

The uncertain future for archives and their users

Although future is uncertain in a lot of senses –social, political, economic, intellectual, etc.–, being all worth exploring, when we speak about the archives of tomorrow is difficult not to think first about the issues of technologies and their interactions, on the one hand, with our professional processes and, on the other, with societies in which and for which we carry out these processes. Technologies have become increasingly invisible, invasive, unstable, dynamic, interactive, distributed, reusable and multipurpose. Despite their treacherous personality, we cannot live without technologies. In some way, we are part of them. This is not necessarily good or necessarily bad. In a much simpler way, this is the environment where we live and work, and predictably it will be radicalized by 2020. There have been prior environments and no doubt in the future there will be even more. Our duty as professionals is not to demonize them or bless them, but to understand the circumstances of their occurrence, in order to perform our process accordingly. This is so complicated for us because this is a change not only of scale or scope, although it actually is, but a shift in our paradigm that implies subsidiary shifts, particularly epistemic in nature. This means that we cannot understand the new paradigm with the knowledge base acquired during so many years. In fact, we need a newer one which is still under construction.

Therefore, when we started thinking about this issue of *Tabula*, questions seemed to far outnumber assertions. Who are our current users? Will these users survive by 2020? What impact will eGovernment have? Will digital natives be users of it? If so, what documents will they use? Will they have the same form that we know today? Will the historiographic sources need to be thought again? Will digital natives constitute a critical mass, sufficient to think of a digital infosphere?

Will the information using modify our core concepts? What will we understand by authenticity, integrity, reliability, privacy? What will trustworthiness mean by 2020? Are archival services ready for this? And archivists? What professional profile will be necessary? What skills? Has archives reality, and its professionals, evolved to keep pace with technological changes? Do we expect a slow but unavoidable agony? Are we bound to be “paper archivists”? Where are users? What do they expect from us? Actually, are we necessary? What do we have to do? What do we have to rethink? What do we have to reinvent? Is there a future for the past management? Will we be able to preserve our digital present for the future? What has been the contribution of archivists to this last decade of electronic management? Do we have some kind of accountability? Have we done what we should? Will digital media modify how we carry out our processes?

Of course, from a scientific point of view, asking questions is healthier than making assertions. The plethora of questions that have grown around us has seemed to suggest that the discipline, therefore, is in good health. Even more, it has seemed to suggest that there is enough will to acquire that knowledge base that will allow us to understand the circumstances of the occurrence of our environment. Nevertheless, and since the preceding statement can become a categorical affirmation if we do not proceed to further discussion, the editors of this issue of *Tabula* launched, on the one hand, an open call for papers whose motto was the title of this volume; and, on the other, an invitation to outstanding leaders in the field. The result is, in our opinion, an excellent monograph, full of questions.

Luciano Floridi; Janna Anderson and Lee Rainie; Frank Upward; Livia Iacovino; Miguel Ángel Amutio; Julio Cerdá; Cayetano Tornel; Alessandro Alfieri and Pierluigi Feliciati; and Aurora Gómez Galvarriato Freer, Gabriela Recio Cavazos and María Alarcón Rendón offer, from different perspectives and within their respective areas of expertise, brilliant texts that make us ask ourselves, not only how the archival world will be by 2020, but also how the world will be by 2020. In addition, Lluís-Esteve Casellas and Carlos Nieto, under our *Varia* section, introduce two experiences that seamlessly fit into the splendid set of articles that now is seeing the light.

Regardless of the order of appearance in the following pages, we will discuss briefly every text, proceeding, in a very archival style, from general to specific.

Luciano Floridi, in an article that depicts the general scenario where we will perform both as professionals and as human beings in a few years, proposes a view of the technologies as an intermediation consisting of triplets, intermediation whose highest degree of sophistication is reached by the so-called by the author, third order technologies, or those that interact with other technologies using as intermediary tool another technology. The most complete example of this

phase is information technologies, which, in the author's terms, make humans unnecessary because they are redundant. Nevertheless, technologies are wise and have brought two concepts that provide human beings with a friendly face: interfaces and design. The spirit in which mankind has embraced this new order is diverse, but on the whole it is generating a complete re-ontologization of the infosphere, terms coined by Floridi some years ago. An infosphere is, in its first meaning, the set of all the informational organizations interconnected, including human informational organizations that, by this means, and such as the author has explained in other texts, becomes re-incorporated to the world of information interactions. In its second meaning, infosphere is the reality where we perform: what is real is informational and what is informational is real. Information technologies are re-ontologizing, that is to say, changing infosphere nature, and raising some challenges. Above all, IT are melting with their objects, blurring this way the difference between processors and the processed. Everything becomes digital and the ontological friction, the difficulty in obtaining information, disappears, with at least four substantial consequences. Firstly, the loss of the right to ignore; secondly, the exponential growth of the general knowledge; third, and since meta-information is abundant, the agents' accountability is abundant, too; finally, in this scenario, the concept of privacy plays an essential role. All of this implies a vital experience onlife, always on.

Precisely, Lee Rainie and Janna Quitney Anderson's article wonders who will be always on, who will be always connected. The almost widespread use of mobile technologies makes this question imperative and peremptory. Qualitative surveys have been conducted by authors in order to extract conclusions from opinions given by more than one thousand experts surveyed. In order to do this, two possible scenarios were created: in one of them the always on generation was not happy; on the contrary, in the second one it was. Rainie and Anderson's text chooses some of the so obtained answers and presents some conclusions that, consciously, are not willing to go beyond the surveyed universe. Approximately, 55% of respondents hope the always on generation will be richer and happier in a broad sense. However it is possible to deduce from the answers that most respondents think that the situation will be balanced: neither too much nor too little. In any case, it is reasonably clear that the following generation will be "wired" in another way, that is to say, their cognitive processes will be different.

In this general scenario – an entirely digital environment with an always connected population, constantly using information items and being information items by itself – archivists will have to carry out our job.

Frank Upward, in an excellent article that aligns with his recent publications in *Archivaria* and *The Records Management Journal*, as well as with his lecture

at the last International Council on Archives Congress in Brisbane, provide us with some clues about how to do it. Again, following the tendency of the author to give a new turn of the screw in the archival thinking, the Upward's text begins stating that something is not working right. In the author's terms: are we losing the archival role of using time to conquer time? From the perspective of the records continuum theory, and making a little history, our tradition has not traditionally focused on processes, but increasingly on objects, what should make us wonder if this makes sense in an entirely digital environment. In general terms, the fluidity of archival relationships and of archival formations has been left out of our discourse; but this situation is not feasible any longer. The author devotes the following pages of his article to restore the space of privilege that fluidity deserves, from a philosophical exploration of the concept of spacetime. Our disciplines have a rich and unquestionable philosophical basis, which in practice has led to a historical review of the shaping of our archival discourse, from Sir Hilary Jenkinson to the creators of the records continuum model. The author concludes that in the Australian case archivists are not equipped, after such a long journey, to take on challenges triggered by technologies. Taking as starting point the appraisal process, Upward explains the need of reinventing our profession. Perhaps error derives from the fact that, against current technological trends, archives are not end products, but vehicles for actions. To correct this error, the author gives up his well-known basis in Sociology of Structuration, to focus on the Actor Network Theory. Results of this shift are a reflection on wave motion and on the need for a new disciplinary basis using the records continuum model from multiple perspectives.

Also from the realm of the records continuum, Livia Iacovino explores several issues that will resonate in the future, taking as starting point the concept of archives without physical boundaries, the global archives. From the continuum perspective, to manage these documents they do not have to be bounded by the archives. There is no even need for them to exist under the same form in all dimensions. But this, in a digital environment, forces the profession to rethink concepts which have worked for many years. In the first place, the flood of digital information and new digital genres seem to come into conflict with the human need to bring order to the chaos, to understand the universe. Archivists will have to define, at least, what these new genres are. In the second place, this flood of information has triggered a massive use of infrastructures and services in the cloud, implying the need to research about how accessibility and preservation will be in it. For the author, the profession will have to revisit two essential concepts, authenticity and accountability. Of course, our duty is still to maintain evidence of actions, but it seems that it will be our duty in another sense. Among other things, we will have to see archives as objects of restorative justice and in

order to do this we must have users who shift from a passive to an active role in shaping records, and accept both positive and negative consequences. We must take into account that eGovernment, another topic explored in this volume, will modify interactions between government and citizens. Finally, a new character of activist archivist, in terms of Iacovino, must emerge. We wonder if we are able to take on this role.

From general, the conceptual, to specific, the everyday environment, the following articles in this volume focus on two of the traditional clients of the archives, the government itself and history researchers. Thus, in the first place, Miguel Ángel Amutio carries out an analysis of eGovernment in 2020, taking as starting point the current situation, as well as the determination of the different powers to evolve. For this author, the eGovernment scenario will have five key features. First and former, there will be a sound and integrated legal framework, that is, our current mismatches between our “analogue” and our “digital” legislation will be removed. Second, eGovernment services will be electronic by default, that is to say, deficiencies in adaptation that many administrations still show and some degree of fear that still exists in certain segments of population will be removed, too. Third, there will be a sustainable ecosystem of common infrastructures and services, supporting the co-operation and interoperability as a means to overcome boundaries. Fourth, services will be completely interoperable, that is to say, we will have public administrations capable of fully dialoguing among them in the interest of the citizen. Finally, services will be provided under security conditions, meaning that instability in secure environments that is currently one of the main misgivings for records managers will be stabilized somehow. Five challenges to accomplish in only seven years.

From the archivist’s point of view, Julio Cerdá Díaz also addresses the eGovernment scenario, in which he discovers an excellent professional opportunity to collaborate. The Ley 11/2007 (Law 11/2007) has triggered a new model of administration that also modifies its relationships with citizenry. We are speaking, in the author’s terms, about open government, regulated by three axes: improvement in services provision, extension of democratic processes and revitalization of governance processes. Taking as starting point the proposals in the Spanish digital Agenda and the European digital Agenda, Cerdá explores in greater depth the concept of open government, concluding that such a government cannot be but a networked and open data government. Hence the “datification” of our environment and thereby of our profession, with three potential lines of work: transparency in administration, data reuse and accessibility to information, despite in Spain open data initiatives are still in their infancy and subject to substantial legal uncertainties.

From another point of view, Cayetano Tornel Cobacho looks into the phenomenon of the Internet invasiveness and ubiquity in relation to historiography. For the author, this cannot continue any longer, since the Internet is, on the one hand, a gigantic source for historians, not only in quantity, but also because we can keep on generating products easily inside of it; and, on the other, it is a extremely insecure source, particularly regarding activities of citizens on it. While connections between archives, memory and history contained in written sources imply stable research means, the so-called by the author digital history is external to archives and mediated by technologies. From the analysis of some of the current phenomena, Tornel, in line with the proposals of other texts belonging to this volume, states that everybody will be on the Internet and the study of history will be conditioned by what is known as technological determinism. What digital information will we be able to preserve for historians in the future? What must the archivist do in order to stabilize this information while needed? In a precarious environment, historians have not thought about these risks yet despite the Internet provides them with two extremely useful tools: web resources and hypertextuality. Moreover, technology is increasingly generating bigger and more sophisticated media. Will historians be able to adapt themselves to this new environment and take on the study of nonlinear sources?

But doubts not only refer to archival concepts and archives users, but also to our own processes and centers. Alessandro Alfier and Pierluigi Feliciati research the change of paradigm for an archival description and in web environments. Description is perhaps the process that more directly allows us to interact with users, to the extent that makes access easier. The aforementioned authors consider that finding aids are an intermediation with users, called esoteric, and which in its traditional form is defined as a lengthy mediation conditioned by the archivist. This perception of archival description, focused on materials rather than on users, cannot continue in the Web, where the application of conventional finding aids becomes frustrating. Despite the Web potential interference in that mediation, Alfier and Feliciati propose a redefinition of our archival finding aids on the web, based on the fact that “the output is not the input”, that is to say, based on the fact that, irrespective of data handled by the professional, the end user interfaces have to be modified. That lengthy mediation becomes thus superseded by a discrete mediation.

About the future of archival centers, Aurora Gómez Galvarriato Freer, Gabriela Recio Cavazos and María Alarcón Rendón describe an action plan for the Archivo General de la Nación de México. First, the authors locate the Archivo plans of future in their context, outlining its history. As in some other texts published in this volume, context is complemented by examining the user's

perspective, since plans of future do not make sense out of the present. Therefore, authors answer the question “who are our current users and how do they behave?” In the same way, they examine the current state of the information technologies in the Archivo, particularly regarding digitization, presence on the Web, records management and archival management systems and digital preservation. Following this analysis of the historic and current context, Gómez Galvarriato, Recio and Alarcón explore the decadent concept of hardware, and they conclude that digital future, such as we suspected, is already here.

This volume also includes two excellent case studies in section *Varia*. Lluís-Esteve Casellas describes the project to implement a recordkeeping system in the city council of Girona (Spain). Because of its attention to digital records and the topicality of its contents, the Casellas’s article could well align with the remaining texts of this volume.

Finally, Carlos Nieto Sánchez describes the history and current status of the Colegio Mayor Diego de Covarrubias fonds (also in Spain). We cannot say that this is an article oriented towards the past. On the contrary, the author, from the title of the text, makes clear that archives are weapons loaded with future.

Such as we suggested at the beginning, we are pleased to present readers an excellent volume that, will not only solve any of their questions, but in all probability will trigger new ones as an indication that our science is still working.

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