

## Prevailing in the digital age: resilient records to avoid drowning in a sea of data

The emergence of digital technology has disruptively altered the way in which citizens, companies and administrations relate and carry out their social, cultural and economic activities. This radical change, accelerated in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, is forcing organizations to redesign their processes and services so they can adapt to a new model of society that takes advantage of the full potential of the digital environment.

This digital transformation of the organizations is also altering the way in which the evidence of their activities is created and managed. The transposition to the digital environment of the traditional record, with narrative content and little or non-structured from the point of view of automatic information processing, seems to have its days numbered in favor of evidential models based on structured data

What are the consequences of this shift towards data for our profession? What is the future role of archives and their professionals in this data age? The reflection on these issues was the central axis of the eighth Castile-Leon Conference on Archives that, between April 14 and 16, brought together more than two hundred professionals of information, documentation and archives, and an unbeatable speaking staff. A conference that, for the first time, had to be held entirely online, circumstance that did not devalue at all the quality of the contents that were addressed in it and that to a large extent are reproduced in this issue of *Tábula*.

One of the highlights of the conference was, without a doubt, the presentation of Adrian Cunningham which precisely opens this volume. From his long and productive professional experience, the Australian archivist reflects on the challenges faced up to by archives and records management professionals in the data age. Far from simplistic motivational messages, and based on the experience of the last thirty years in his country, the author calls for “rolling up our sleeves and committing ourselves” to a long-term struggle: that of dealing with a continuous digital transformation and with the consequent changes in the way organizations document their activity. “Change is constant, so you can never afford to relax,” says Cunningham, who far from being intimidated, points out in his paper different strategies to face challenges and uncertainties and to move forward on the basis of small victories.

One of these challenges is to understand (and make understand) that structured data may – and sometimes should – be captured as fixed evidence of the organizations’ activities. And, although there are good reasons for us to deal with this, as the Australian author believes, we will also have to fight our way and establish territories in the face of the media appeal and the modernity sheen of the new professions emerging around data management.

Jordi Serra, who in his article analyzes the contribution that archival professionals can make in order to improve the data-driven management of digital organizations, gives us the tools to achieve this. He proposes four recordkeeping intervention stages in data management. They will afford for, according to the author, adding value and opening a new “window of opportunity”.

Carlota Bustelo brings up the relationship between data and records management, presenting the concept of data governance and its multiple connections with our professional area. To this end, she outlines the different levels and areas for action encompassed by data governance, highlighting in each case the main initiatives carried out internationally and their link with the records management and with the contents discussed in the different sessions of the Conference.

Luis Martínez is somewhat skeptical about the role that archivists – at least those of the Spanish public administrations – can play in the governance of this data republic (or of the multiple “data republics”), due in large part to the heavy burden of our framing in “cultural bodies and scales” and “institutions devoted preferably to the dissemination of historical heritage” that are pushed “to the bottom of the food chain of public services”. Despite this, the author is “minimally optimistic” and believes that there is still time to open that window of opportunity mentioned by Serra.

Not surprisingly, the world of data is no stranger to our work. An example of this is the reflection of Javier Requejo and Ana María López on the management strategies and models of archival data. That is, the structured data on

records generated through the archival description, and the work with the new “dataficated” digital records. The work of Laia Bota presents us, in this sense, with some European initiatives that aim to shape some of these new records, “less narrative and more data-centered”, based on the standardization of the types used and the data model on which they are structured, so that they can be shared and reused in other Member States within a European interoperability framework.

The key to leaving the corner may not be so much to step out of our comfort zone, as Requejo and López point out, but rather to focus on those specific processes of our discipline that can bring special value to data-driven organizations. Laia Bota gives us a clue in this regard: the identification and appraisal of records as evidence. And the importance of the evidence of the record – whether its data is structured or not – in a data age that is also, paradoxically, a disinformation and fake news age, is on what Laura Millar brilliantly reflects in her article. “The act of capturing and preserving evidence is crucial,” says the Canadian-based American, since “without evidence, societies now and for centuries to come cannot understand what happened yesterday or a century ago.”

This evidential value or nature of the record is – as it has been claimed for some time in our sector – key to the accountability and transparency of public institutions. An area that is also being transformed and increasingly oriented towards data.

Proof of this is the new Castile-Leon transparency bill, presented by Joaquín Meseguer, Director General of Transparency and Good Governance of the Regional Government, which in other noteworthy aspects aims to align the regulation of our region with the standards of the Open Data Charter of 2019 which advocate open and actionable data by default.

In the same vein, Professor Julián Valero addresses in his article what the European Data Strategy consists of and its materialization in the Community regulatory context. The Community regulation on the reuse of public sector information evolves towards a regulation on data governance in the European Area that seeks to decisively promote the opening of government data as one of the engines of digital transformation.

Civio Foundation provides us with the vision of a civil society that exercises its right to know, requesting and exploiting that open government data. Despite – or against – the lack of political commitment to them. Ensuring transparency and open data from design is a key strategy to improve our society and our institutions, and public policies and regulations on the subject should advance in this regard. So does our professional practice, as we know, walk in that direction. Not in vain, it is pointed out by Civio that “a good documentation and a complete data registration through standardized forms are essential to

give a more agile and higher quality compliance with the transparency requirements of public administrations”.

Continuing with the open data, Antonio Ibáñez writes about the management and visualization of data on the COVID-19 pandemic carried out in Castile-Leon, that have turned our region into a national reference. Javier de la Cueva, for his part, focuses on the opening of research data and the Open Science movement. This movement’s boost of the FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) once again highlights the importance of an archival methodology to ensure the production and maintenance of reliable data.

The intervention “from design and by default” is also one of the principles advocated by the new regulations on the protection of personal data, from the entry into force of the GDPR. And this is the battlefield on which some professionals of the archives have been struggling, such as Francesc Giménez, who combines his archival functions with the position of Delegate of Data Protection of his institution. Their contribution is an excellent example of the value of a proactive records management for the public administration and society.

Ignacio Alamillo introduces us, for his part, to a disruptive way of conceiving and managing the evidence of transactions in the form of structured and distributed data: the electronic ledgers based on blockchain technology. A model that, in the words of the author, presents “significant potential for the transformation of the safe records management in the public sector, especially in relation to digital signatures, certificates and document authentication”.

In the field of construction and infrastructure it is also revolutionary the BIM methodology, whose repercussions on the records management of public works are explained by Isabel Medrano and Pablo Olivares. In this context, the new records are not mere representations of the constructions, but their digital twins.

This issue of *Tábula* concludes with two of the communications delivered at the Conference. In the former, Tamara Morte addresses the risk management associated with records management, focusing on the risk identification project she has carried out in the eGovernment Service of Aragon (Spain). In the second, Ana María Peña, gives proof of the importance of training to implement an “archival culture”, that is, to interweave awareness and records management practices in the organization culture (in this case, the Castile-Leon trade union CCOO), as a starting point for the implementation of a records management system.

That archival culture should permeate the data republic. This eighth Castile-Leon Conference on Archives has given a good example of what we do and what we can do in this new age. And, in the same way, the data culture will have to be more present in the training of archivists, in our processes and in our

methodology. As Adrian Cunningham told us: we cannot give up the fight. Only then we will be able to prevail in the digital age and – to paraphrase the title of another of our conferences – not to drown in a sea of data. Long live the archives.

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