

# 7 Access to knowledge and Archives

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## 7.1 Abstract

Archives and fonds are a reflection of the activity of either a legal entity or a natural person and perform a double role: a) as active records with functional usefulness and b) as historical archives with research and scientific value, which is an important element of cultural heritage. The process of information with the use of archives leads to proper documentation and to documented, secure and reliable knowledge. Information Science, Computer Science and News Technologies are important factors of archives and records management as they can support and reinforce in a systematic way the diffusion of archival information of every kind. Due to these sciences, everyone is able to find a sufficient number of archival information digitally, through an open archival information system without being obliged to spend extra financial resources and time during the preparation of a scientific research with relevant reference use. Every user has to respect and follow archival legislation, legal status and access conditions for each archive. This open access to archives and the review of archival information by scientists offer knowledge of primary value and promote scientific research and cooperation in national and international level. In this way a more creative international feature can be created.

**Keywords:** Archives, archival information, research, news technologies, documentation.

## 7.2 Introduction

Archives and fonds are the most official written proof and natural reflection of activities of legal entities or natural persons. [1] They constitute the basic material for research of personal and collective past and they are also considered raw material for the present and future user. Proper observation and preservation of archives protect the past activity of a corporate body, an institution, an association, the public sector as well as the historic past of people and families. Archives connect the past with the present and the future. Their role is fulfilled by processing documented findings, increasing the interest and leading to a cohesive and reliable knowledge. By cultivating such knowledge in conjunction with critical thinking and reviewing, the researcher is being able to support excellent education in any scientific field and level of studies.

## 7.3 The role of Archives

Archives (in other words fonds) due to their authentic character, their primary material and diversity, are related with: a) the administration and b) the scientific research. As a result they perform a double role: a) administrative and b) researching.

1. The administrative role of fonds: There are active fonds called Records with official value and functional usefulness. [2] They are produced from initial creators and are basically deployed for the needs of current administration or individual activity, especially in an administrative, economic, legal and functional aspect. These fonds as stored information facilitate the decision-making process on relevant to fonds subjects. The frequency of their use depends on the needs of each institution. It is generally accepted that the proper and adequate operation of public services depend on the proper functionality of their archives. The reason is the fact that

- knowing and understanding past policies and former decisions, institutions can deal with their future subjects with greater coordination, security and success rate.
2. The research role of archives: There are the historical fonds with probative value, which justify their permanent preservation, as scheduling information. In this case the archives give answers to scientific questions of researchers and other people. Researches concerned with the past commonly base their research on relevant archival sources. When the official use of this kind of resources expires, they have outlived the current usefulness and their functional value disappears. Then the fonds are considered inactive and after selection and appraisal they become historical archives. The main public archival service is National Archives in many countries of the world. [3]. In Greece this service is called General State Archives, which were created in 1914 by Eleftherios Venizelos' government.

The historical fonds have probative value as documents of proof, that is to say they can offer a scientific reasoning of events and attitudes of the past. The study and treatment of archives lead the researcher to reliable scientific conclusions. Their special value justifies the operation of keeping them perpetually for research purposes and this is an innovation we inherited from the 19th century.

## 7.4 The Archives Science

Archives, due to their primary material, mainly constitute: a) the most reliable research sources for the scientific knowledge in all sectors of Science and Art and b) a vital element of social, economic, political, and cultural heritage.

The management of archival information is a complex and valuable process, as it constitutes genuine proof for the people, events, situations, conditions and structures that led to the initial creation of an archive. [4] It is obvious that the archives sometimes were given birth and functioned as active fonds.

The archivists practice intellectual and physical work for the successful processing and promotion of archival material. It is necessary to be familiarized with special meanings and archival terms. [5] Archivists use the term "processing" to refer to all the intermediate steps that are taken to prepare archival materials for access and reference use. Arrangement and description are the two main steps of this procession. They are closely linked together as each one depends on the other. Arrangement refers to the physical and intellectual order of archives: which papers are grouped together and what is the order in which papers, folders, boxes and bound volumes are placed. Description refers to creating finding aids in use for researchers in locating materials in such a suitable way that their questions can be answered. Processing also includes some preservation and appraisal. [6]

## 7.5 The valuable Aid of Technology

Apart from this the archivists must use the widest possibilities of new technology for the processing, long-term preservation and dissemination of archival information through digital systems in national and international level. In consequence, it is appropriate to facilitate exchange of information between archival services based on international standards, which have been accepted by the science of archives nowadays. International Standards in combination with modern encoded information systems have been developed for the processing of knowledge in several sectors of science. The application of the main International Standards includes: a) ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description, b) ISAAR (CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record For Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families, c) ISDIAH: International Standard for Describing Institutions with Archival Holdings d) DiPPeL: International Standard For Describing Functions.

The main challenge is: the simultaneous and coordinated service of public administration, individual activity and scientific research. The material of archives constitute a primary

probative material and therefore is considered as societal property and should be accessible by the administration and the research community. [7]

## **7.6 The respect to legislation referring to Archives**

In any case the diffusion of archival information is not uncontrolled. On the contrary it is protected by special legislation. Access to files by researchers is controlled by several legal restrictions, mainly about data protection, sensitive information, access dates and all of them are based on respect for human and individual rights. The protection of the citizen's legal right for his private life and personality is clearly overridden against any right of free access to the archives, especially when having to do with confidential information and personal data. Moreover information law includes fundamental principles such as the principle of respect for privacy, the principle of respect for personal autonomy, the protection of intellectual property. [8]. For some special legal reasons some Archives are protected by special access control systems.

## **7.7 The very closed relationship between Archives and knowledge**

Concretely with the utilization and evaluation of archival information, made dependent from previous information [9] and applying the suitable scientific criteria the following issues are ensured: a) the knowledge aiming at the comprehension of objective reality and b) the knowledge management for making future decisions in order to promote progress and development. In this manner, knowledge is built and scientific research is progressed.

The knowledge, in order to be useful and effective, must be composed of original information. The archival information is original and authentic, because it derives directly from the source and thus provides with safety for the researcher or the user.

Consequently the knowledge, supplied from the archival information, makes a circle of production, concentration, scheduling, disposal to the user and the final recipient, as does every other product of human intellectual creation and so it becomes useful and valued.

Archival as documented information must be widely published and available to the society. It should be supported by the international scientific community because of its public faith. The International Council of Archives defines the historical archives as the part of information that is estimated to have perpetual value beyond the reason, for which it was created. [10]

## **7.8 Conclusions**

- The concentration of archives is not due to the chance or arbitrary action of a person, but stems from the daily activities of public administration services, institutions, industrial or commercial enterprises, families or individuals. By the processing of archival information, which precedes a circle of localization, intellectual control, description, arrangement, accumulation, both through the traditional and the digital way, the supply of knowledge is achieved and in particular the specialized knowledge. In this way scientific research is developed.
- The archival material today, as documented proof for corporate bodies, people, conditions and structures that led to its birth, is considered as primary property of the society and therefore the special rights of citizens who are interested in the archives must be protected.
- However for the further progress and wider efficacy of an advanced society, the access to the archives has to be promoted with the assistance of technology, both in individual and collective activities and also in scientific research. With the use of new technologies, knowledge is spread worldwide and the diffusion of knowledge is

achieved with unique experiences and results. As society is evolving and modernizing rapidly, the world changes, access to knowledge is being facilitated rapidly as well.

- Archives, as creative memory organizations, are disposed of the primary sources seen with a critical scientific approach. The archival experience and conscience are essential to increase the interest of higher education in combination with the study of books, which should follow. However, books without fonds constitute insufficient, incomplete and sometimes precarious knowledge. The collaboration between every kind of educational centers with regional departments of the General State Archives is necessary. [11]
- The appropriate institutional and legal framework for the protection of archival information and scientific research leads to acquisition of a wide and elaborate knowledge and its systematic, and not symptomatic, development.
- This is the big question and on the same time the pursuing aim: the acquisition of skilled, specialized, documented, original knowledge as an evolution of the recorded information in the human history. The constant aim is always the same: a) on one hand, the settlement or resolution of problems and errors of the past and b) on the other hand the most successful and effective activity in the future for the sake of understanding the unknown reality until today. The archives' role is fulfilled especially in exporting documented findings leading to continuity, consistency, promotion and expansion of knowledge.
- As a direct result of archives comes the creation of spiritual benefit, substantial practice and a whole progress for a society with a high level of prosperity and growth, based on reliable knowledge of the past.
- The dissemination of evidence-based information leads and should lead to greater cooperation and creation of a significant and wide network of European and international collaborations, having in mind the renewal of scientific knowledge and the relevant developments on a more creative world future.
- Finally the archives do not provide an absolute and static knowledge, which stops somewhere, but provide a documented and verified knowledge with primary value, which is evolving continually as a constant prospect. This knowledge expands and strengthens the global co-operation between science, research and society.

## 7.9 References

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