

The phoenix of the memory

If we google¹ the word *archivo* (archive or file in English) the first result will be the definition of computer file by Wikipedia: “a computer file is a set of bits that are stored on a device.” In English, archive directly shows the URL of the Internet Archive, which according to the same Wikipedia, is “a non-profit digital library dedicated to the preservation of archives, captures from public Web sites, multimedia resources and also software.”

The impact of these results and their perception by users is proportional to the importance of the linking tools in the retrieval and presentation of information: Google, the web with more hits in the world, and Wikipedia, the more consulted information web, with thousands of queries per second everyday

These results contrast sharply with the digitization efforts carried out by the archives, and more specifically by historical archives. One of the consequences has been the dramatic increase of online documents, but at the same time, the equally spectacular decrease in the on-site search in most of them. It is therefore evident, that the archives not only face the dematerialization of documents and the challenges of digital preservation, but also the virtualization of their users and, at the same time, the competition for their identity and public interest in the midst of the digital information universe. In this context, it seems logical to wonder whether in the medium term, the present historical archive will exist in the future or if on the contrary, they will converge towards another type of centers.

Will the use of archives in relation to the management of online users result in a change in the physical management of the documentary heritage? Not

a trivial question if we consider the current debate in the environment of American University libraries, some of them also with relevant archive fonds. For example, the Mullins Library at the University of Arkansas² is considering moving off-campus nearly 83% of the 1,200,000 publications stored there. The reason is the decline in the ‘circulation’ of publications by 49% in the period 2016-2017 compared with the period 2012-2013, placing the percentage of use in a small 2’6% of publications. We should also take into account the results of the protest movement against this decision. The manifest only collected 430 signatures and only 25 people attended the presentation, most of them professionals and teachers. That means that “active interest” was mostly professional, contrasting with the lack of attention on the part of the students.

This trend is not confined to a single center. Similar situations³ are taking place at the University of Syracuse, which will also displace off-campus 1,200,000 publications. Indiana’s University in Pennsylvania will reduce by 30% its collection on grounds of creating a more interesting collection for students. Studies carried out in Indiana showed that 50% of the collection had not been used in the last 20 years and, of course, these data were accompanied by the corresponding study of preservation costs.

Certainly insufficient access to these materials is closely linked to digitization projects and, above all, to the fact that most of them can be found in the cloud. The question is how and who manages it, and in this case, a very important initiative, among others in development, is the HathiTrust digital repository, which will store 16 millions of publications of fifty American libraries.

In this regard, it is worth wondering whether the same tendency to assess costs and use will be applied to archives preserving handwritten documentary heritage, since the access to these documents is extremely low. Will deposits for the physical conservation of records merge with other type of material? And of course, will the creation of data processing centers (data centers) for the preservation of the announced flood of data inevitably happen? Obviously, when preserving ones and zeros boundaries could be blurred. Who and how will data preservation, dissemination and use be carried out? Will “the Internet” be the global archive that some predict?

The rapid evolution of technology and the changes in social habits make us foresee a relevant impact on historical archives in the short/medium term. Disruptive expectations that generate new technologies (Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, etc.) do not always fit with the development of their implementation. In any case, the visualization and promotion of the interest in trustworthy documentary sources against a context of increasing fake-news are already new challenges. But they are not the only ones.

Social transformation linked to the understanding and use of information sources as well as the procedures for their access and reuse will be key factors in

The historical archives: which services for which users in the information society. The professional sector has made in the last years a major effort to adapt to a multitude of regulatory changes, illustrated in Tabula 11, *Drowned in a sea of acronyms* (2008). However, this unavoidable focus on technical issues has also represented, in a way, a ballast for the observation and consideration of the more orbital transformation of the profession, as the innovation in archive services in accordance with the evolution of technology and social habits would be.

In this Tabula edition we wanted to go beyond the already abundant experiences in digitizing and publishing of online content, or the use of social media. Our intention has been to provide different points of view that contribute to reflect on the role of the historical archives in the future or how they will be, as well as to present best practices in order to facilitate the rethinking of the services demanded by new users now or in the future.

From the perspectives of both the professional researcher and the information, documents and records professional, Anacllet Pons in *The digital memory of the world: The Historians and the archives*, and Geert-Jan van Bussel in *Organizational Archives in "World 2.0". The framework for the "archive-as-is"*, analyze the evolution of the professional user experience in the archive and the management and use of information within an organization. Both agree on the importance of the contextualization and globalization of the concept of archive and on the present and future impact on the digital transformation of society, organizations and individuals. In addition, Pons discusses the change in the researcher's attitudes towards the new global archive and the dematerialized and ubiquitous document. This necessity of globalization and context is moved by van Bussel into the understanding and management of information inside organizations proposing, at the same time, an integral model of management and exploitation of archives, documents and data supporting decision making processes in this context.

M. Teresa Iranzo Muñío describes and assesses the Archive Plan of Aragón and the impact of the cooperative project Dara both on the participating institutions and the users experience in *The historical archives at the crossroads: public archives and social memory in Aragon (2008-2018)*. The article also sets out challenges and vindicates the role of archives in the future in the dissemination of content and in the requirement for transparency of public institutions.

In the context of the description rules and digital transformation, Greg Bak in *Understanding the media and mediation: Archival description standards, mediation technologies and archival decolonization*, reflects on how changes in the format and in the access to the contents of the documents affects their interpretation. In this sense the archival description needs to adapt to the real context of understanding and use of the documents on the basis of examples such as the American indigenous communities and, therefore, going beyond a traditional Eurocentric vision.

In *UNESCO programs, EU archives, libraries and museums as a unified mechanism of preserving the world historical and cultural heritage*, Liudmila Varlamova proposes the need to make visible the archival fonds of transnational interest through the creation of an integrated digital informational resource, on the basis of existing projects (Memory of the World, Europeana, etc.) to facilitate their access, dissemination and reuse for research.

From the features of the Semantic Web David Iglesias, in *On the move. The photographic archive of the 21st century*, considers the major technological trends that will impact on the exploitation of the photographic documentary heritage such as the hyperconnectivity, reuse, and respect for the rights of creation and the gamification, as well as the new demands and expectations of users of photo files.

Marçal Rusiñol and Lluís Gómez, in *Advances in the classification of images in the last ten years. Prospects and constraints in the field of photographic historical archives*, explain how the development of computer vision and the application of Deep Learning enable the interpretation of the images content with high rates of success and, therefore, can promote the automatic classification of large photographic funds.

In *The gamification in the field of heritage: crowdsourcing with a ludic design*, Tomislav Ivanjko argues the success and the practical usefulness of the gamification in tasks of massive description on the basis of concrete examples applied to documentary resources, describing at the same time the factors and possible tools for this type of initiatives. However, for the author, the gamification is much more than a simple collaborative task since it contributes significantly to encourage participation and to create a community of users linked to archives.

Escape to the future of the archives by Sonia Oliveras, is another case of success in service innovation for new users: the escape room. The text describes what it is, its dynamic and the elements that should be taken into account in its design. The article includes a brief presentation and evaluation of an experience carried out in the Municipal Archives of Girona, in which the concept of escape room was applied to a board game.

Gerhild Krebs places innovation at the redesign of the attention to the archive users in *Archive users' management: A beneficial approach for users and staff*. From her experience as a researcher and archive user and as the director of the Saarländisches Filmarchiv, she contrasts the users' traditional attention to the personalized, case by case attention. This approach offers a higher quality service with a very high degree of user satisfaction. On the other hand, the archive staff also benefits from the specific knowledge of the research user, which results in a better understanding and description of the consulted documents.

Finally, in the last text about The Provincial Historical Archives and the construction of the collective memory, Carlos Flores Varela explains the situation

of the provincial archives. From a critical assessment of their management over the years and comparing different centers in different communities, he considers the challenges to be faced in the short term in order to overcome not only their current invisibility to citizenship but also the risk of it.

Diverse perspectives, experiences and reflections on the role of the historical archives inevitably linked to a society in vertiginous transformation, which the archives are not alien to. The future may be uncertain in relation to society-technology-memory, but the only way of influencing the future is actively participating in its construction. This *Tabula* aims to provide food for thought, knowing that forgetting is natural and that memory requires time, energy, expertise and effort.

Lluís Esteve Casellas i Serra
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Notes

¹ Retrieved November 21, 2018.

² Jaime Adame. "Petition questions removal of books at UA campus library". In: *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*. (July 1, 2018) <<https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2018/jul/01/petition-questions-removal-of-books-at-/>> [Retrieved 1/21/2018].

³ Michael Rubinkam. "Why university libraries are tossing millions of books". In *The Christian Science Monitor* (February 7, 2018). <<https://www.csmonitor.com/Books/2018/0207/Why-university-libraries-are-tossing-millions-of-books>> [Retrieved 21/1/2018].