

ISAD(G) AND SOME ASPECTS OF ROMANIAN ARCHIVAL PRACTICES To Be or not To Be

Bogdan-Florin Popovici*

UDK: 006.44:930.25(498)

Bogdan Florin Popovici: ISAD(G) in nekaj vidikov romunske arhivske prakse - Biti ali ne biti. Tehnični in vsebinski problemi klasičnega in elektronskega arhiviranja. Zbornik referatov z dopolnilnega izobraževanja, Maribor 8/2009, str. 55–60.

Izvirnik v angleščini, izvleček v angleščini in slovenščini, povzetek v slovenščini.

ISAD(G) so mnogi arhivisti sprejeli kot sodobno rešitev za standardizirano popisovanje arhivskega gradiva. Romunija, ki ima že nekaj desetletij standardiziran narodni sistem za arhivsko delo, bi ob implementaciji tega standarda lahko imela težave. Članek se ukvarja z možnim vidikom neskladja, ki ga predstavlja izvajanje nadzora nad spisi v njihovem celotnem življenjskem ciklu od ustvarjalca do prevzema in uporabe v Narodnem arhivu.

UDC: 006.44:930.25(498)

Bogdan-Florin Popovici: ISAD(G) and Some Aspects of Romanian Archival Practices - To Be or Not to Be. Technical and Field Related Problems of Traditional and Electronic Archiving. Conference Proceedings, Maribor 8/2009, pp. 55–60.

Original in English, abstract in Slovenian and English, summary in Slovenian.

ISAD(G) has been welcomed by many archivists as a modern solution for a standardized description system. Romania, that has had a national standardized system for archival work for several decades, might have problems in implementing this standard. This article presents one possible aspect of incompatibility that is the continuum of controlling files from the creating agency to the National Archives.

Ključne besede: ISAD(G), upravljanje z dokumenti, Romunija.

International archival standards have been welcomed by many professionals as a solution for synchronization and unification of divergent parochial practices; although, in other countries their evolution has not been felt as an absolute utility, so the attitude has been more reluctant. In some countries, the national archival service immediately adopted ISAD(G), as a long-expected solution. On the other hand, one may even say that the countries with a well-established archival system, with standardized archival practices at the national scale, felt these standards as a new task; they are in the situation of checking - at least - in what measure their own standards are compatible with ICA's. This is the case for Romania, where the release of ICA's standards generates a very little interest among professionals. Although there are full versions in Romanian for all four ICA's standards, the debates are only at an academic level, mainly among young archivists. Unfortunately, these debates do not approach the substance and the essential implications of this phenomenon, but are limited to find out and exemplify the standards' provisions.

The present paper essays to overcome this approach and to analyze if there are incompatibilities between ISAD(G) and national archival standards' provisions. More precisely, it approaches the bond between the National Archives of Romania (here it

* Dr. Bogdan-Florin Popovici, archivist, Arhivele Nationale, Str. Gh. Baritiu nr. 34, 500025 Brasov, Romania.

follows: *NAR*) and records creating organizations (here it follows: *creators*) on managing records.

Accordingly to the National Archives Act, *NAR* has the function of developing standards and working procedures for the »uniform archival activity on the territory of Romania«. These working procedures shape a model of a records system, with proper control tools.

The first of these tools is the register of incoming and outgoing records that supports, based on the registry techniques, the capture and the control of records, at their arrival or exit, in and from the creator. At this point, the capture of main metadata is also produced in order to allow the identification and tracking of records.

The classification of records is done with a file plan. Traditionally, the file plan is mirroring the organization chart, divided to services and offices, together with the titles of files organically created or accumulated by each office. Each file title/topic represents a class to which an indicative is assigned; in the register mentioned above, this indicative should be indicated in order to locate the formal filing place for each record. This was the initial mechanism. But during decades, the Romanian archivists noted that in a class, under the same title, important and unimportant records gathered and a general retention period for a file is not enough for a good appraisal, even if all the records dealt with the same topic. The classical example is a payroll that has some bookkeeping records attached. According to the Romanian act, a payroll has a retention period of 50 years, while the general bookkeeping records are to be retained for 10 years. As a consequence, a new criterion has been introduced in records classification: the retention period. All these lead to the assignment of the suited retention period to each title in the file-plan. Therefore, in the Romanian records system, a retention period is assigned to each class, so that it also corresponds to one indicative (i.e. to one file title). This tool is called »nomenclator« and it is also intended to serve as a basis for classification and for disposal: the records are classified under the proper indicative, based on their topic and their retention period.

After the records' classification, when the files are closed, the control tool changes. If initially the main »finding aid« was the register of incoming and outgoing records, after the closure of the file the creator should make an inventory. The level of control changes from the records level to the file level. Each office ought to compile an inventory of the created files and, based on this inventory, the files ought to be sent to the in-house records center and arranged accordingly. In the inventory, files are listed volume by volume, every one of them being identified by a reference number, the indicative of the file, a short intellectual description and the dates. In order to facilitate the disposal, not all the files are listed in the same inventory, but separately, according to the retention period. For instance, all the files identified as having permanent value are listed in one inventory, all the files with 5 years retention - in other inventory and so on. In this model, when the retention period expired for a group of files, their disposal is done using the proper inventory. When the permanent files will be transferred to the National Archives, these inventories will serve also as finding aids at the *NAR* reading room.

But let us have a closer look at the results of this model. There is an archival fond; it comprises all the creator's records (aggregated into files). Inside the fond, there are sub-fonds that correspond to the whole of files created by services. Inside sub-fonds, there are series of files, created by offices. If one takes a look at the »nomenclator«, one can see that the classes from the file-plan represent the sub-

series of records. Therefore, an inventory of permanent files would group together many sub-series. In the timeline, the accumulation of inventories would lead to a structure like this:

Service	Office	Year	File No.	Indicative of file	Retention period
I. Management	B. Deputy manager	1999	1.	I.B.1	Permanent
			2.	I.B.2	
			3.	I.B.3	
		2000	1.	I.B.1	
			2.	I.B.2	
			3.	I.B.3	
SUB-FOND	SERIE		SUB-SERIES		

or

Year	Service	Office	File no	Indicative of file	Retention period
1999	I. Management	B. Deputy manager	1.	I.B.1	Permanent
			2.	I.B.2	
			3.	I.B.3	
2000			1	I.B.1	
			2	I.B.2	
			3	I.B.3	
	SUB-FOND	SERIE	SUB-SERIES		

Based on ISAD(G) model, the structure of files should look like this:

Service	Office	Indicative of file	File ID	Retention period
I. Management	B. Deputy manager	I.B.1.	1/1999	Permanent
			1/2000	
		I.B.2.	1/1999	
			1/2000	
		I.B.3	1/1999	
			1/2000	
SUB-FOND	SERIE	SUB-SERIES		

It is obvious, from the analysis of the above tables, that the actual model of aggregating files based on inventories generates a structure that is not compatible with ISAD(G).

ISAD(G) is a standard that was elaborated from the perspective of and mainly intended to historical archives. »While the focus of these rules is the description of archival materials after the point at which they have been selected for preservation, they may also be applied at earlier phases«,¹ states the text of the standard. This approach should raise the question of the compatibility with the need of records managers. Is ISAD(G) suitable for the description of files in intermediate stage of the records lifecycle or for historical archives only? Some practical examples, I had the

¹ ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description, Second Edition, Ottawa: 2000, para 1.3.

opportunity to see in France, showed that, if desired, ISAD(G) can be applied for intermediate stage of the records lifecycle.

In an article from 2003, Elisabeth Shepherd mapped the provisional set of metadata elements for the implementation of ISO 15489-1 Information and Documentation - Records Management with ISAD(G). Her conclusion was that there is »a large degree of correlation between the metadata that should be captured as part of a records management system to satisfy ISO 15489-1, and the information required to compile an ISAD(G)-compliant archival description. Most of the compatible information comes from the description area of ISO 15489-1 metadata elements rather than the management area. Out of the six mandatory elements for ISAD(G) interoperability, five, i.e. reference code, title, dates, extent, and creator, are present in the ISO 15489-1 metadata element set, albeit often in an abbreviated form«.²

Despite this conclusion, an ISO standard³ has relatively recently identified the necessary metadata for records, ignoring ISAD(G) elements. Also, even if initially the elaboration of MoReq2 took into consideration the existence of ISAD(G), the final version does not use any correlation with ISAD(G) elements. Some personal talks I had with some members of the MoReq2 developing team revealed that most of the feedbacks from the interested parties showed rejection of the usefulness of ISAD(G) for records management.

The above mentioned issues outline some incompatibilities between ISAD(G) and practices of arrangement and/or description currently used in records management. Even if Romania is not a country with a records management tradition, some practices of managing the »records« also showed some incompatibilities with ISAD(G). Being involved in regulating and monitoring the records management practices for 50 years, the National Archives developed a sort of *continuum* in managing both records and archives, where the control and reference tools in »records management« practice became those further used by the NAR. An implementation of ISAD(G) in the archives management practices of NAR would break this continuum. For theoretical discussion sake, let us have an imaginary reform of the system. How could the records system model be re-structured, as the final output be compatible with ISAD(G)?

First of all, for the design of control and reference tools of an organization's records one must take into account the needs of that organization for efficiency. That is, to control and to have a quick reference of the information needed at a given moment, but also to provide an efficient way to dispose of unneeded records. Examining the actual Romanian model, in my opinion it is obvious that the system agrees more with the second requirement than with the first one. The regulation issued by NAR rather emphasizes the preservation of permanent records and the disposal of the temporary ones than the support of business needs of the creating agency for information retrieval. It is very useful to have separate inventories for the files with the same retention periods, but this is a disposal perspective; is this truly useful for the organization, when searching and retrieving a certain file?

The inventory (which stands for the physical and intellectual reference and control, at file level) is not structured or, better said, the structure has no meaning for description. The only solution to retrieve the information, therefore, is to read

² Shepherd, E., West, V., »Are ISO 15489-1:2001 and ISAD(G) compatible?« Part 2 in *Records Management Journal* 13(2), 203, 62.

³ ISO 23081:2006 *Information and documentation—Records management processes—Metadata for records*.

the entire inventory, point by point. It could be the possibility of using the »nomenclator« for identifying the retention period and the reference code for file, but in practice it is seldom the case. Not to mention that a key element in structuring the inventories and arranging files is the year of file's creation, element that should not define a structure in ISAD(G).

Taking all these into account, there could be several possibilities of re-thinking the way inventories mirror the arrangement of files:

a) not involving the retention period:

- *one inventory for files in a whole series.* That is, all the files created by an office should be listed, ignoring the retention periods. This solution has been suggested for two decades, but until now it was only applied for some particular situations, not as a general rule. The disposed files should be marked in the inventory, preserving in the same time a full picture of documentary production for the service.

b) involving retention period:

- *one inventory for sub-series.* This approach implies that the reference and control tool represents the list of the sub-series from »nomenclator«, with a short description and the number of files for each sub-series.
- *one inventory for each sub-series.* This would lead to an even greater fragmentation and increase in the number of inventories, and does not really help the creating agencies.

These approaches would imply a modification of the *continuum*, as seen today by the Romanian archival theory and methodology. At the transfer to NAR, these inventories could serve as a control tool only, and the archivists should make a new re-presentation of units of description. That should change the workflow and for a good implementation the professionals should support it.

The actual model system seems to work, even if, at a closer glance, some problems may occur. The ISAD(G) theoretical model is, in my opinion, a useful and a correct one, deriving from the best professional tradition, from both theoretical and practical perspectives. But often, rather than a significant change in methodology and practice, it is preferred to patch the current system. The match between a theoretical model versus a practical habit has still an unknown final score ...

REFERENCES

- *Instructiuni privind activitatea de arhivă la la creatorii și deținătorii de documente, București, 1996.*
- *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description, Second Edition, Ottawa: 2000.*
- *ISO 23081:2006 Information and documentation—Records management processes—Metadata for records.*
- *Law 16/1996 published in »Monitorul oficial«, București, 9.04.1996.*
- *Shepherd, E., West, V. »Are ISO 15489-1:2001 and ISAD(G) compatible?« Part 1 in Records Management Journal 13(1), 2003, 9-23 and Part 2 in Records Management Journal 13(2), 62-69.*

POVZETEK

ISAD(G) IN NEKAJ VIDIKOV ROMUNSKE ARHIVSKE PRAKSE

Biti ali ne biti

Mednarodne arhivske standarde so mnogi arhivisti sprejeli kot rešitev za sinhronizacijo in poenotenje različnih praks, čeprav jim ponekod niso bili naklonjeni. V nekaterih državah je narodna arhivska služba takoj sprejela ISAD(G) kot dolgo pričakovano rešitev. Na drugi strani pa obstajajo države, ki imajo dobro stoječ arhivski sistem s standardizirano arhivsko prakso na narodni ravni, in te standarde doživljajo kot novo nalogo ter se najprej sprašujejo, v kolikšni meri so njihovi lastni standardi v skladu s standardi ICA. Takšen je položaj v Romuniji, kjer je izdaja ICA standardov povzročila veliko zanimanje med profesionalci. Čeprav so vse štiri različice ICA standardov prevedene v romunščino, se debate odvijajo samo na akademskem nivoju, predvsem med mladimi arhivisti. Na žalost se te debate ne nanašajo na vsebino in dejansko uporabo tega standarda, ampak so omejene zgolj na poznavanje predpisov standarda. Članek analizira obstoj realnih neskladij med ISAD(G) in narodnimi arhivskimi standardi. Prikazuje povezavo med Narodnim arhivom Romunije in ustvarjalci pri upravljanju z dokumentarnim gradivom.

Romunski arhivski sistem po zakonu ureja Narodni arhiv Romunije. Njegova funkcija je razvijati narodno politiko in standarde za enotno upravljanje z dokumenti in arhivskim gradivom na državnem nivoju ter nadzorovati prakse upravljanja za vse ustvarjalce, tako javne kot zasebne. Ustvarjalci morajo uvajati t. i. »nomenclator«, klasifikacijski načrt in rok hrambe (vsakemu dokumentu se določi rok hrambe). Glede na »nomenclator« se dokumenti zbirajo v spise, za katere je izdelan inventar. Teoretično bodo inventarje za trajne spise uporabljali tudi v čitalnici Narodnega arhiva. Težava je, da takšni popisi arhivskega gradiva niso v skladu s standardom ISAD(G).