

### Finding and accessing the right archive and archival data: archival tools to support research and to make archives available to public

Arathymou, Spyridoula

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Arathymou, S. (2009). Finding and accessing the right archive and archival data: archival tools to support research and to make archives available to public. *Historical Social Research*, 34(3), 71-77. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.34.2009.3.71-77>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

# Finding and Accessing the Right Archive and Archival Data. Archival Tools to Support Research and to Make Archives Available to Public

*Spyridoula Arathymou*\*

**Abstract:** »Strategien der Suche nach Archiven und Archivdaten. Neue Instrumente der Unterstützung von Forschern und der Erleichterung des Archivzugangs für breitere Nutzergruppen«. Archival institutions have been characterized as the arks of knowledge. This is quite right as they preserve data which are dated in the later past but still valuable in nowadays. Before the development of computer technologies, archival institutions had to cope with the immense amount of information they had to record and classify and also create finding aids so as to help users find what they needed, without any automation. So, the archival institutions did not have the chance to promote their work and they had been usually identified with chaos and specialized users, who only them knew the archives' secrets. Hopefully, the computers' evolution, slowly gave the chance to archives to work faster and preserve a lot of information, in various forms, other than paper.

**Keywords:** Longitudinal Analysis, Process-Generated Data, Archiving, Secondary Analysis, Data Access, Data Management.

## 1. The Multi-Level Nature of Archives

Archival institutions have been characterized as the arks of knowledge. This is quite right as they preserve data which are dated in the later past but still valuable in nowadays. Before the development of computer technologies, archival institutions had to cope with the immense amount of information they had to record and classify and also create finding aids so as to help users find what they needed, without any automation. Everything was done by hand or with the use of a typing machine. In addition, all the archival works generally need quite a time to be accomplished because of the multilevel nature of archival information and the lack of automation made all the works go slow. Also, the created finding aids<sup>1</sup> were not always published. So, the archival institutions did not have the chance to promote their work and they had been usually identified

---

\* Address all communications to: Spyridoula Arathymou, University of the Aegean, Sozopolos 78-80, 10445 Athens, Greece; e-mail: pipiar@yahoo.com, pipiar@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> Finding aids: tools created by archivists to describe an archive's holdings, such as: inventories, catalogs.

with chaos and specialized users, who only they knew the archives' secrets. All this had as a result, to discourage possible users from studying the archival material and not to promote research. Also, the archives' users spent a lot of time trying to find what they really wanted and when they did, if they could consult it, they could only have a copy of it only on a microfilm, on photocopies – if allowed – or if they copied the text, by hand. The archives' staff could create only printed finding aids which were very difficult to become accessible to public. The users had to visit an archival institution in person so as to know its holdings or call, or write to it. Also, the archival institutions could not exchange data about their holdings, but only after the exchange of printed finding aids.

Hopefully, the computers' evolution, slowly gave the chance to archives to work faster and preserve a lot of information, in various formats, other than paper. Computer disks and later CDs and DVDs saved space for the archival institutions, as not so much paper was needed any more. But, the great chance for them came with the launch of Internet. The appearance of Internet had as a result the development of various technologies for the transfer and representation of various types of information. So, a lot of archival communities, professional groups, etc. thought that it was about time to use the new technologies to promote archival work and create better conditions and tools for the archives' staff and users.

Of course, long before the launch of Internet, archivists tried to incorporate new technologies in their work. Over the course of the last thirty years, the archival profession has been challenged and inspired by the development and evolution of new technologies. The dominion of computers in both public and private business has led to perhaps the most difficult challenge: electronic records. As far as it concerns archival description, the archival community had finally the chance to transform it, make it more flexible and represent it on new format, other than paper.

## 2. ISAD (G) (General International Standard Archival Description)

In 1994, the International Council on Archives (<http://www.ica.org>) released the first edition of the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD (G)) (<http://www.ica.org/en/downloads> ) and in 2000 it released the second revised one. This standard provides guidance for the preparation of archival description from the level of document to the level of fonds. It provides fields for giving information about everything related to the archival material to be described. The release of ISAD was a major step for the standardisation of archival description all over the world and without it the progress that has been made in the encoding of archival description, would have never been achieved. Today, ISAD is used almost globally by archival institutions to

describe archival material in combination with each country's national standards, which is a quite promising fact for the future of archival profession.

Table 1: ISAD (G) Main Data Elements

3.1.1. Reference code (s) 3.1.2. Title 3.1.3. Dates 3.1.4. Level of description 3.1.5. Extent and medium of the unit
3.2.1. Name of creator 3.2.2. Administrative/Biographical history 3.2.3. Archival history 3.2.4. Immediate source of acquisition
3.3.1. Scope and content 3.3.2. Appraisal, destruction and scheduling 3.3.3. Accruals 3.3.4. System of arrangement
3.4.1. Conditions governing access 3.4.2. Conditions governing reproduction 3.4.3. Language/scripts of material 3.4.4. Physical characteristics and technical requirements 3.4.5. Finding aids
3.5.1. Existence and location of originals 3.5.2. Existence and location of copies 3.5.3. Related units of description 3.5.4. Publication note
3.6.1. Note
3.7.1. Archivist's note 3.7.2. Rules or conventions 3.7.3. Date (s) of description

### 3. EAD (Encoded Archival Description)

The first attempt to use markup technologies to create machine readable archival description took place in 1993. The effort to develop a method for representing archival description using markup technologies resulted five years later in the release of Encoded Archival Description (EAD) (<http://www.loc.gov/ead/ead2002a.html>). The effort focused on developing a method for representing printed archival finding aids and because of the complex hierarchical nature of archival record description, the developers decided to use SGML (Standard

Generalized Markup Language) a markup technology, which was released in 1986 by the International Standards Organization (ISO) (<http://www.iso.org> ). This technology is well suited to the representation of complex, hierarchical documents. During the five-year development of EAD, new technologies were developed. In 1998, the year EAD was released, Extensible Markup Language (XML) (<http://www.w3.org/XML/>), a derivative of SGML, which is more compatible with formal computer grammars, was released by World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) (<http://www.w3.org> ). Version 1.0 of EAD was designed for use as either an SGML or XML encoding schema or system. In 2002, version 2.0 of EAD was released. The theoretical structure of EAD is based on ISAD and it shows the multilevel nature of archival information.

Table 2: Timeline of EAD

Before EAD	Timeline of EAD
MARC (USMARC, UNIMARC etc.)	1993 – ha Project Born at Berkeley
MARC AMC (USMARC format for Archives and Manuscript Control)	1995 – SAA Involvement
APPM (Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts) [Describing Archives: A Content Standard, from SAA, 2004]	1996 – Trial version of EAD DTD
RAD (Canadian Rules for Archival Description)	1998 – EAD DTD Release 1.0 unveiled
ISAD (G): General International Standard Archival Description	2002 – EAD DTD Release 2.0

#### 4. Connecting and Transferring Information from ISAD to EAD

It would be useful to see the equivalencies, the “crosswalks” between EAD elements and the data elements defined in ISAD (G), so as to see how the mapping of data can be facilitated between and among these metadata tools. There are also equivalencies between EAD elements and MARC21 fields in which mapping are between an EAD finding aid and a MARC21 record describing the same collection.

Table 3: ISAD (G) crosswalks to EAD

ISAD (G)	EAD
3.1.1. Reference code (s)	<eadid> with COUNTRYCODE and MAINAGENCYCODE attributes <unitid> with COUNTRYCODE and REPOSITORYCODE attributes
3.1.2. Title	<unittitle>
3.1.3 Dates	<unitdate>
3.1.4. Level of description	<archdesc>and <c> LEVEL attribute
3.1.5 Extent and medium of the unit	<physdesc> and subelements <extent>, <dimensions>, <genreform>, <physfacet>
3.2.1. Name of creator	<origination>
3.2.2 Administrative/Biographical history	<bioghist>
3.2.3 Archival history	<custodhist>
3.2.4. Immediate source of acquisition	<acqinfo>
3.3.1 Scope and content	<scopecontent>
3.3.2 Appraisal, destruction and scheduling	<appraisal>
3.3.3. Accruals	<accruals>
3.3.4. System of arrangement	<arrangement>
3.4.1. Conditions governing access	<accessrestrict>
3.4.2. Conditions governing reproduction	<userrestrict>
3.4.3. Language/scripts of material	<langmaterial>
3.4.4. Physical characteristics and technical requirements	<phystech>
3.4.5. Finding aids	<otherfindaid>
3.5.1. Existence and location of originals	<originalsloc>
3.5.2. Existence and location of copies	<altformavail>
3.5.3 Related units of description	<relatedmaterial> <separatedmaterial>
3.5.4 Publication note	<bibliography>
3.6.1. Note	<odd> <note>
3.7.1 Archivist's note	<processinfo>
3.7.2 Rules or conventions	<descrules>
3.7.3. Date (s) of description	<processinfo><p><date>

#### 4.1 The Problem of Time

Because of the multilevel nature of archival information and the difficulties that derive from it, the archival community needed more time to develop standards for the archival description than the time the librarians' community (<http://www.ifla.org>) needed to develop standards for books' description. The

basic information fields of a book are usually the same, such as: book title, writer, year of publication, etc. So, it was much easier for librarians to develop standards to describe the libraries' holdings and use the computers' technology to promote their work.

#### 4.2 Advantages of Digitization

There have been developed several archival standards. The results so far are quite promising as the archival services can cooperate better and promote their work to a public not limited by geographical borders. The use of EAD gave them the chance to present on-line their finding aids, so as users can know the documents they preserve. Also, digitization has helped so as to preserve unique documents but to show them on-line, too. Users can download rare or not rare documents or ask for copies of them on-line, in many cases. Besides, when users visit archives they can consult their electronic finding aids, or printed ones, which are not available on the web. They can have access to digitized photographic material and maps, drawings, etc. which they could not possibly study before, in case that material was sensitive. The copies of documents are saved in media such as CDs, DVDs or flash disks, which enables users to work on the material in various ways. Digitization also saved vital space in the archival institutions as information is preserved in new formats and not paper which demanded space and also is a very sensitive material. New technologies improved the functions of archival services in other ways, as well. They can compare their holdings easier and see if they have parts of a single archive, which is a very common case. And all this is to the benefit of users.

#### 4.3 Current Developments

Most major archival services have released on-line finding aids for their holdings. They can be consulted on the services' web pages. Usually, web users cannot be informed about all the holdings that an archival service preserves, because it takes some time to develop a finding aid, but this is nothing compared to past situations. UNESCO's Archives' Portal ([http://www.unesco.org/cgi-bin/webworld/portal\\_archives/](http://www.unesco.org/cgi-bin/webworld/portal_archives/)) and ICA's web page are two great tools for users, who are not familiar with archives and for experienced users, as well.

The adoption of new technologies by the archival community did not bring the end of traditional methods for archival works. Archival material is very complex and various stages of data processing are needed so as to make it available to public. Nevertheless, new technologies improved the situation both for archives and their users. The archival profession has become modern and more demanding than ever. There a lot of things to be seen and to be done as the future of archival profession will require the development of new technologies outside the archival community and the possible development of new theories and practices.

## 5. Web Tools for Archives

- UNESCO Archives Portal:  
[http://www.unesco.org/cgi-bin/webworld/portal\\_archives/](http://www.unesco.org/cgi-bin/webworld/portal_archives/)
- International Council on Archives:  
<http://www.ica.org>
- WWW-VL: History Index: Archives:  
<http://vlib.iue.it/history/bibliography/archives.html>
- Society of American Archivists:  
[www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org)
- EAD DTD Version 2002 (EAD Official Site, Library of Congress):  
<http://www.loc.gov/ead/ead2002a.html>
- National Archives of Australia:  
<http://www.naa.gov.au/default.html>
- The National Archives of the United Kingdom:  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>
- Bundesarchiv:  
<http://www.bundesarchiv.de>

## References

- Dooley, Jackie (Ed.) (1998): *Encoded Archival Description: Context, Theory and Case Studies*. Society of American Archivists.
- EAD Tag Library. Version 2002 (2002, 2003). The Society of American Archivists.
- Ellis, Judith (Ed.) (1993): *Keeping archives*. DW Thorpe in association with the Australian Society of Archivists.
- International Council on Archives (2000): *General International Standard Archival Description*. Ottawa.
- Pitti, Daniel / Duff, Wendy M. (Eds.) (2002): *Encoded Archival Description on the Internet*. The Haworth Information Press.
- Stocking, Bill / Queroux, Fabienne (Eds.) (2005): *Encoding Across Frontiers: Proceedings of the European Conference on Encoded Archival Description and Context (EAD and EAC), Paris, France, 7-8 October 2004*. The Haworth Information Press.