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SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON ARCHIVAL APPRAISAL FOR PERMANENT RECORDS IN ROMANIA

Abstract

This paper presents the principles and criteria used for archival appraisal presented in professional literature in Romania. It starts by making terminological clarifications, then presents the concept of National Archival Heritage, as an umbrella term for all records bearing permanent (historical/archival) value. Then, by using the professional methodologies or professional articles as a source, it presents the types of values considered, principles and criteria used, and some solutions used in practice. The critical reading of all these shows that sometimes the used terms and the promoted criteria are not sufficiently clear and usable, leaving a great space for the lack of predictability and consistency. While subjectivism may be beneficial in principle, it may become an issue when it impacts the efforts for preservation. The situation may be regarded as critical also by considering the new challenges that come from the electronic environment for creation of records. At the end, instead of conclusion, the author is trying to draw some more specific background principles to guide the appraisal, and to define some generic area to better filter the records.

Keywords: *archival appraisal, contextual value, informational value, historical value*

ALCUNE CONSIDERAZIONI SULLA VALUTAZIONE D'ARCHIVIO PER I DOCUMENTI PERMANENTI IN ROMANIA

Sintesi

Questo articolo presenta i principi criteri utilizzati per la valutazione d'archivio nella letteratura professionale in Romania. Parte da chiarimenti terminologici, poi presenta il concetto di patrimonio archivistico nazionale, come termine generico per tutti i documenti che hanno un valore permanente (storico/archivistico). Quindi, utilizzando come fonte le metodologie professionali o gli articoli professionali, vengono presentati i tipi di valori considerati, i principi dei criteri utilizzati ed alcune soluzioni utilizzate nella pratica. La lettura critica di tutto ciò mostra che talvolta i termini utilizzati e i criteri promossi non sono sufficientemente chiari e fruibili, lasciando ampio spazio alla mancanza di prevedibilità e coerenza. Mentre il soggettivismo può essere un vantaggio in linea di principio, può diventare un problema quando ha un impatto sullo sforzo di conservazione. La situazione può essere considerata critica anche considerando le nuove sfide che provengono dall'ambiente elettronico per la creazione di record. Alla fine, invece della conclusione, l'autore cerca di trarre alcuni principi di base più specifici per guidare la valutazione e di definire alcune aree generiche per meglio filtrare i documenti.

Parole chiave: *valutazione archivistica, valore contestuale, valore informativo, valore storico*

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NEKAJ RAZMISLEKOV O VREDNOTENJU TRAJNIH DOKUMENTOV V ROMUNIJ

Povzetek

V tem prispevku so predstavljena načela in merila, ki se uporabljajo za arhivsko vrednotenje, predstavljena v strokovni literaturi v Romuniji. Začne se s terminološkimi pojasnili, nato pa se predstavi koncept narodne arhivske dediščine kot krovnega pojma za vse zapise, ki imajo trajno (zgodovinsko/arhivsko) vrednost. Nato se z uporabo strokovnih metodologij ali strokovnih člankov kot vira predstavi vrste obravnavanih vrednot, uporabljena načela in merila ter nekatere rešitve, ki se uporabljajo v praksi. Kritično branje vsega tega kaže, da včasih uporabljeni izrazi in promovirana merila niso dovolj jasna in uporabna, kar pušča prostor za pomanjkanje predvidljivosti in doslednosti. Čeprav je subjektivizem lahko načeloma koristen, lahko postane problem, ko vpliva na prizadevanja za ohranitev. Situacijo lahko štejemo za kritično tudi ob upoštevanju novih izzivov, ki prihajajo iz elektronskega okolja za ustvarjanje zapisov. Na koncu, namesto zaključka, poskuša avtor definirati nekaj bolj specifičnih izhodiščnih načel, ki bi vodila vrednotenje, in opredeliti generično področje za boljše filtriranje zapisov.

Ključne besede: vrednotenje, kontekstualni vrednost, informacijska vrednost, zgodovinska vrednost.

Archival appraisal is a very dear topic to archivists. There is a huge amount of professional literature on appraisal, offering a wide range of perspectives (Duranti & Franks, 2015, pp. 214-217), spreading from the enthusiastic "*the most important/difficult part of the archival job*" (Cox, 2004, pp. 276; Adamache, 1989, pp. 287; Coman, 1982, pp. 370)) to the skeptical "*one way to distort the history*" (Cox, 2006, pp. 240-241). Probably a whole book could be devoted only to a bibliography of the matter.

In the following, I shall present briefly archival appraisal in Romania: the vocabulary, the current system and some critical remarks on it, and possible lines of evolution.

TERMINOLOGICAL STATEMENT

I would like to start by examining the terminology used. Traditionally, appraisal is an "*assessment of records to determine their value as primary source material, providing evidence of the history of the organization, family or individual*" (Crockett, 2016, pp. 141). But the terminology designating the determination of the values of records and actions associated with it encompass also some other terms, like *selection*, or *disposition*.

a). In Romania, traditionally the term *selection* was used. For several years, in 1950s-1960s, the official designation was *analyse* ("expertizare"), defined as "*detailed study of the records content contained in the archival units in order to determine their political, scientific and practical importance*" (Arhivele Statului, 1962, pp. 3). Later, the term *selection* was again officially endorsed by legislation, meaning "*the operation of establishing the historical-documentary or practical values of the archival units from a fond or a collection, with the aim of permanent preservation of those part of the National Archival Heritage or disposition of those lacking importance*" (Arhivele Statului, 1982, pp. 211). In the latest years, selection is defined only as "*operation of disposition of records or records units from an archival fond when the retention periods expired*" (***, Ordin nr. 137 din 27 septembrie 2013 pentru aprobarea Normelor metodologice privind aplicarea unor dispoziții ale Legii Arhivelor Naționale nr. 16/1996, 2013).

The hesitation of use between "*selection*" and "*analyse*" is very likely due to the source of authority. The term "*selection*" was very likely used based on Italian influence, while the term "*analyse*" was adopted under Soviet influence, in the 1950s. If these identifications are correct, the rollback to the original term may be considered directly connected with Romanian Government's attitude of "*independence*" within the Communist block, started in the 1960s. A second remark is the fact that the definition of selection covers in fact several actions. On the one hand, it is about appraising the value of records for retention; on the other, appraising for disposal. While obviously the original meaning was identifying the valuable records, in practice the activity of selection comes to be considered synonym to disposal. Another aspect is that nor "*historical-documentary*", nor "*practical*" values are defined in a regulative paper, but only in professional glossaries. We shall elaborate more below on this distinction, but we would like to emphasize that the two terms have an outstanding importance in separating records, though their meaning is very much inconsistent.

The last definition, which simplifies the complex process of assessment of records, is today the only definition with legal value in Romania! It reflects a late trend within the National Archives to regulate specific situations, disregarding the whole picture of the archival appraisal domain.

b). Another important distinction is the use of term "*permanent*". According to Romanian archival regulatory framework and methodology, "*permanent records*" or "*records that are preserved permanently*" are those record with "*historical and documentary*

value". In a new project of law on archives, the term "archival value" was also used for indicating permanent records.

For the purposes of present paper, I shall focus mainly on appraisal, that is on the action of assess the archival value of the records, where by *archival value* I understand the estimated long term relevance of records for various users of the archives, either groups or individuals.

TIMELINE OF THE APPRAISAL

The current methodological framework states implicit and explicit moments for appraisal. The *implicit moment* is the when retention schedule is created. Assigning retention periods implies an activity of appraisal, which I like to call "prospective", since it is, more or less, an estimative value for the records, before the records are created and used. The explicit appraisal of records occurs at the moment of disposition, when it is decided which archival materials has the retention period expired. This explicit appraisal I call "retrospective", since it is ulterior to the moment of creation. Apparently, this is a more limited that appraisal, as it is defined today in ISO 15489:2016 and ISO 21946:2018.

In fact, at a closer look, it may not be the case. In practice, there are some stages of appraisal that occur, but they are not clearly identified as such. For instance, for paper records, the grouping of records into folders in order to be send to the storage room implies an examination of copies or notes that exists, in order to determine if they are convenience records or contain relevant information for the organisational process; that is, to determine if they are records or mere documents. In the past, this kind of "appraisal" should be also done under the supervision of a commission (Dinu & Nicula, 1978, pp. 445), but today it is not prescribed anymore.

Also, before the records are transferred to the Archives, in theory, the inventories containing those records that were set initially as being of permanent value, and those retained in the process of disposition as having this value² are the transfer lists. In fact, scrutinizing the inventories or even in the process of transfer and verification, some items may be "appraised" as not being of permanent value and discarded. Lastly, even those pre-checks may fail and in time, it may be considered that some records may not possess the estimated permanent values and they are subject to a "re-appraisal"³.

As such, I am inclined to remark that the latest definition of appraisal presented in international standards, seems more faithful to the process, at least in Romanian case. The second remark is that, with a proper articulation of concept, appropriate controls can be applied, so the effectiveness of the process may increase, so here it is an area of improvement of the current methodological framework.

THE BODY OF "PERMANENT" RECORDS

As most of the ex-communist countries, Romania shares a concept that aim to designate the body of all permanent records: National Archival Heritage. The name of the concept may be misleading. The term was often translated as State/National Archival funds/fonds, translating the terminology in original languages, where the term used is rather similar to the concept of "(archival) fonds". In fact, definition (at least in Romanian) refers to the *permanent records*, not to the *body of records having the same creator*. The

2 This may happen in general for 2 reasons: 1. It was overridden the retention schedules periods, due to reevaluation of the initial rationale; 2. Those records were not categorized at all initially in the retention schedule.

3 However, in Romanian, the term used is the same as in the other phases, that is "selecționare".

meaning (and even the wording in Romanian) is the same with "cultural heritage", so, for a proper English translation, I shall use the term as National Archival Heritage⁴.

The concept also recorded some transformations. Before 1950, such concept did not exist in Romanian archival theory and practice. Drafted in 1953, obviously following the Soviet model, it was officially proclaimed in 1957, as State Archival Heritage. In 1971, not surprisingly aligned with the national-communist policy promoted by Nicolae Ceausescu, the term was renamed as "National Archival Heritage", concept that was taken over as such in the post-communist legislation. (Popovici, 2008)

For the past 60 years, little changes in the definition of this concept occurred. In 1957 (***, 1957) it was stated that the purpose for establishing the State Archival Heritage as "to ensure the centralized register, preservation and use of documentary materials for scientific and practical purposes".

In 1971, the concept became more inclusive: the name was changed to National Archival Heritage and covered all records based on their "*scientific and practical value and importance and not by its creator or owner*" (Arhivele Statului, 1982, pp. 121–122). Except for some wording, the actual legal definition is mostly the same.

While the form of protection of all records, no matter the creator, may seem legit and inspiring⁵, some questions still arise. The first one is the feasibility: can the government monitor all records creators in Romania? In my opinion, this is an impossible logistic goal and even an undesirable cultural memorial goal⁶. In order to attempt to achieve, it would be necessary at least to filter the relevant creators, and this add a new level of archival appraisal, "the creator": who are those organisations (or natural persons!) that have to be monitored as part of the NAH? Surprisingly, however, in Romania there were not—and still there is not—any reference list of NAH creators that are officially monitored. And while logistic problems are obvious, the policy of "foggy" area of competences continues to have no formal resolution, since it offers the liberty of decision from one case to another.

One other hidden flaw of the definition of NAH is the collision with cultural heritage area, that is governed by a distinct legislation in Romania. The definition in archival legislation would include all historical records in NAH, even those preserved as individual pieces in libraries or museums. In theory, they should be managed according to archival legislation. But those memory institutions are governed by a different law, which govern the protection of cultural heritage. In order to clarify this situation, that law limit the NAH to those records preserved by the National Archives (and thus, excluding permanent records held by the creators), and include NAH in the National Cultural Heritage

4 I recall the fact that, because of the misuse of the term, Michel Duchein mistakenly claimed that it is the case of a *single archival fonds at the country level* (Duchein, 1992, pp. 16). In fact, the archival fonds exists in their own state, but, across these fonds, all the records with permanent values are abstractly designated as National (State) Archival Heritage. And that this is an abstract concept is showed by the fact in 1957 the name of the piece of legislation was "Decree for establishing the State Archival Heritage". Or, since the records or the archival fonds existed long time before the „establishment“, it is obvious this is an administrative concept, independent of the creators and the records produced by them.

5 A quasi-similar approach seems to be the Canadian "total archive", though some authors claimed their approach is a „uniquely Canadian practice" (Sheffield, s.d.). In our opinion, the author's claim for uniqueness, based on 4 tenents, is unsustainable. It also worth reminding that the feasibility of the approach was questioned (Miller, 1996; Miller, 1998).

6 Without stressing this aspect, since it tangential in the frame of this paper, modern research showed convincingly that no matter how professional National Archives staff may be, monopoly over the management of the past traces may lead to a deformed history. From this point of view, it may be really undesirable that the State, through its one (or a few) institution(s), to be delegated to collect all documentary traces of the past. (Blouin jr. & Rosenberg, 2013, pp. 158–160; Popovici, 2011, pp. 261–262).

(***, 2014, pp. art. 6., al. 2.). These provisions have also unanticipated legal and practical implications. According to Romanian law, all goods part of the National Cultural Heritage needs to be monetary appraised (***, 2019). And, consequently, records must be financially valued. Such activities began in 1981, when archivists took record by record (starting with old ones) and set prices to them, based on certain criteria. As a result of this overwhelming practice (which never reached an end), in an intervention, the then deputy director of the Romanian State Archives stated that not all records in NAH are in fact part of the Cultural treasure (Arimia, 1985, pp. 351) ⁷. But this approach opened a new line of thinking for some: records are no longer regarded based on fonds they belong, but on their status of being or not part of the cultural heritage...

As a preliminary conclusion, though Romanian archival legislation designates the whole of permanent records with a special term, its usefulness can be questioned. It is not accompanied by explicit and formal criteria for identifying permanent records. The grouping of records based on their value is rather museal than archival; hence, records tend to be regarded in a decontextualized manner, as items, rather than collectively, interrelated, based on provenance. In the same time, the overall coverage, from government to banks and from education to industry, is a heavy task, which has impact on the way appraisal should be approached.

APPROACHES FOR APPRAISAL OF PERMANENT RECORDS

The coherence of the legislation in the last 60 years allows for a sort of continuum of practice in the effort to identify the theoretical and methodological ground helping archivists to make appraisal decision.

TYPE OF VALUES

The standard differentiation when the generic Romanian archivist talks about values of records is "the historical and documentary" and "practical", and sometimes "legal". There is no formal definition for these terms, but the *Dictionary of Auxiliary Sciences of History* define the documentary -historical value as "*the importance of the historical and documentary (sic!) information that are included in the archival units belonging to a fonds or collection (...). The historical and documentary importance of archival units is given by the value of the information on the social, economic, political, and cultural development of society over the centuries.*" The legal value was defined as "*a propriety transferred to the record by legal norm*". The practical value, on the other hand, is defined as "*the sum of the information contained in an archival unit from a fonds or collection which serves to solve current economic and social problems*".

Though widely used, I find this differentiation of little use, not to mention a sort of insidious patronizing attitude, from the high level of "scientificity" (history—the object of interest of the National Archive) to the mundane "current problems" (practical—object of interest of the creators or public). Personally, I find relevant Schellenberg's remarks: records are primarily made as a documentary evidence of the activities performed by those who have practical needs. Records are not designed to be "historical and documentary" objects; quite the opposite, they result in having this value after their primary utility ceased. So, all records have, initially, a practical or legal value, longer or shorter. On the other hand, all these values are not a "given", but they are contextual. As a Romanian example: lists with refugees from WW2 were considered historical. A compen-

⁷ The topic is not settled in a definitive manner until today and periodically it is prompted for implementation.

sation law made those records the main source for the citizens' rights; so, "historical records" become "practical records".

It must also be mentioned that, in 1962, it was officially stated that "political value" for records as a criterium for appraisal. This approach lasted only several years, but, one may say that the political perspective did not vanish, but was included in the historical one.

"PRINCIPLES" FOR APPRAISAL

It may look strange, but the only guideline that contained principles for appraisal was issued in 1962. Since then, various opinions were only presented in professional articles, but never adopted officially, at least to my knowledge.

In 1962, the (then) State Archives identified three types of values (political, scientific⁸ and practical). In order to determine those value, beside some practical indications (using of the retention schedule, prevalence of the higher valued record in case of concurrence of retention periods), it was stated several broad lines to identify permanent records:

- *Small amount of records* kept from a creator will impose permanent preservation for all those records, no matter if, in regular circumstances, those would have been temporary;
- *All records reflecting the history of an organization* from its foundation, including those reflecting the building of communism and those which reveal the living and working conditions of the workers.
- *Records which have political, scientific value*, those referring to economic crisis and to the cultural and commercial relation with the foreign countries
- *Records which have practical relevance* for the work of the socialist organisations (creators)
- *Records which reflect the foundation of collective farms*, their activity and life style of the workers in these farms.

These "principles" reflect quite transparent the immediate political perspective for preserving certain informational content in archives.

Later on, in 1982, an author issued another set of principles (Puşcas, 1982, pp. 243), from which the first 3 were proposed by German-Democrat archivists. Unlike precedent ones, these principles have a more pregnant theoretical ground:

- *the principle of historical conception* = the value of the records is given by the conditions in which the creator of the fonds carried out its activity, the role it played, the position it was in, the duties it had
- *the principle of complexity* = the value of records is determined not only at the level of a single fonds, but also by the relationships between different fonds
- *the principle of multilaterality* = the value of the records is determined based on the relationships in the fonds as a whole.
- *the principle of historicity* = a record is valuable if it has the potential for future use.

Puşcas' principles remained a theoretical effort only, because they were not promoted in the formal guidelines of the State Archives. Their titles may not be quite expressive, but reflect very well the main concerns of the time (visible in other articles too). It is to be underscored the understanding that an assessment of the creator is a main pillar for records appraisal.

8 For the obsession of "scientific" grounding during the Communist regimes see Lucian Boia, *The Scientific Mythology of Communism Bucharest*, Humanitas Publishing House, 2005.

One of the issues in front of the archivists, in socialist countries, is reflected in the second principle. Since the governance of that time was centralised, it implied that most of the organisation were in a hierarchy. As such, some authors suggested that some records series should be kept permanently only at the upper level of decision (Coman, 1982, pp. 371). However, this "principle of complexity" led to some unhappy decisions in practice. Disposal of series at the executive level preserved the only copy of some records series at the decision level; and here, from various reasons, they were lost. As a result, a whole set of relevant information was lost. Moreover, provenance is not only a principle for arrangement, but also one basic principle for searching in the archives: there was a historical Event, there were Agents involved in that Event, so the Agent's Records should contain information about that Event. Attempting a sort of "national scale" appraisal leads to disposal of some records which are normally permanent and looked for in the creator's fonds. Of course, considering the whole of the NAH, this may have a rationale; it also has a rationale from logistic perspective, for optimising storage area. But since the whole of records from one creator is considered the top unit of aggregation of records (at least in Romania), this approach is flawed and deprives the fonds of some relevant records series. On the contrary, "the principle of multilaterality" acts inside the whole of records produced by a creator and thus may balance the preservation of the relevant information for a creator's history.

The last principle reflects a prospective approach, and we shall come again to it below. Essentially, it is an estimation for a potential use, which transforms the appraiser in a fortune teller. As the recent history showed, values and interests of the society can change fast and often unpredicted. Hence, trying to foresee the exact future is almost impossible (Kretzschmar, 2005, pp. 226). Very likely, such decisions would imply a re-appraisal in the future.

"CRITERIA" FOR APPRAISAL

The inclination for practical aspects of Romanian archivists rather led to a use of "criteria" than "principles" for guiding appraisal. Such criteria were issued several times in methodologies and professional articles. Many of them are repetitive, and many of them relates in fact with the principles above.

The historical and documentary value of records. This criterium is the most invoked, despite its imprecision, as I said before. Everything has a history, from a country to science: for whose history must the records be relevant? In some methodological editions, the explanation is very emphatic: "*goods of national interest containing information on significant moments in the past struggle and life of the Romanian people*". In this definition hardly can someone find a place for minorities or for those elements significant for a small community, which has little or no impact to "the nation", as a whole. Being so vague, it is here where the professional and cultural background of the appraiser is vital for a good evaluation. On the other hand, historiography is a moving target and new trends in historical research may only influence future decisions of appraisal.

Special events (...or remarkable historical moments reflected in records or that created the context for the records to be created). This criterion reminds very much of "documentation plans" advocated by Hans Boom (Booms, 1991, pp. 28). But again, this is difficult to implement, because "*complex human value concepts can hardly be harmonized to reflect the whole of society*" (Booms, 1991, pp. 29). In any case, there was no explicit documentation plan prepared in National Archives.

Role and functions of the creators (and his place in the institutional system of our country or his relations with institutions and personalities in our country and abroad). This criterion is

similar with the principles promoted in macro-appraisal strategy and has a potential for feasibility. Unfortunately, no guidelines for "what is relevant" or "for whom" were produced in Romania. The way it was formulated promotes again the "national whole" and perspective of an age where relations with "foreigners" were exceptions. Also, it is rather intuitive, but arguably, that a train ticket from 2000 would not be considered extremely relevant for a railway historian from 2100.

A rather objective criterion is the *age of the record (and its special features like form, carrier, ornaments, artistic value)*. This is rather a museum approach, looking for exceptional records, rather than those "mundane" evidence of day-to-day activity. Such records document special events, with less documentation in the background.

Long-time legal or practical value. While the historical value is opposed to the practical value, it must be admitted that preserved archives from medieval times contains in fact very few "historical valued" records *per se*, but rather records concerning legal and practical useful records. On the other hand, in my opinion, practical utility for a generation or two (that is, 60 years) would not qualify records to be permanent.

The density of information is another criterion, presented only in professional literature though. Initially, this was a criterion used to retain for preservation the summative records and not detailed ones, but today it is more and more relevant in the context of medium migration (paper to electronic).

The quantity of records from a certain age or fonds is a criterion frequently invoked in Romania, reflecting the reality of many archives lost, both in times of war or peace. Records from a fonds under 0.5 l.m were automatically considered permanent because nothing else remained; also, records under 1920 are not disposable but in special circumstances. There is some room for criticism in this area, because, in my opinion, sometimes 0.5 l.m. of irrelevant record do not help at all in restore past events. Additionally, setting time limits based on historical political events bring little value to the topic. I think that time limits should be connected with recordkeeping policy events, so reflecting a direct impact to the holdings.

A related criterion is the *frequency in the national and universal heritage*. It refers to the situation where the same record may exist at various levels in a centralized system, being derived from the principle of complexity. Hence, the same criticism may be applied: each record has a distinct role in a working process. A repetition of the same record in different organisations or units, apart from the duplication of information, may have a different significance, because it is placed in a different context. Their elimination may fragment the documentation of the process.

A last criterion is *the conservation status of records*. This was only introduced in the last version of the methodology, and it targets the logistics. Many decayed records are not only a burden for the restauration budgets, but also can be a danger to other records, so it a relevant question to ask if deserves transfer to Archives.

As a conclusion, National Archives has developed a system for guiding appraisal, but in my opinion, it is rather broad. Some criteria used in methodologies drawn up have validity, but would need they need further refinement and more guides—which have never been produced. Some indicate a rather vague goals and scope, deriving from an obvious centralized, national-level approach, promoting "THE history" against "a history". Some other criteria though need clarification, as concepts and as implementation suitability. And overall, in my opinion, it needs clarification about what to preserve, why and for which reason. "History" is a big word, but less tangible.

PRACTICAL APPRAISAL

The criteria mentioned above are present in methodology but, because of their generality, some workarounds are used; the results are not always consistent, though.

By far, the main purpose of the appraisal in National Archives of Romania is to identify and retain the records with "historical" value. In theory, this is presumably attainable by the specific training the archivist had, that is graduates of History. In practice, there are at least 2 issues with this approach: as in any scientific field, studying History once in life does not guarantee a perpetual historical perspective. In fact, I noticed not once that people who are "bureaucrats" (that is, most familiarized with bureaucratic processes) may be more useful in the process of appraisal, being capable to identify the most important records, the most important processes, the most relevant actions in an organization. The second aspect is that in rare cases the general history studied in universities helps coping with small events, small administrative institutions, mainly for archivists who do not work in capitals and dealing with government institutions. So, in my opinion, competences in History is just one tool for the appraiser, that these competences must be periodically updated to be relevant and that lack of other competences can make a History graduate as good appraiser as a specialist in other domain, like management or legal studies.

Beyond competences of the appraiser, it is still unclear for which history can a record be relevant: local history, regional history, country history?... In practice, the source for discerning the "historical interest" comes from 2 directions. First, from a personal "documentation" plan. That is, which events seems memorable for the appraiser, from her/his knowledge: "This was a pyramidal scheme where many people were cheated, so we must preserve the records about this, to show how transition to a market economy occurred". While it can nevertheless bring relevant records, this approach is neither predictable, not consistent. It is just individual experience of an archivist, which makes it as good as any other opinion. The second source for "historical relevance" is the personal observation on the use of records: frequency of a certain topics of research in the reading room, newer historiographic trends etc. While this may also be a valuable source, its flaw is that it is always "reactive", from a moment on, and it will not give an evaluation of that reason: cause of interest, its relevance, potential duration: would a social interest for global warming justify preserving related records from now on? Is this a more relevant topic than others?

Another tool used for appraisal is getting in technicalities, like records type. This is a very convenient method, since it is easier to identify the types and may automatically be assigned to the group of "permanent" or "temporary" and it is materialized in "list of permanent records". Criticism was present in Romanian archival literature, by highlighting that such an approach would de-contextualize the information (Adamache, 1989, pp. 287) and that any document, in a proper context, may represent a historical value (Coman, 1973, pp. 36).

OTHER CHALLENGES

Beside a need of a more precise guidelines for appraisal, there are several other situations that have impact over the identification of permanent records. Some of this are generated exactly by the imprecision and variability in evaluate records, others by the changing landscape in the production of records.

The tool I mentioned before, combining filing plan and retention schedule, may face several revisions in time. Officially, it should be an organizational structure-based scheme,

but several variants, including functional, can be met in practice. No matter the system adopted, it is subject to revisions or upgrades in time. In most of the cases—and supported by lack of methodological provisions about this situation—codes and retention periods are re-assigned to the various categories comprised. Under these circumstances, previous “permanent records” are downgraded, because of various reasons. Sometimes, it concluded records content did not confirm the prospective value (“too optimistic initial assessment” (Coman, 1982, pp. 347–375). In other cases, general requirements have changed: social (for instance, preserving records about building of socialism) or legal (like payrolls). Also, sometimes it is noticed a “mistake” in previous assessment (and human nature will always tend to improve the work of the predecessors...).

The production of electronic records will raise (if not already did) new challenges. The first and the most visible is that a variability in assigning the retention value and coding categories of records will imply updating systems (which have implemented records controls) at each revision of the retention schedules. And this may be burdensome. Also, the possibility of disposition at the record level (instead of series or file level, as today) will challenge the integrity of documentary flow in permanent records series. Hybrid approach, as that included in Sharepoint, for instance (Lappin, 2019), may need to be formally accepted, modifying the paper logic that exists today. In the case of large systems built on databases, one system may contain many traditional series, so the target of appraisal may need new perspectives, from retaining the whole system, selecting part of the system or “recreation” of traditional series of information by exporting data. Not least, the dematerialisation process, more and more an option for many organisations, would lead to a duplicate of records in different media. And, in case of permanent records, what would prevail: the original artifact or the records used lastly by the creator in its activities?

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS: A PROPOSITION

This paper was rather severe towards the methodology and practice of identifying permanent records, as it exists in the National Archives of Romania. And this may be somehow unfair, since for so long no change occurred, even if the anticipated outcomes are different than the real outcome.

Following this critique, in my opinion it can be possible to create a guideline for determining the concept of archival value of records. And here is my perspective on some general principles and some angles of analyzing records:

- The value of the archive results primarily from the testimony to the creator’s activity and the information contained in the records, and secondarily in its quality as an artefact, a cultural object, of special appearance, rarity, exceptional specimen, etc.
- The value of records can have different degrees of significance for different communities at different points in time. As every record is a testimony, the potential preservation interests are infinite, and, above all, variable over time.
 - Whatever criteria are used to analyse archival value on the long run, they must be applied in an integrated way, looking at the archive from multiple perspectives.
 - As it is not feasible to identify all the future interests of potential users, the focus should be on the preservation of information/records that allow the reconstruction of a creator’s activity in the context of its era.
- The archival value lies in the enhancement of the original value of the record and the documentary ensemble of which it is a part with new cultural, social, etc. meanings acquired because of the passage of time.

- The archival value cannot be definitively established from the beginning of the existence of a record/group of records, but only estimated; this implies subsequent re-evaluations, by analysing new contexts of existence and use, which may lead to the promotion or downgrading of the status of 'historical value'.
- The separation of records with archival value implies that there are records that do not possess this value. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that:
 - the intensity of archival value depends on the degree of uniqueness of the activity and the uniqueness of the information it contains
 - the degree of relevance of records to knowledge is different
 - determining what to keep can also be done by determining what to remove and by analysing the impact of removing certain categories of records.
 - the intensity of the archival value of an records aggregation must also be justified by the logistical resources required for preservation, aligned to the function of the archival preservation institution performing the appraisal.

One can select some filters necessary when performing an appraisal for archival value. Of course, each of them would need more detailed instructions in order to be operational.

1. *Appraisal of the relevance of a creator of records.* Unless it is not specified in their mandates, archival institutions should check which are the most relevant functions and performers of those functions in society, at the time of creating the records.
2. *Which records serves best as the long time testimony on the creators's activity?* That is, the ability of records to provide information on the origin, organisation, functioning of the creator, the functions and activities carried out and their impact on society. This value therefore concerns the processes of records creation and not the actual informational content of the records produced by a creator.
3. *Which is the records informational value?* Information value refers to the information records contain about people, things or phenomena. By the nature of documentary output, records typically contain only information that falls within the remit of the organisation concerned. As a result, information about persons, things or phenomena is not necessarily absolute (complete and objective), but is delimited to the competences and activities of the creator.
4. *Intrinsic value of records.* The intrinsic value of records refers to the meaning that people attribute to a record as an object/artefact or symbol and, as a result, keeping them as originals is the only acceptable form of preservation (as far as possible).
5. *Contextual value.* Contextual value is the long-term importance that certain records can acquire only when specific conditions are met. Examples: rarity of records in a certain timeframe, technical characteristics, relation with other records.
6. *Assessment of the preservation effort.* Preserving some records may involve a disproportionate effort compared to the testimonial/informational value of the records and the possibility of exploitation. It should be explored areas like access and use limitations, preservation/conservation/restauration costs

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