Management and Participation in the Public Sphere

Mika Markus Merviö
Kibi International University, Japan
ABSTRACT

In the multi-millennial history of archives four successive paradigms can be distinguished. In the archival systems that can be designated respectively as entitlement-attestation, national, public, and global ones, their primary or new objectives, key institutions, specialists and target audience as well as applied information technologies and characteristic problems show significant differences. Alongside enduring elements of continuity new key features, functions and impacts appear, which together fundamentally change the actual role and ideology of archives. With an information-centered approach, this study attempts to include the most important characteristics of these respective archival paradigms in one coherent system, with a brief overview of the challenges the archives of the future may face.

INTRODUCTION

Archives, besides libraries and museums, represent one of the three prominent types of institution dedicated to the preservation of the past. Obviously, other important techniques and genres of ensuring the survival of the past also exist, but what these three types of organizations have in common is that they have evolved into institutions (and in the era of their modern development, typically into public institutions), creating in the process their characteristic functions, branches of science, professions and even specific languages. In most parts of the civilized world, these three institutions have happily coexisted side by side, each taking its place in the public conscience and carrying out its specific tasks in the accumulation of information, knowledge and scholarship: in general, in the preservation of important segments of our cultural heritage.

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According to the superficial distinction of the lay (and, precisely for this reason, valuable) public, museums collect objects, libraries hold books, and archives store documents. Nevertheless, this distinction fails to work in a variety of cases. The fragments of Mesopotamian clay tablets or the Rosette Stone are held in museums, rather than in archives or libraries; and several libraries have extensive collections of manuscripts. On the same token, archives often complement their holdings with publications or even physical objects, while some of the museums hold hand-written letters or manorial inventories. To top it all, documents also have valuable physical features (material, texture, technique and aesthetic value of their production), just as objects have documentary value (their manufacture and use are proof that certain events did take place and certain practices did exist), irrespective of the type of institution that stores them. As for the more recent developments, the new information and communication technologies (most notably digitization and Internet access) go way beyond the already existing phenomena of convergence and tend to confuse the picture even further by concealing from the Internet user the institutions and functions behind the objects to be digitized.

Still, today’s lay public usually have some notion of when and why to visit a library, an archive or a museum. While touring some cultural attractions, they might even discover that the previous owners also had no problem separating the three functions: in Forchenstein (Fraknó) Castle under the Esterházy, for example, the three functions coexisted side by side (and two of them can still be studied in the original milieu and context, thanks to the good fortunes of history): the museum, which combined the functions of a treasury, an art collection and a natural science museum, served to demonstrate the family’s wealth, discerning taste and network of connections, while also presenting interesting and exotic pieces of information; the library was meant to accumulate knowledge handed down through history in printed form (its later removal from its original setting and its transportation to the family’s subsequent place of residence was decided only for reasons of convenience); and its archives served the purpose of keeping track, as well as providing evidence, of the changes in the proprietary rights and economic circumstances of the estate.

In this regard, it is perhaps the archives that are the worst off: their function is the least understood by the public in most countries. But as soon as the need arises to use them, a layperson, even without being able to express it in expert terms, will easily understand the main difference between the holdings of an archive and the collections of the more familiar environment of a library: archives hold primary sources (i.e. documents that exist either in the original only or in no more than a few copies – such as documents about the visitor’s own property), while libraries keep secondary sources (typically copies of works based on primary sources – such as a monograph about the visitor’s hometown, for example). And anyone who has already searched the catalogue of both a library and an archive will confirm that in a library every single book is treated as a separate entity (regardless of the existence of serial publications and shared elements of classification), while the same is far from being true in the case of documents held in an archive: certain background knowledge and some familiarity with the context is necessary, as we need to know who produced or used the document, in what context, in what organization and in the course of what activity. Without this context the individual document cannot be interpreted, even though that context might exist in the mind of the researcher or even in the public conscience.

Of course, nothing can stop a person from using a document outside its original context, or even from placing it deliberately in a different context, whether as a mere illustration, or as part of an intellectual montage. In other words, one could use any document in a different way, for purposes fundamentally different from the originally intended one. To cap that, “using differently, for a different purpose” – irritating as it may be to the value system of the expert professionals and their communities – is not
something that is fundamentally new to the nature of the institutions of memory-preservation. What all these three institutions have in common is that none of the materials they respectively store were originally conceived for the purpose that the visitors of these three institutions use them, or will be using them in the future. This is especially true in the case of the archives, which have basically been set up for storing documents related to everyday life, rather than for keeping intellectual products originally intended either for the preservation of the nation’s past, or for the dispensation of knowledge. Not even the paintings were originally meant for being displayed in museums, not to mention the tools, cloths and other exhibits. As for the books, they were intended for the bookshops and the bookshelves, or perhaps for the Internet, not only for the libraries – although the publishers are today under obligation to send a copy of each of their publications to the national library. Another characteristic that the objects and documents held in these three institutions have in common is that they allow the audience, lay and professional alike, to draw conclusions that are very different from those that people drew from them during their primary existence. In fact, the amount of information and the multitude of contexts, which can be combined to give new information and new contexts, can be expanded almost without a limit. A further shared characteristic is that their existence – together with their secondary use, which is more or less disconnected to the original purpose and can be expanded almost without limit – serves as one of the important guarantees for the survival of various communities, large and small, as well as of human culture as a whole. It is also the source of their vulnerability: history has repeatedly shown that dictators and conquerors have a predilection for burning or demolishing institutions established for the service of memory preservation (but only after stealing the most precious items so that they can remove them from their original context and reuse them as proofs of their own wealth, power and ability to conquer others). Interestingly, the other group of people that has problem with the preservation of memories is formed by the revolutionaries. In Charles Kecskemeti’s words

_Burning documents in the name of progress was a matter of routine during insurrections and revolutions, while the burning of books was a favorite tool of dictatorships to hinder progress. Posterity undoubtedly stands to lose more from the burning of documents. Because of their uniqueness, the burning of every document causes irretrievable loss._ (Kecskemeti, 2005, p. 27)

**ATTEMPTS AT RENEWAL AND RE-INTERPRETATION**

Some of the most momentous developments witnessed over the past quarter-of-a-century – the rapid spread of new communication technologies, the emergence of the “information society”, the shifts in institutional boundaries and functions, and the effects of globalization – have posed serious challenges in the world of archiving, too, urging theoretical and practicing archivists to re-interpret the existing roles and functions (actually, the same also applies to libraries and, to a lesser degree, museums). On top of that, the meaning, and also the applicability, of certain principles and notions, which right until recently were generally accepted and taken as self-evident, have become questionable, and most notably so in connection with electronic or digitized documents: original and copy, document and record, provenance and context, are notions that no longer fit into the same conceptual box as self-evidently as before.

There have been numerous signs that the members of the archival community in the more advanced countries of the world have warmed up to the idea of reforms. The guiding principles and rules of the profession are changing, or at least expanding, and even if the practical aspects have not changed
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noticeably, the way of thinking and the attitude of archivists have been showing the signs of a general fermentation. Also on the move is archivistics: a discipline that attained the status of an independent branch of scholarship in the second half of the nineteenth century but started its spectacular career only in the last decades. As early as the 1990s, the era marked by the patronizing attitude of “much ado about shelving”³ was replaced by the period of scholarly conferences⁴ addressing the fundamental problems of archivistics, and while the literature on libraries itself could fill a library and the same on archives would only occupy a few shelves, those few shelves have acquired a number of valuable volumes. Although the comprehensive monographs have not yet come out, the conceptual diversification, along with the ascendancy of information-biased approaches, has undoubtedly enriched and fertilized the special literature on archives.

More that fifteen years ago, Hans Hofman identified fundamental shifts within the archival paradigm in four areas (Hofman, 1998, p. 24):

1. The re-active approach has given way to one that is more pro-active – see the concept of document life cycle management;
2. In the intellectual paradigm of archival theory, the emphasis has shifted from the document remnants of organizations to the original purposes and context of document production;
3. The organizational monopoly of archives is a thing of the past – the documents can be archived at the originating organizations or even in a distributed system;
4. In the area of the memory to be preserved the organizational structure has been replaced by the functional context – in other words, the business transactions.

In one of his writings analyzing the development of archival theory in the past century, Terry Cook saw new developments in five major areas (Cook, 1997, pp. 21-23):

1. In the raison d’être for the archives (moving away from the juridical-administrative viewpoint of public institutions financed by taxpayers and dominated by historians, towards the idea of socially legitimized archives offering services to the general public in the areas of identity, locality, history, culture and personal and communal memory);
2. In guaranteeing the provenance and authenticity of the documents (from the problems of handling paper-based documents towards the problems of processing electronic documents);
3. In the area of archival theory (from descriptive archivistics towards functional archivistics);
4. In the archival profession (from the role of impartial custodian of inherited records to that of an agent actively involved in the processes of originating and handling documents);
5. In the social embedding of archivistics (from a sterile science towards cross-fertilizing debates in social theories).

Charles Kecskemeti (Karoly Kecskemeti), one of the defining figures of archivistics and a leading contributor to the international public discourse on archives for many decades, recently wrote about the emergence of a new archival paradigm,⁵ the origin of which he traced back to the 1950s, affecting almost every essential elements of the theory and practice of archiving. By contrast, while constructing the theoretical framework of the long-term archiving of electronic documents, other authors have tried to prove the very permanence of the paradigm by demonstrating the adaptability of both the profession’s guiding principles and its basic rules to the new digital environment (see Gilliland-Swetland, 2000). After
The Australians had revived the principle of provenance, Canadian theoreticians proceeded to extending it, both to the preservation of the physical environment in a manner that verged on the archaeological, and to the principle of territoriality, which recommends the continual storage of the documents where they were originated, in preference to their transfer to an archive.

Meanwhile, the postmodern theories of recollection, of both the reflexive and the self-reflexive kind, are thriving on the organic matter of the primary and secondary intellectual material accumulated over the past, both decomposing and reinterpreting it, and even competing against one other on the volatile market of attention. All these together make a favorable soil, and also a fortuitous moment, for an analysis of what these intellectual products usually tend to overlook: *i.e. whether the past to be decomposed and reinterpreted can truly be regarded as homogeneous.* However, regardless of the seductive power that the idea for such a discourse may hold, with its sophisticated and intellectual conceptual apparatus and with its meandering, Baroque line of thoughts, it seems prudent that for this analysis we should first try to find those fundamental criteria and key factors, the constellations of which may, according to our current approach, lead to the emergence of new qualities – in our hypotheses, new archival paradigms – in the history of archives. And since one of the originating factors in the search for new approaches is the spread of new information technology, it would seem natural if we dedicated appropriate attention to the viewpoints of information management.

### PRIMARY PURPOSES, NEW FUNCTIONS

From the earliest Mesopotamian clay tablets to the archives of ancient and mediaeval times, the two main ideas behind preserving documents were the administration of current affairs on the one hand (for example, the production and distribution of the goods, the collection of taxes), and the attestation of entitlements and the safekeeping of official deeds on the other. At a superficial glance, it may appear that the archives have not changed with regard to these functions: every office of records, traditional or electronic, still continues to store the documents of current affairs, before handing them over to the archives for secondary utilization. It is the same with the attestation of entitlements: in the course of the legal compensations that followed en masse after the democratic transition, the former proprietors of confiscated property, or their descendents, stormed the archives of the new European democracies in order to obtain documentary evidence for their legal claims.

However, the attestation of entitlements and the preservation of official deeds no longer constitute the core function of the classical portfolio of archives: these are but one element in a host of other functions. In the first great period of archival history, the attestation of entitlements played a crucial role: the documents certifying family descent and titles, along with the contracts, title deeds, decrees and letters of donations and privileges legitimizing people’s control over towns, countries and empires, as well as the various proofs of either ownership or lease of landed property, constituted the fundamental guarantees of the preservation of the existing order. And while the violent modification of this order through uprisings, wars, conquests and assassinations was all too familiar down through history both at the macro and the micro level, the power of the written word still proved strong, and continued to grow stronger alongside the myths invoked in support of these rights. In fact, so strong was the power of the written word that it endured even through the most turbulent times, such as wars, the deposition of kings and violent land seizures – periods of various duration, when the realization of the rights recorded in the documents proved impossible. Even the Jacobins of the French Revolution came to the conclusion that
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beheading the privileged elite of the Ancien Régime would not be enough for effecting a definite break with the past: the documents legitimizing the privileges would also have to be destroyed. Passed in the first year of the Revolutionary Calendar, the same law that abolished all feudal privileges also ordered the burning of all the documents recording these privileges. This decision then led to a wide-scale destruction of documents that lasted for years and resulted in the loss of an enormous volume of documents.

Nevertheless, the French Revolution broke new grounds not only in the burning of old documents, but also in the formulation of new archival politics. To this effect, it institutionalized an idea born in the 18th century, whereby the nurturing and preservation of the national memory was the duty of the state, while the instruments of achieving this were the national archives and the network of local archives placed under central direction. The preservation of national memory and the representation of the state’s inalienable claim to public documents thus became the decisive archival functions of the new era. In addition, however, the French also enacted an important legal principle, that of public transparency, and while it is fair to say that their primary motive was to demonstrate the government’s breaking with the previous regime, rather than to support historical research, it nevertheless also revealed the emergence of a new demand, that of accountability and transparency in public affairs.7

The liberal transformation of archival principles took roughly one hundred years to complete in Europe. By the end of this period, the archival practices had gone from the stage of declarations to the establishment of an infrastructure placed in the service of researchers; parallel with this – and with the active participation of historians – the system of archival principles and the system of professional regulations had both been firmly established, as codified by the famous Dutch Manual in 1898 (Muller, Feith & Fruin, 1920), which became generally accepted in the first half of the 20th century.

The next major change in the declared objectives of archives became noticeable in the period following the Second World War, primarily in the United States, which was left out of the main stream of the 19th-century archival revolution. The emergence of American national identity, which was the product of a quasi-secondary national development, in conjunction with the realization and development of democratic legal principles as codified by the Founding Fathers, and the rapid expansion of the modern state’s institutional framework and public administration, formed favorable grounds for the post-war development of American archives, which was accompanied by the growing prestige of the conscientious and influential archivists. The liberalization campaign launched by the American archivists in the interest of easier access to the archives came to exert a profound influence on the European concept, which in the decades following the Second World War finally grasped the significance of the idea that a public office of records should serve not only the state, the qualified and privileged academic researchers, historians and the “official elite” of the national memory, but also the public at large, and in principle it should do so by offering to the public the same range of services that it had previously offered to a select group of researchers.

Beginning with the 1950s and 1960s, the Western European countries one after the other produced laws specifically dealing with archives. These laws codified the handling of public documents and the tasks and the institutional system of archives on the one hand, while enacting regulations on the use of archive material in a manner that was more democratic than the earlier ones on the other. In the archival regimes of liberal spirit, the legal distinction between researchers and lay users were effectively abolished. From the status of a conferred privilege, getting access to documents, together with the ability to read and copy them – in other words, the opportunity to discover one’s personal, family, institutional and national memories – became a right.8
The last, still ongoing major change, which originally compelled archivists to reinterpret the principles and rules of their profession and, at the same time, enriched the archives’ purposes and viewpoints of assessing the justification for their existence with new, essential elements, was sparked off by the spread of the new technologies. And although the demand to archive electronic documents already emerged in the last decades of the 20th century (first as an exotic novelty heralding new theoretical problems, and then – with the spread of the idea of paperless office – as a source for massive archival problems, both short-range and long-range), it was not until the turn of the millennium that the capacity for processing, storing, and transferring information (a technology by then sufficiently advanced to safely meet the massive demand for handling data and documents regardless of location) actually reached the level of development, where it was able to present the archivists with a new vision, as well as with other phenomena of cultural and economic globalization.

This new vision was making the archives universal – first, with respect to the format, medium, genre and content of the documents stored or to be stored, second, regarding the place and responsibility of storage, and third, with respect to the accessibility of the archived documents. The latter meant that the archived documents (or more generally, data) must be continually accessible on the Internet or its future successors in such a way that anybody can access and use them, anywhere and at any time. All those ambitious projects concerning either the digitization of traditional documents and other intellectual products (books, works of art, etc.) or the archiving of the growing volume of documents already produced in a digital format – projects envisioned on a scale that often seemed startling – in the long run were all aimed at the idea of making digital information globally accessible.

In summary, therefore, if we were to designate the main chapters of archival history outlined above, according to their respective, most important or new, archival function, mission or vision – on the basis of which the archival paradigms, at this point existing as working hypotheses, could be built –, the first chapter would be named the period of entitlement-attestation archives, the second would be called the period of national archives, the third the period of public archives and the forth, that of global archives.

THE KEY ARCHIVAL INSTITUTION AND ITS OWNERSHIP

In order to verify the specificity of the archival paradigm associated with each of the above-mentioned periods, i.e. to see if they essentially differed from both their predecessors and their successors, we must study further aspects of the problem, along with their interconnections and joint impact. Besides the functional changes, we must first consider the various stages of the institutional development: What organizations played a key role in the history of archiving; in whose – real or symbolic – ownership they were; and also, who their users were and under what conditions they were able to use the holdings of the archives.

The earliest archives were presumably established for the purpose of carrying out the current administrative tasks associated with the production and distribution of goods in Mesopotamia, as well as in the lands that now form the territories of Turkey, Syria and Iran. In current terminology, they would probably qualify as records offices, rather than archives. With the passing of time, however, the status of documents changed, first into that of semi-current documents, and then of non-current ones; to the areas of production and distribution, the branch of treasury management was added, the chronological dimension of which served the economic interests of retrievability and reusability alike (and also, the interests of information and knowledge management), as well as the measurability and demonstrability
of power and wealth. Then, in step with the growing complexity that characterized the diplomatic and commercial relations externally, and the public administration and the increasingly interrelated and interacting economic and political entities internally, the archives had to meet the demand in storing and managing documents that registered and proved these increasingly complex relations. According to the archaeological finds of unburned and burned clay, or papyrus paper in the case of Egypt, the archives continued to fulfill these functions throughout the ancient history of the Orient and the Mediterranean.

The owners of the ancient archives were the emperors and, after the emergence of independent economic units and power centers, the local rulers. Throughout ancient history, administrative systems governed centrally but based on common property alternated with royal rule concentrating all power and all the properties; the independent city-states with the empires founded either on conquests or on the alliance of cities; systems of state governments based on religious power with regimes based on the separation of state and religion – and the management of the early archives had to fall in line with all these changes.

Private ownership was established very early on, and the management of private properties required the maintenance of registries, while the legality of property transfer necessitated the preservation of deeds. And while the various forms of public ownership survived (mainly for the benefit of the master nations and the free individuals making up their social elites), public affairs as we know it today – the res publica – only existed for a relatively brief period in antique democracies, and it only affected a small fraction of the population and a limited geographical area. It was in these republics of lively public involvement that the community-owned public archives and their system of symbols appeared, on which the regime based its fundamental legitimacy and legality. The word origin is derived from the Greek word archeion, while the more practical expressions tabularium, conservatorium and scrinium, along with similar designations, referred to the function of preservation and the medium of this preservation, the written word.

Nevertheless, in most part of the ancient world – to use a modern terminology – the private archive was the prevailing institutional form of archiving, not only with respect to the form of ownership but also regarding its management and use. This trend continued in Europe in the mediaeval period of reviving demand for written evidence for privileges and entitlements, after the turbulent centuries of the disintegration of the Roman Empire and the formations and falls of various empires during the Migration Period, and even in the age of early modern archives.

The mission and the role that states came to play in the preservation of documents (and also, of the national memory) emerged from the deliberations of the philosophical, political and archival movements of the 18th century. In conjunction with the need to meet the growing demands posed by public administration, the efforts to concentrate documents and to centralize the archives intensified, in many cases even at the cost of ignoring the logic of the original Fonds and setting up cataloging systems that were artificial regarding content and form. The birth of the French Revolution’s archival politics was the crucial and symbolic moment in this area, too: the Revolution referred the issue of archives to the authority of the legislature, establishing the public archives (the National Archive and a network of county archives), whose tasks would be the preservation of documents belonging to the Republic.

The 19th-century history of archival developments – in our proposed terminology, the national archives paradigm – showed two different tendencies: the British track was the establishment of the central Public Record Office for the preservation of public documents (ignoring private and regional archives), while the French track was characterized by departmental archives established and independently managed by the ministries of strong influence – the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Colonial affairs. (At the same time, France also developed a uniformly designed national network of archives, which also paid attention to private archives.)
However, the declaration of the archives’ nation-state responsibility did not automatically guarantee equal service to each member of the nation. Although the modern republics derived their legitimacy and powers from the people, as required by the principle of popular sovereignty, in practice they established systems of institutions and procedures, which were not even remotely connected to the idea of the people’s direct ownership and access; in fact, individual access was often limited, or even denied, precisely in the name, or under the pretext, of “public interest”. Although the communalization of the archives (on the analogy of the communalization of the land) was not proposed in the course of the “liberal revolution of the archives”, the symbolic transfer of the archives’ ownership from state to “public” was expressed more as a demand or a goal, which came to be realized only in the public archives paradigm.

In this new paradigm, parallel with the existence of the archives owned by the “public”, some of the archives that remained privately owned (i.e. company, family, foundation, and church archives) also became – formally or in practice – public, operating according to the same kinds of principles and research policies that applied to the public archives. Several archival laws still in effect contain provisions on the regulation of private archives in the public interest, partly to protect the cultural heritage – by limiting the commercial dealing of documents of permanent historical value, for example – and partly to act in the interest of public transparency, thus introducing the institution of “privately owned archives open to the public”, in other words, by encouraging private archives to follow the public archives’ code of practice in their own policies.12

Therefore, while the typical archival institution throughout the period of national archives is the public archive, the corresponding institution in the period of public archives is the “public-access archive”: the combination of public archives and privately owned archives open to the public. For the customers, these “public-access archives” constitute the interface, through which the archived documents become accessible.

As for the global archives of the most recent era, the key institution that guarantees access is no longer the archive: it is replaced by the information/communication service provider. The pool of such service providers is very large, and the services they offer are very broad, ranging from the technological aspects of network access, through the use of storage space and software applications, right down to the provision of content and information brokering, with various measures of added value. In the case of today’s lay users of the Internet – unless they start out surfing the Internet from an institutional homepage – the search engine and the Web surface conceal from them both the source of the documents that are available on the Internet and the identity of the institution holding them or providing access to them, while the operation of the service providers is for the most part transparent (i.e. not perceptible) from the start. As for the intelligent agents that help the users resolve the issue of context – these are among the most controversial and, regarding their impact on the individual user, potentially most dangerous components of the cyber world13 – these identify and present the filtered and interpreted representation of reality as the existing reality itself.

**THE USERS OF THE ARCHIVES**

The potential circle of users – the target audience of archives – was formed in mutual interaction with the above-mentioned institutional and jurisdictional changes. In the first major period the sovereign, the landowners, and/or the religious leaders, along with their literate servants, stewards and officials, were the users of the archives. With the establishment of national archives, or public archives in general, and
also in conjunction with the state’s assumption of the task of memory preservation, a two-fold circle of archival users formed, which constituted a significant departure from the previous practice: the new public archives served the state on the one hand and catered to the researchers (historians) on the other. There were no principal difficulties as far as services to state agencies were concerned: however, non-governmental researchers were often faced with delays or limited access, partly because of the arbitrarily imposed restrictions or even bans, and partly for the lack of appropriate procedures, professional customs, as well as the shortages of various lists and tools in the aid of archival research. Right until the last couple of decades in the 19th century, the institution preferred by those doing historical research was not the archive but the library. Similarly, for historians accustomed to the freedom of research (and also, to the ready access to historical studies of often dubious reliability), the positivist approach with its appreciation of archival material as primary source documents was both a novelty and a challenge, while the slow and restrictive archival practice came as a bitter disappointment.

After the Second World War, the appearance of a large new population of archival users and the diversification of the traditional type of researchers came to characterize the clientele of the (genuinely, rather than just nominally) public archives. One of the new groups was formed by those personally involved private individuals, who were already independent and informed enough on the one hand, and who had the necessary legal acumen to feel confident enough to obtain the relevant archival documents and manage their current affairs by themselves, rather than through their lawyers. Another group was made up by the amateur genealogists: some of its representatives wished to discover the history of their own family, while others wanted, either out of curiosity or on behalf of their commissioners, to find the documents of families other than their own. These people occasionally demonstrated considerable expertise in handling the documentary sources. Yet another group was formed by the “amateur” archival users, who either wished to study the documents of their personal past and their family’s past, as compiled by the successive political regimes of the former dictatorships (including materials such as their employers’ ratings of their work, which greatly influenced their personal career, or the reports that secret police had compiled on them), or tried to discover and publish the inner workings of the past regime, out of a sense of civic duty. Members of the former group wished to exercise their rights of informational self-determination\(^{14}\) (an individual right) in retrospect, while members of the latter group wanted to promote the idea of information restitution\(^{15}\) (a quasi-collective right).

The diversification of the circle of researchers also produced some spectacular changes in the composition of archival users. On the one hand, the fields of scholarship diversified, and on the other, the representatives of such academic fields, who previously had had no need to use archival documents, suddenly decided to visit the archives. In addition to the traditional historians, there appeared the researchers of music history, art history, literary and legal history, geography, linguistics, economy and political science, sociology and many other disciplines, whose study concerned not just the “historical” documents of the remote past, but also the documentary evidence of recent and semi-recent history. Members of this group included the – mostly retired – researchers of the welfare states, people who carry out their research of local history or company history with great determination and occasionally at a considerably high standard, even though they have no relevant academic degree or previous professional experience. A separate category is formed by the “experts” who are not “researchers” in the strict sense of the word (meaning they do not conduct academic research), but they search for answers to their specific questions concerning their own work and professional field in the archives: for example, diplomats, functionaries, journalists, architects, exhibition curators, etc.
The new groups of visitors showed up both in public and “public-access” archives. However, once they have registered as public-access archives, private archives are no longer in the position to pick and choose from the researchers: they cannot discriminate, positively or negatively. Having said that, it is not the lay public in general that makes up a large percent of the clientele of the archives, but certain specific groups within them or rather – in a symbolic sense – their representatives. In Charles Kecskemeti’s words, democracy in libraries is direct, while democracy in the archives is essentially indirect. While a researcher working in a library may be in need of help from the reference librarians behind the desk, and while an archival researcher, lay or expert, may find what he or she is after without any help, making a distinction here reveals an important difference: with respect to the public transparency of archived materials, the research activity is of an intermediary character, implying that the guaranteeing of access is in the interest of not only the academic elite, but, through the publications, also of the “secondary users”: the general public.

In the archival paradigm of global/universal access, the role of the intermediaries seemingly disappears and, similarly to so many Internet-based services, the process of disintermediation gains in importance in the case of online archives, too. (Disintermediation is, of course, merely apparent: while the archivists may have disappeared from the picture, along with the source publishers or disseminators, a host of Internet mediators popped up instead.)

The appearance of lay Internet users as potential archival visitors has created a new situation, in the sense that context-independent or “atomic” access to, and re-use of, knowledge has now become possible on a large scale. It would not be the first time, if somebody stumbled upon a book or a document in an open-shelf library or archive by chance and deduced far-reaching conclusions, or even academic discoveries, without knowledge of the actual context. If the context had already been in the head of the reader, or if another context had been there and the “atomic” discovery actuated it, creating new values in the process, then such a development could not be faulted. Short of that, however, the actual usefulness of such research would become rather dubious. By contrast, context-independent learning is now complemented by a large number of arbitrary elements (one particular aspect of this phenomenon is experienced by lecturers, who are obligated to read essays en masse produced by the method of Internet copy/paste).16 This is accompanied by the superficiality of today’s mass-scale Internet use (anything that fails to download in three second will be aborted; we rarely get to the second page of Google hits, and practically never bother checking the tenth one, regardless of the actual criterion, which determines the ordering of the hits) and this phenomenon is gradually losing any value content: this way of processing information is becoming the standard mode of operation of our biological and intellectual survival machines in the present environment of the “information society”.

We can illustrate the importance of context precisely through the range of validity that context-deconstructing theories have. In post-modernist intellectual circles there exists a fashionable view, whereby anyone could become an artist, scientist, historian or archivist: one does not have to earn a degree, or to become a qualified member of an institution, or to master specific knowledge at a required level. With some oversimplification, our free choice of identity – or even multiple identities – gives us the freedom to become anybody or anything; in any case, the labeling of categories is nothing more than an empty convention: we are free to give any name to anything. These thoughts constitute an important and organic chapter in the history of ideas (similarly to the archival ideas from a century ago) and form fully justifiable elements of the individual and group level intellectual arsenal. Such views, however, will only “hold water” within a specific knowledge community and value system: without their own context they will appear nothing more than the esoteric humbug of the intellectual elite. And while it is precisely the
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demolition of earlier contexts (in new democracies complemented with the demand to erode the fossilized structures of the past regime) that such theories aspire to, in order to establish their own range of validity (and also to ensure the survival of the “genes of their own logic”), they nevertheless need to rely on the familiarity and compliance with the context, with the rules of the game (such as language, semantics/thesaurus, metaphors, rites, value systems, etc.). In other words, context-demolishing has its own context, denial of rules has its own rules.

Nevertheless, the theories of archival reform, which had an entropic effect in decomposing both the earlier state of orderliness and the possibility of context-independent global access (or at least the illusion of it), could conceal neither the demand for quality nor the need for knowledge communities. No one is a born expert in everything at all times, which implies that anyone who believes that the experience of non-contextual Internet use, despite its joyful and positive effects, can deliver intellectual products of the same value and applicability as the far-from-ideal “indirect democracy” of archival institutions, is deluding himself or herself.

Concepts and ideas, which predict that “folksonomy” will replace taxonomy, and tagging by the users will replace processing by the archivists, are the misleading fantasies of those archives, which are fighting a losing battle against the ever growing task of archiving, processing and making available of documents in electronic format. Both folksonomy and user-initiated tagging explore important new contextual aspects, connections and interdependencies in the (secondary) use of archival documents, thus they represent an important collective dimension in research – completing but not replacing traditional archival processing. Uploading, tagging and commenting documents of interest are no substitutes for creating a Fonds structure, just as “googling” is no substitute for conducting serious (online or offline) research.

From the above, we may draw the conclusion that from the viewpoint of the archives’ social impact, the statistics relating to the visitors of the archival reading rooms are hardly relevant; far more telling evidence can be derived from the number and accessibility of the researchers’ publications, as well as from the number of their actual readers. Similarly misleading may be the statistical figures relating to the number of visitors of Internet sites.

All these together also mean that while it was already difficult enough to measure the direct social impact of archives within the framework of the public archives’ paradigm, when it comes to the paradigm of global archives, the phenomenon becomes even more difficult and more controversial.

THE HISTORY OF ACCESSIBILITY

The issue of accessibility regarding information and knowledge stored in objects and, more importantly, in written documents, deserve special attention: the issue on the one hand concerns the extent to which accessibility forms part of the primary use of the objects, books and documents held in the memory-preservation institutions and, on the other hand, it concerns who, under which conditions, for what purposes, can have access to the collections held in libraries, museums and archives during the secondary use.

To various degrees, the question of limited or unlimited public access – i.e. public access for a definite or indefinite audience – already appeared among the original purposes. For example, in principle at least, the printed books have always been meant for the public, even in cases when they were accessible only to a limited public (the initiated, the literati, those in power or those deemed ideologically trustworthy). The works of art, which constitute an important category within the museums’ holdings, were often
meant for the general public – these include the public sculpture and paintings, although here, too, the “public” was sometimes also limited to the family of the commissioner or the art collector. At the same time, there were works of art, such as individually commissioned miniature portraits kept as talismans, erotic art or esoteric, ritual objects meaningful only to the initiated, which, thanks to their original function and themes, were accessibly only to a closed circle of people. Naturally, these personal objects, which also ended up in museums, were used in their original function only by one particular person and his or her immediate relatives and friends. Similarly, when it came to the mass-produced domestic objects or the individually manufactured yet, in terms of functionality and production technology, standardized peasant tools, such as scythes, hand-rakes or saddlery, these – along with the related information – were intimately knowable as individual items only to their owners or users, which was in contrast with the superficial knowledge the public at large had about their general purpose.

The rather broad scale of documents with archival potentials ranges from the privately used mnemonic tools, such as the shepherd’s staff inscribed with symbols to help him with his administrative tasks, through the documentation of various production units, right down to the public documents created in the process of running an entire state: at a later stage of their history, all these items could be transferred to archives, libraries, or museums. And as for the most recent era, in view of the public function of their originators or users, some of these documents may, still during the life cycle of their original (non-archival) use, be assigned to the category of public documents, as it was the case in Sweden, where this practice was codified into law and became one of the pillars of the Swedish constitutional system. In this way, the fact that these documents became accessible to the public did not derive from their transferal to an archive (in practice, the opposite: documents can temporarily become inaccessible precisely because of their transferal to an archive).

The history of the accessibility of archival documents already forms part of the next stage of their life cycle: the period of secondary use – regardless of whether this secondary use is in harmony with their primary function (e.g. legal evidence of propriety rights and entitlements), or not (e.g. linguistic research). For centuries, or millennia even, the archives acted as safe deposits for secrets, information monopolies and the information replica of other monopolies: their use was reserved for the privileged (the beneficiaries of information monopolies or other powers). Under certain conditions, the privileged may have shared – out of interest, under duress, or as a reward, but in any case always subject to limitations – some of their privileges with the outsiders, but they always made sure that their information monopoly survived. Actually, in a symbolic sense this information monopoly has survived even in the case of the public archives of those – otherwise open and democratic – countries, where researchers are formally required to ask permission. As a reminder of the fact that their task was to provide effective and exclusive service either to the proprietor or to the sovereign ruler and his or her administration, numerous archives preserved in their names the adjective “secret”: from the imperial and royal secret archives of the Viennese Court, through the Scritture secrete of Venice, to the Prussian Geheimes Staatsarchiv. It was in connection with the latter that, as late as the mid-19th century, a secret archivist wrote a secret book, the inaccessibility of which was bitterly lamented by Elek Jakab in his inaugural speech at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1877, p. 26). And although Leo XIII opened the Vatican’s archives to a small group of lay researchers at the end of the 19th century, to this day the institution goes by the name of Archivio Segreto Vaticano.

The element of secrecy partially continues to this day, even in the case of public documents, regardless of the fact that, according to the legal principles of modern democratic states, the basic requirement of sharing of information power would have to be extended to offering public access to documents of
public concern, past and present, and this in turn would require that, with the exception of a small class of thoroughly justified cases, public access should be guaranteed to the documents held in archives. However, the continued existence of secret materials held in archives mostly results from political decisions or lobbying.21

Except for the Swedish law of 1766, which laid the foundations of what is today known as the legal institution of the “freedom of information” – and for this reason, it mainly applied to current documents –, the earliest legislative act making the deposition of every public document in the National Archives mandatory, and at the same time giving every one of its citizens the right to demand a copy of any document deposited in the Archive, was passed by the French National Convention in the second year of the Revolutionary Calendar (1794). Nevertheless, it took another forty-eight years before the Reading Hall of the National Archives actually opened its doors to the public, while the road from the birth of the liberal research regulations through the provision of openly accessible finding aids, to Internet access has been (and continues to be) very long, indeed. When the Council of Europe found it necessary to publish its Recommendation at the turn of the 21st century, it was in fact an indirect admission of the incompleteness and faltering pace of the process.22

THE DOMINANT INFORMATION TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGIES

In the era of the first great archival paradigm, writing was the dominant technique of information management – and also of the establishment of the archives. The demand to make marks, which led to the emergence of the earliest systems of writing, probably arose from the expansion and growing complexity of the activities related to the production, accumulation and distribution of goods. Recorded, structured and retrievable information was stored with the help of various systems of marking, which gradually acquired a more and more standardized form, as well as a more and more general-purpose character. Originally invented to keep track of the variety and quantity of material goods, these systems of markings eventually became suitable for recording and preserving abstract notions and relations, such as individual rights, in a way that also reflected the syntax and semantics of various languages.

The recorded units of information or data blocks to be handled together with regard to content and purpose, eventually became structured: in today’s usage, they were organized into documents. The separation of documents into individual units was aided by the structuralization of the data carriers (tablets, scrolls, etc.). With the development of the document preservation function of the archives, the documents had to be organized for easier handling; in today’s words, they had to be arranged into series and document folders according to the documents’ originator, type or date of origin. Archival historians have recorded, for example, that chronological lists arranged by type were compiled in England as early as the beginning of the 13th century; in the 16th century the deeds and diplomas were stored in sacks and strongboxes color-coded according to country of origin in the Vatican’s secret archive in Castel Sant’Angelo (by the time the hundreds of deeds and diplomas were shipped to Paris in 1810 on Napoleon’s orders, they had been re-sorted into chronologically arranged boxes); and under the reign of Maria Therese, the compilation of repertories by chronology, as well as by “item and materials”, was standard procedure in the Imperial Secret Archives of Vienna (Jakab, 1877, pp. 2-13, 16, 34).

In the case of such broad-scale periodizations of information history, where the first “revolutionary change” is linked to the emergence of literacy, the second stage is usually tied to the invention and spread of printed books. With regard to the archives, however, the invention of printed books (i.e. the
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standardized mass-production of materialized information goods) failed to become a decisive factor of information technology, for the simple reason that archives store primary sources, in which case originality, or at least individuality, is a necessary requirement – in other words, they must be unique, or if not, there should not be more than a few copies of them. If we were to single out the formulation of modern archival politics, as spectacularly announced by the French Revolution (regardless of the fact that its components had already appeared decades earlier), then the systematic use of meta-data or meta-information, as well as the public access to these meta-information, would constitute the definitive novelty of the related developments in information technology.

The question of meta-information came to acquire crucial importance for two reasons. First, the extensive merging of archives, along with the accompanying concentration of documents, required the creation of new, artificial systems of registry and classification. One well-known example of this was the concept of centralized classification, formulated by the French National Archive after the large-scale burning and discarding of documents, which brought along the artificial creation of series formulated according to criteria of both content and form. A few decades later, the archival concept based on the principle of provenance was born, mainly as a critical reaction to this earlier concept. Secondly, as a consequence to the Enlightenment (and at the same time, against the history concept of the Enlightenment’s philosophers), the positivist historiographers whose new approach helped to discover the value of primary sources, were eager to study all about these sources – including information about their existence, whereabouts and nature. This eagerness provided a new impetus to source publication, which had been around since the end of the 15th century. It also energized 16th and 17th-century source criticism and, in addition to boosting the publication of narrative sources on historical events, it also encouraged the publication of document lists, monographs and source catalogues, irrespective of the place and institution of document storage. However, both the catalogues, which are compiled to help archival users find their way within the institution and locate the documents, as well as the source publications, which are meant to provide general orientation for researchers, target only a limited circle of users: the educated public, who are aware of the context that is necessary for the interpretation of the documents.

Increasing archival openness after the Second World War, together with the widening of the circle of researchers, the opening up of specialized archives to researchers and the American archivists’ liberalization campaign to further increase archival accessibility, created the need for a new generation of (meta) information about the archived documents: the “user-friendly” finding aids. The aim of these finding aids was to guide those lay users and potential users of unknown professional competency in finding their way around in the archival collections, who do not belong to the knowledge community of archival researchers, and to make it easier for them to locate and use individual documents and complete archival material on specific subjects. In other words, such tools apparently rid archival visitors of the burdensome requirement of prior knowledge of context. However, these tools have a double-edged effect: they make access easier (or faster, to be more precise) on the one hand, while at the same time making it more difficult, also, as they offer less assistance in interpretation.23

There are a number of contributing factors that facilitate the creation and dissemination of user-friendly information about documents: local assistance by reference archivists trained not just in their own profession, but also in inter-personal communication; the preparation of cross-references between the holdings of various archival institutions; the organization of exhibitions presenting archival materials and/or related events, information and art works; the publication of information materials; the organization of public debates; the preparation of teaching materials; invitations to hold history or other classes in the archive – in other words, all forms of outreach activities, which have also grown in importance since the end of the Second World War.
The crucial, still ongoing developments in information technology of the most recent period concern automated data processing, or more specifically, certain characteristic computer applications. The initial impact of computerization opened new possibilities in setting up and searching databases and document catalogues. The next major change concerned the provision of remote access to meta-information, first via internal networks, and then through open networks. This was followed by mass-scale digitization, which implied the technical convergence of various genres and formats (in conjunction with the growing data storage capacity and declining prices). This coincided with concerted efforts by the archives to handle documents originally produced in electronic format. Finally, the ready availability of terminal equipments (PCs, mobile equipments) among potential archival users, along with the establishment of the de facto standardized user interfaces and the arrival of broadband Internet access, opened the way to accessing this Gargantuan mass of digital information and meta-information significantly reducing spatial and temporal limitations.

These new techniques have been designed to serve members of the knowledge community of professional users and the army of potential lay users alike, although the latter group seems to be the preferred choice, judging by the evidence of genre and stylistic characteristics. The most promising solutions in this area are represented by the combination of different access routes, i.e. the context-dependent linking of the “professional” and “lay” finding aids and research methods. Still, when it comes to getting the most out of the archival services, these multi-level tools are no substitutes for having a full grasp of the context.

KEY MOMENTS AND PROBLEMS

If we were to look at the evolutionary history of archives again, and if we were to select the most characteristic key moments of their operation, as well as the most important impact of their existence from today’s perspective, then in the case of ancient and mediaeval archives the element of secrecy would most probably feature very high on the list. Secrecy – or to be more precise, the severely limited access to archival documents and the information contained within – was in direct consequence to the archival ownership and privileges.

The right to having access to the archive, together with the archival practice pursuant to this right, faithfully reflected (and partially still continues to reflect) the aspects of power relations in information ownership. These include the following:

- The mere existence and availability of recorded information (it guarantees exclusive use of the information necessary for making decisions and, indirectly, holding onto, and increasing, power);
- The documentation of the origin and specific circumstances of economic, political, religious/ideological power (it is meant to justify the Rightfulness and legitimacy of the existing order or certain demands);
- The permission to share the information and to study the documents held in the archive (it guarantees the gracious offer of voluntarily granting a privilege);
- The opportunity to offer a “free interpretation”, without outside control, of the information contained within the archival documents (in an age, when “evidence” was equated not with the proof offered by authentic documents, but with the power to persuade).
The idea of sharing the information power in the context of archival practices only appeared in the case of the antique democracies, during the spatially and temporally limited existence of these democracies. In addition to the operational details, each of the great periods of archival history had fundamental problems in connection with both archiving and the management of the archives. In the case of the ancient and mediaeval archives, the mode of operation based mainly on secrecy or limited access was accompanied by exclusive territoriality – in other words, before the arrival of the age of document copying in the 18th century, documents typically existed in one copy, stored at one location. And this location (the Archives as an institution) was physically concentrated in either one single building or one group of buildings. This was also the cause of its fundamental weakness, its main vulnerability – meaning not just the flimsiness of the contemporary data carrying media (the fading of texts or the disintegration of parchments), but also all the security risks concerning the archive as a whole. A natural disaster, a devastating war or a single act of sabotage was all that was needed to destroy all the documents held in the archive, together with their functions to retain the past and to preserve deeds and entitlements.

The idea of public access to archives – in today’s terminology: Akteneinsicht –, as it was conceived at the birth of the modern, national archival politics, followed directly from the intention to do away with the privileges and secrecies of the old regime. Nevertheless, the open-access policy essentially remained declaration; instead of implementing the principle of public access, the key activities of the national archives were the centralization and merging of the documents of the earlier archives established and managed within organizational and territorial frameworks.

No matter how comprehensive their conceptual basis had been, archival mergers ultimately wrecked havoc in the resulting cataloguing systems. Organically developed local archives, which were dependent on both locality and organization and reflected power relations, had cataloguing systems based on either content, form or chronology: they were unsuitable for preserving the entire contextual environment necessary for using the documents in a centralized, national archival system. It took long decades to recognize this problem, which was finally resolved by the announcement of the principles of provenance and the integrity of Fonds. However, the required codification – as we have mentioned earlier – did not follow until the end of the 19th century.

In the age of liberalizing archival access, the most emblematic moment in archival developments was the opening of public reading rooms, accompanied by the enlargement of the existing reading rooms and the extension of the services. In conjunction with the increases in the number and variety of researchers, the range of archival services also grew. Some of the new services were designed to meet the demands of the professional researchers (actually, this also coincided with the professional interests of the archives' owners and staff, namely, with the demands posed by processing, labeling and cataloguing the material), while other new services meant to attract to the archives the previously untargeted lay public (the outreach activities mentioned earlier belong to this category). Most of the modern public archives were transformed into user-friendly research facilities at the very least, but some of them became cultural centers or even exciting and attractive popular science institutions that exhibited both qualities captured in the compound word infotainment.

During this period, access to archived material changed in status from a privilege to a right, so that public access became the norm and secrecy became the exception. Naturally, the norm of public access only applied in the realm of “public”, and was not extended to the domain of “private”. In modern democratic states governed by the rule of the law, the information protection of the personal private sphere (or informational self-determination) and the transparency of the public sphere (or freedom of information) are fundamental rights of equal stature. The freedom of access to historical information
can be regarded either as an extension of the freedom of information or as a new addition to the already existing basic principles of the freedom of information. As a consequence of the specific features of archives and the content of the archived documents, this freedom would also be extended to documents that had earlier belonged to the personal private sphere and, in the case of the documents of recent history, they perhaps still belong there. The limitation of public access to such information is regulated by the data protection and archival laws, as these laws constitute one of the fundamental – although both legal and legitimate – barriers to researching archival documents. Nevertheless, researchers of both the recent and the semi-recent past are generally dissatisfied with those legal barriers, which they consider as an unwarranted restriction of the freedom of research.

The other fundamental barrier in this regard is the closure of public information or information of public interest from the public itself. In addition to state secrets, which are rarely confided to the care of archives, documents marked as “confidential” or “for internal circulation” or “nonpublic information” by various regimes belong to this category. Also, in the case of some of these documents even nowadays no time limit is specified for the duration of secrecy. In addition to this, some countries have further possibilities to limit document access, on the basis of such considerations as the long-term protection of business interests, for example, or the personal wishes of the donor. The spatial and temporal validity of these considerations can be challenged in court with convincing legal arguments. There is, however, one consideration that is unassailable to legal arguments, and that is political will, as manifested in the legislation itself or the regulations of local authorities. It has been confirmed both by the pan-European monitoring project mentioned earlier and the general experience of researchers that the practice of locking away the politically sensitive documents from the public was a policy not only in countries formerly under Communist rule, but occasionally also in Western democracies, as well as in other countries. In summary, therefore, in the age of public-access archives the greatest difficulties were caused by the policies on limiting public access, or more precisely, by the deliberations on where to draw the actual boundaries of these limitations.

The evolving archival paradigm of today has numerous characteristics and components, which make it markedly different from the previous periods of archival history. But there can be no doubt that the key factor in the current functioning of archives is information technology, more specifically, digitization and computerized data processing through the use of network technology. The impact of the “IT revolution” can be felt, directly or indirectly, in the numerous changes that exert fundamental effects on the existence and operation of archives. Since the scope of the present work will not allow a thorough discussion of either the new changes or the problems that these changes have brought to the surface, the author will only mention the most important developments in passing.

- The production of a steadily mounting volume of documents can be attributed to the “technological hunger for information”, which in part was created by the computerization process itself (while, at least in part, it was generated by institutional developments made possible, or even spurred on, by computerized data processing and communication); and the resulting production of an ever growing number of documents, in turn, increased the load on archives.

- We are witnessing the disintegration of the structural monopolies on information and document management: the handling of digitally recorded current documents and their further processing is no longer the privilege of the organization where the document was originated, but also concern the partner organizations.
Similarly, the handling of the archived electronic documents has – de facto, if not de jure – been removed from the exclusive jurisdiction of the archival institutions. New possibilities have been opening up for the shared, quasi-communal storage of digitally formatted documents, and new business organizations specializing in digital data storage have appeared on the market, driving a steeply rising demand. Some experts on modern archival theory would go as far as baptizing the present period the “post-custodial” era, when the tasks of storing and processing documents, and of providing access to them, is no longer reserved exclusively for the national and private archives.

The most courageous vision in the entire history of the archives (to us it seems more like an illusion, frankly, on philosophical as well as practical grounds) is the idea that with the advancement of digital technology, one day it will become possible to archive all information, which will be stored for eternity, and retrieved anywhere and anytime. Even if we momentarily put aside the difficulties that any analysis of the problems associated with the capacity to process an “unlimited volume” of information would necessarily bring into focus, and of all the implications it would entail in power relations and social organization, we could still not fail to point out that the elements of evaluation and selection have always formed part of the archival work throughout the several thousands of years of its history – there is simply no need for preserving all the information, only because it is technically possible. On top of that, the world of information contains many transient elements, the preservation and publication of which would be similar to the freeze-framing of an unflattering gesture in a sequence of movements, eliciting the temptation to use it out of context. Furthermore, human recollection, with all its temporal changes, forms a fundamental part of our culture and we should not take this “burden” off of our successors’ shoulders.

Still, besides all the philosophical concerns, the most important problems are practical. Some of them concern the current practices of digital information management, while others are related to the mid and long-term storage of them. All Internet users are aware of the problem caused by the stupendous quantity of digital information that their searches are likely to produce: a typical search condition can easily produce tens of thousands of hits, of which we shall obviously consider no more than a couple of dozen at best. As for the more experienced Internet users, they are also familiar with the problems of quality: without a knowledge of the context, they cannot differentiate results that are valuable and relevant to their searches from the junk: from information that is obsolete, incomplete, non-authentic, secondary or altered, either tendentiously or by accident – in other words, they have no way of separating facts from opinions, the complete picture from a fragmented view. A thorough familiarity with the context has already been one of the prerequisites for successfully researching traditional archives, but when we are faced with the net’s hopelessly vast data domain, our searches will only stand a chance, if we either have fore-knowledge, or resort to complex, recursive algorithms, or deliberately scale down and compartmentalize the realm of the knowable. To ease the problem, a number of intelligent tools have been introduced on the one hand (we have already mentioned a few of them before), while on the other hand there are new inventions aimed at improving the general intelligence of Internet research in the form of built-in devices – such as the concept of creating the semantic Web.

Despite popular beliefs, the problem of the medium and long-term preservation of digital information has not been solved. From the preservation of “prehistoric” computers, programs and data carriers and the training of “paleo-computer-scientists”, through the regular and cumulative task of migration right down to solutions of the “information about the information” type and the concept of the universal virtual computer, there exist several theoretically well-founded alternatives and systems of criteria,
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while in practice all the options for meeting the demand for long-term archiving that are available at present only prolong the lifespan of existing document formats and guarantee the theoretical possibility of their future migration. In contrast to the vision of being able to store all information for eternity, the prospect we shall be facing for the next couple of decades is that we may lose some of the information meant to be preserved: in other words, we may lose part of the collective memory.

Nevertheless, there are some very impressive projects aimed at digitization and archiving, which are already up and running. Perhaps the most ambitious of them all is the Internet Archive (http://www.archive.org), which has set itself the task of archiving every single webpage, which has ever been published (or will ever be published in the future). At the time of sending this study off to the print, the “time-machine” services of Internet Archive have already provided access to over 150 billion (as of June 4, 2015) web pages, as they existed at various points in time during their life history. Also, digital archiving has led to an increase in the number of genre types in archived items, as well as to a convergence in their methods of management.

Naturally, it would be wrong to conclude from the above that from now on all the archives and other related institutions would confine their interest to the problems associated with the collection and preservation of, and access to, digital documents, thus relinquishing their duties to look after and preserve valuable historical documents in their collections. The situation could more appropriately be summed up by drawing attention to the fact that these tasks are now being carried out by new organizations, mostly established on private initiative, even though there are also some state institutions entrusted with the job of preserving our cultural heritage in digital format, accessible and researchable via the Internet.

THE KEY PROFESSIONALS

Before summing up the conclusions of our review so far, we would like to say a few words about the social position and role of the archival experts, as well as about the development of the archival profession and its relations with the sister institutions of archives, and while on the subject, we would also like to digress briefly into the development of these sister institutions themselves.

In the first great period of archival history, the key person was the scribe: a man of letters who was able to record, retrieve and interpret information. Also, in addition to discharging all the above functions as well as the role of the guardian, the ancient specialist also filled positions known by the names of archiota, archivarius, archivist, chartularius, tabularius, camerarius, to name a few. The first archives emerged roughly simultaneously with ancient libraries: the skills of reading and writing and the job of guarding were the fundamental requirements of the ancient experts in this case, too. Naturally, the holdings of ancient libraries were handwritten texts themselves, originally produced in one copy (and therefore apparently met one of the crucial criteria of primary sources), but these manuscripts were fundamentally different from the archival documents in two other respects. One of the differences concerned the content: while the ancient archives held documents, which related to everyday life and served as proofs of existing relations, the libraries collected works containing ritual texts, chronicles, scholarly treaties and religious admonitions. The other difference had to do with accessibility: produced by copying, the ritual texts and other manuscripts were circulated among the initiated through the royal or religious channels of the privileged classes – this was not typical in the case of archival documents. We can identify the prototypes of today’s museums in the royal treasuries and the private collections: in the early days, the skills of writing and reading were probably not indispensable requirements for the professional keepers,
while certain skills in assessing the value and tracing the source of the items were a must. (This, in turn, necessitated the use of some sort of information recording and cataloguing system in the case of large collections that continued to exist for a long period.)

It was no longer the literate guardian who played crucial roles in the era when the national archives were emerging, but the scholar, the politician and the bureaucrat who developed and implemented the new concept. They worked out the broad-scale mergers of documents and institutions, the new catalogue systems; they conducted the discard procedures and document burnings; and they laid the groundwork for modern archival politics. Mainly storing printed books already (in addition to their valuable manuscripts), libraries in those days were functioning as research institutions and venues for the practical realization of academic freedom, rather more so than the archives, where researchers were often harassed by bureaucratic procedures, authorization protocols and arbitrarily imposed restrictions. This was the age when the holdings of museums became public collections and – initially on private initiative but later also strongly encouraged by the governments – the expressions of national excellence and feeling; this was also the age when the casualness of the earlier private collections was replaced by the ideals of completeness and orderliness.

It was with the arrival of the period of public archives that the archivist’s role, as we know it today, acquired a key importance: in processing the archival material and producing the archival finding aids; in imparting knowledge about the context of the material; and in communicating with the researchers. This period also coincides with the formation of the professional organizations (even including its world organization, the International Council on Archives) and the international acknowledgement of the archival work as an independent profession, mainly on American prompting. And this was also the time when archivistics was recognized as an independent branch of information sciences. Paradoxically, its emergence was stimulated by the formation of the new paradigm: the appearance of phenomena that no longer fitted into the earlier archival paradigm. By comparison, the recognition of library sciences caused much less of a problem; in fact, the development of information sciences was partly rooted in the conception and formation of library information systems; the development of the latter can be regarded a great deal more organic and intensive than that of archivistics, which received new impetus precisely from the growing need to question and re-interpret its own professional rules. It is worth mentioning here that archivists had to conduct an earnest campaign to have their profession recognized as a field distinct from both librarianship and records management. By that time the activities of archaeologists and museum curators had sufficiently been separated from those of librarians and archivists, both as far as training and scholarly prestige were concerned, even though museums at that particular time were more focused on their role in popularizing the sciences and in attracting the tourists, than they were on strengthening their scientific standing in the general public’s perception. The outreach activities came to form an indispensable part in the running and maintenance, and even in the existential legitimacy, of museums holding public collections.

The key professional in today’s archival management is the IT specialist, who can oversee the computerization of the archival cataloguing systems and whose grasp of the structure and interconnections of archival material enables him or her to organize the most characteristic features of the collection into a database; who has the necessary skills to design and execute the digitization of archival material held in analog format; and who can publish the digitized material either on the local network, or on remote networks with limited access or indeed on the Internet. IT specialists also have a crucial role to play in library management and, to an increasing extent, even in the fields of archeology and museology, as reflected in the growing popularity of joint degrees that combine courses in information science and some other special field.
The fact that IT professionals play a crucial role in the operation of the three memory-preservation institutions is not the only reason why there is a convergence between these areas: another contributing factor is the informatization itself. In part this is explained by the existence of similar problems in the storing, cataloguing, processing, describing and indexing of digitized items, and in part by the use of similar modes of searching, displaying and accessing. At present, in the area of library digitization and archiving, the two outstanding programs are associated with the two great rivals, Google and Yahoo: the goals of both companies include the digitization and electronic archiving of books and their publication via the Internet. Inspired by the example of the Ancient Library of Alexandria, the already mentioned Internet Archive has attempted another highly ambitious project: it wants to collect and digitize all the books that have ever been published, and to give them online access with full-text search capacity. The advanced digitization technologies used by museums make the quasi-three-dimensional display of objects possible, along with the virtual tour of spaces and even an uncannily “real” experience of physical objects through virtual reality technology.

In the age of the vision of global access, the boundaries between the specialized institutions of memory preservation are becoming increasingly blurred in the eyes of their visitors, although this should not make the existence of specialized knowledge communities in and around such institutions redundant: there continues to be a need for the expertise of librarians, archivists and archeologists/museum curators. The problems of researchers will not be solved by training Internet infotainment universalists. On the contrary: instead of making researchers’ life easier, the discovery of new interconnections, which is made possible through digitization, only adds to their complications by requiring more trans-disciplinary efforts. Even the expert systems and the programs based on artificial intelligence, ultimately designed to relieve humans of certain types of intellectual work, need to be kick-started by inputting existing, differentiated, field-specific human expertise.

It is also possible to review the development of the archival profession and the archivists’ work in the context of information theory, by examining the activities of the various specialists according to the type of informational operations they perform (production, storage, processing, communication, reproduction etc.). If we attempted to associate typical professional groups with various informational operations (Z. Karvalics, 2004, p. 59, and, less in detail in English, 2009), then the work of archivists would probably fall into the category of information storage. But if we tried to examine the situation in the context of archival institutions and the functions of archivists, then we would find that, along with the storing of information, the tasks of processing, presenting or reproducing data also carried primary importance throughout the various periods of archival development.

Constituting one of the basic functions of archival operations, the element of storing has been a constant and central feature in the history of archives. With one exception, all the other elements have been added to the function of storing in a cumulative way down through the evolution of archives. In the case of the ancient archives, the informational task that preceded storing was the task of recording/coding (carried out by the scribes): this is the item that will disappear from the typical portfolio of informational tasks during the later stages of the institutional development of archives. In the age of the emergence of the national archives, the task of processing or categorizing (at both the micro and the macro level) complements the function of storing. In the age of the public archives the task of providing access becomes the order of the day. Finally, in the age of global archives another new element is added to the list: reproduction. (Reproduction means the same in the case of digital archives as it did in the case of book publishing: the differences between the original and the copies essentially disappear.) The acts of access provision and reproduction serve the same purpose: to allow more people to study the archival
materials. The readers should be reminded here that in the case of the provision of access to archived materials by archivists the contextual element is the more pronounced (although the work of archivists naturally also include the provision of physical access). By contrast, in the case of provision of access by IT professionals the technical element is the primary factor (although IT professionals themselves can provide certain types of contextual connections).

CONTINUITY OR PARADIGM SHIFT?

In our overview we have discussed the most important characteristics of the existence, functions and operation of archives, with a special focus on the aspect of information management. We have also made an attempt to identify the permanent and the changing elements throughout the four, hypothetically constructed, major eras.

In its spirit, the specialist literature on archivistics – with the only possible exception of the modern and postmodern studies discussing the effects of the information revolution – underlines the continuity of archival history. We can find numerous views confirming that current documents are essentially no different from their distant predecessors and that the functioning of the organizations (including the state, the churches and the institutions) is continuous. If we accept that the documents proving family descent and proprietary rights have preserved the same function throughout history, from the Antiquity to the 21st century; that the clay tablets of Mesopotamia are essentially no different from the administrative records of a modern business; and that the scribes did the same work as the inventory makers do today, than all this may suggest that the archives of the past and the present are essentially the same. The archival profession itself likes to point out the existence of continuity and unbroken development, in a sense underlining the claim that archives are for eternity. Among the few authors who do not regard archival history as an essentially uniform whole, John Ridener should be mentioned who focuses on archival theory and, most notably, appraisal theory, and divided the period between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 21st into characteristic periods and paradigms.35

Nevertheless, we know that great archival revolutions did take place (along with political revolutions that had important effects on the archives), and that time and again new functions, new goals and new operational modes did surface in archival history. We also know of certain elements, which – although they had already formed part of the archival practice before, without actually exerting a crucial influence or playing a role that could influence or transform the decisive elements of the archival paradigm – suddenly found themselves in the forefront of archival politics in another period. It is also clear that a paradigm shift does not necessarily require radical reversals in every area; sometimes it simply means that the emphasis is being shifted to other aspects and problems.

So which is the more important factor – continuity or periodical division? What is the best way to proceed in understanding the evolutionary history of archives, with all its permanence and changing – by demonstrating its continuity or by underlining the specific characteristics of the different periods? Our hypothesis is that the latter approach is more helpful. Our intention with the present study has been to demonstrate that, notwithstanding the evident signs of permanence down through archival history, new constellations invariably emerged in each of the various historical periods, and these fundamentally determined the basic conditions of archival existence: essential changes occurred in the ownership, processing and accessibility of information, and the sum total of these changes produced the distinct and well-defined archival paradigms, with marked differences and unique constellations with regard to each and every one of the criteria examined in our study.
Nevertheless, we must face the fact that establishing a one-to-one correspondence between the validity of the various archival paradigms and the actual historical periods, or assigning concrete historical caesura to the changes in the archival paradigms, would be very difficult, indeed. The French Revolution is perhaps the only exception in this regard, but even here some of the changes laid down by the archival laws of the Revolution had already been in progress in the various European countries. On top of that, the new developments in archival practice did not take place simultaneously everywhere, just as the historical changes that drove the archival developments unfolded with different speeds. Our analysis so far (with the exception of the archives of the ancient Orient) has implicitly been based on the historical developments of the “advanced” West – even if we encountered different priorities and examples of asynchronous development within the various countries and continents. Nor should we forget that archives *ab ovo* run in a cumulative mode, both as far as the daily operation and the historical development of archives are concerned, which means that they carry with them the indirect fossils of the archival paradigms of the past. Perhaps a historical moment, when these archival constellations could be captured in their purest form, has never existed at all. Still, the various ideas, abstractions and states of equilibrium – in other words, the archival paradigms and the related practices – seem to emerge in a pristine form in our proposed theoretical construction.

**THE PROPOSED TERMINOLOGY**

All that remains for us to do now is to confirm the names assigned to each of the four archival paradigms: we already have enough information about the *entitlement-attestation, national, public* and *global* archives to set them apart according to purposes, organizations, owners and target audience of the archival institutions; we can specify the key technologies applied, the expertise required and the most typical information technology operations performed, along with the most important practical effects and problems associated with them. Also, we can roughly mark out the validity of the archival paradigms on the timeline of history, comparing them with the temporal development of the memory-preserving sister institutions.

With the help of Table 1, we would like to summarize the key elements discussed in our analysis.

We have shown that if we discard the traditional approach to archives based on administrative, legal and historical arguments and choose to review their millennial-old history from an information-based approach instead, we shall find that their historical development can be divided into characteristic periods, each reflecting a different paradigm. These paradigms reveal distinctive individual characteristics and a well-defined overall picture with regard to every one of the key discussion points; at the same time, however, we shall also find that not all the factors lose their validity at the boundary of the successive paradigms. Although ever since Kuhn put forward his by now somewhat inflated notion of paradigm shifts, the term has been understood to refer to concomitant changes of axioms and the system of rules within a relatively brief interval, history has shown us that different paradigms or combinations of paradigms can coexist for longer periods.
Table 1. Archival paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Paradigm</th>
<th>Primary/ New Purpose</th>
<th>Key Institution</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Users, Target Audience</th>
<th>Key Technology</th>
<th>Key Professional</th>
<th>Informational Operation</th>
<th>Impact, Key Element</th>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>(Libraries)</th>
<th>(Museums)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entitlement-attestation</td>
<td>proving titles, properties, power, origin</td>
<td>private archives</td>
<td>the creator, the ruler/ owner (and his officers)</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>writer</td>
<td>recording + coding, storing</td>
<td>secrecy</td>
<td>vulnerability of archives</td>
<td>~3000 BC</td>
<td>pristine texts, chronicles, copying</td>
<td>treasure-houses, private collections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>preserving collective memory, promoting historical scholarship</td>
<td>public archives</td>
<td>the State, the State, historians</td>
<td>catalogues, meta-information, publication of sources</td>
<td>scholar, politician, bureaucrat</td>
<td>storing + processing</td>
<td>document concentration, structuring</td>
<td>preserving provenance, keeping context</td>
<td>18th c. – (French Revolution)</td>
<td>the place of doing research</td>
<td>public collections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>openness, serving the public</td>
<td>public-access archives (public archives and open private archives)</td>
<td>the &quot;public&quot;, the State, historians, learned or concerned public (genealogists)</td>
<td>user-friendly finding aids, inter-archival cross-references, outreach programs</td>
<td>archivist</td>
<td>storing + processing + making accessible</td>
<td>public reading rooms, services</td>
<td>access restrictions</td>
<td>WW2 –</td>
<td>community places; a birthplace of information science</td>
<td>tourist attractions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>global access</td>
<td>service providers</td>
<td>“free”, internet users, laymen</td>
<td>IT professional, information broker</td>
<td>storing + processing + making accessible + multiplying</td>
<td>archiving &quot;everything&quot;, digitizing, preserving &quot;forever&quot;</td>
<td>context, quantity/ quality, preserving electronic documents</td>
<td>2000? –</td>
<td>digitization, convergence</td>
<td>digitization, convergence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE

After reading through the history of archives, archiving and the use of archives, and after being presented with a systematic inventory of the most important characteristics of the historical paradigms of archiving, the readers might find themselves labouring under the illusion that the understanding of the past processes and the identification of the present problems could provide a firm basis for facing up to the challenges that lie in store for the archival institutions and the archival profession. Although the study of past developments and an astute analysis of the present situation do, indeed, provide a vitally needed intellectual resource for continuing a millenial-old activity and for shaping its future, the immediate future nevertheless holds a number of challenges that directly question the raison d’être of archiving. For this reason, it seems appropriate that we conclude our analysis with a brief inventory of these challenges.

All these challenges can be traced back to the same root cause: to the vision that, as a result of digital data storage and network access, in the foreseeable future all information will be preserved and be made accessible from everywhere, at all times. One of the projections of this vision is what we can already experience in our everyday practice now: unlike in the previous history of mankind, where forgetting was natural and remembering exceptional (in the sense that it was the latter that required resources, special tools, special techniques and special institutions – for example, archives), now remembering has become natural and forgetting exceptional (i. e. the one that required resources, such as time, special tools and techniques). The masses of private individuals, their associations, the business organizations, the offices of state administration, and even the archives themselves, store their data in distributed network systems, sharing them on public networks and conduct internet-based communication with each other, their clients and lay visitors.

However, the Internet – apparently at least – does not forget: more precisely, with varying degree of access and in a varying context, it permanently stores all the information that has been either uploaded to a distant storage device or communicated through some web-based service. This situation itself presents challenges to the stakeholders (including the service providers, the users and the regulators), while the responses to the challenges, directly or indirectly, affect the memory preserving institutions, the archives among them.

THE RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN AND THE ARCHIVES

As part of the comprehensive effort to reform European data protection, the European Commission introduced a new right, the “right to be forgotten and to erasure”, popularly known by the acronym RTBF, in its draft proposal published in January 2012 (European Commission, 2012), which received considerable publicity and generated an intensive lobby activity, both pro and contra. This right concerns itself with a particular type of data stored in archival documents: the personal data.

According to the definition of EU law currently in force, personal data is defined as “any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person”, and an identifiable person is one “who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identification number or to one or more factors specific to his physical, physiological, mental, economic, cultural or social identity”. Although the EU affords a higher level of protection to the personal data of its citizens and lays down stricter regulations for their processing than any other country or region in the world, including the USA, due to the globalization of data flow these regulations have relevance for organizations – including archives – outside of Europe.
Therefore, the crucial element of the definition\textsuperscript{37} is linkability: the link between the data and the person. Prior to announcing the plan to introduce the RTBF, no particular attention had been given to the limits and the extent of linkability. Nevertheless, personal data are contained in a large number of documents held in the archives: in addition to names and birth data, certain characteristics are also mentioned, on the basis of which people can be identified even in a seemingly anonymized document. In the previous practice of the archives, this aspect mostly came into play in assessing the researchability of the documents. However, the plan to introduce the RTBF came as a shock to the profession of archivists: according to this, the persons named in, or positively identified by, the documents – the so-called data subjects – have the right to demand that the organizations and the individuals processing their data – the so-called data processors – delete their personal data and refrain from disseminating such information.

To a superficial observer, such a right might appear to be in a fundamental contradiction with both the basic task shared by the archives and the essence of the global archival paradigm, which is centered on the storage of, and global access to, more and more information. Although a number of objective and professionally well-founded statements by some archives were published, the majority of the reactions were nevertheless both extreme and emotional. The best known among them was the Association of French Archivists’ petition sent to the European Parliament,\textsuperscript{38} which was signed by more than fifty thousand people from the archival profession. Cut to the bone, these reactions essentially claim that “Giving such a right to people will ruin historical research and archival work in the future.”

It appears, however, that the archival profession has fundamentally misunderstood the essence of the RTBF. Here we shall confine ourselves to listing only the most important arguments to demonstrate this,\textsuperscript{39} without analyzing the motives behind the reactions, which include numerous elements, ranging from concerns for the culture to the defense of professional interests and ignorance of the text of the draft proposal.

- First of all, the declared aim\textsuperscript{40} of the RTBF is to limit the use of personal data in the processing of current data (in other words, data typically handled by institutions other than historical archives), as well as to provide data subjects with tools to improve their position vis-a-vis service providers, marketers and other data users. Therefore, the RTBF is not designed to limit historical research or the preservation of our historical heritage.
- The RTBF is not a new right: its most important constituent elements have already been in force in the EU member states.\textsuperscript{41}
- The application of the RTBF is conditional on certain well-defined criteria: the data subjects are entitled to demand the deletion of their data only when one or more of these criteria have been met.\textsuperscript{42} The archival materials are usually unaffected by these criteria: it is only in some exceptional cases that research on documents containing such data might have to be limited, but even so the data will not have to be deleted, so information of historical value will be preserved.
- The RTBF cannot be invoked in those cases when the processing of personal data is explicitly designed to exercise the freedom of expression, to meet a public interest or a legal obligation or to address public health concerns, or, alternatively, it is carried out in the aid of historical, statistical or scientific research.\textsuperscript{43} The archival activities obviously fall into the latter category. According to the strongest exception, the right to delete data cannot be exercised, when the information is stored explicitly for the purpose of historical, statistical or scientific research.\textsuperscript{44}
- The archival institutions usually carry out their activities on a legal mandate (rather than on the basis of the consent of the data subjects). In the case of the administrative type archives, the pri-
mary task is to guarantee the *veracity* of the documents in their charge, and also to issue, when requested by the persons concerned, certificates attesting a certain fact (property owned earlier, employment, social situation), so in such cases the RTBF cannot be exercised. The primary task of the historical archives is to guarantee the *integrity* of the documents in their possession, regardless of the truthfulness of their content: here the possibility of deleting data is extremely limited, because an archive cannot damage the integrity of the documents by deleting a name or editing out certain parts of a photograph, for example.

Therefore, the archival institutions do not have to worry in this respect, as their activities will essentially remain unaffected by this challenge. We cannot, of course, guarantee that individual cases will not arise, when they might have to consider implementing the RTBF; to be able to handle such cases, they must verify the content of the documents in their possession.\textsuperscript{45} This exceptional status does not, however, apply to data storages and data warehouses dealing with business data or other forms of current electronic information, as the activities carried out there do not qualify as historical, statistical or scientific research.

**DEALING WITH DIGITAL DEATH**

One of the traditional tasks of the archives is the preservation of personal and family history. Due to their nature, such documents usually contain a large volume of personal data, and the donors in such cases are mostly private individuals. There are, of course, other types of documents, of administrative or business nature for example, which could also contain personal data. However, the personal aspect of the data contained in the documents changes with the passing of time, and in this regard the death of the person concerned is a milestone in the process. Metaphorically speaking, we could say that this personal aspect is like the tail of a comet: At the time of death it is still very bright and stays close to the core of the comet, in other words to the individual person, but with the passage of time it fades away more and more, until it eventually loses all connection to the deceased: it becomes a historical data. The precise moment when this happens is as unpredictable in the workings of celestial mechanics as it is in the archival practice. For this reason, archival law attempts to tie the researchability of personal data to concrete time periods: this may start from the death of the person (for example, the documents become researchable 30 years after the death of the person concerned), or the time of birth, when the fact or the time of death is unknown to the archives, or the moment of the document’s creation, when none of the other dates is known to the archivists (and they are typically not in the position to look into it).\textsuperscript{46}

Today’s population, especially the generation of “digital natives” – and this is not restricted to the developed countries – spend a large part of their life on the net: this is where their lives unfold, and where the documents related to them are created, either in textual, photographic, video or some other, non-traditional form. A considerable portion of these documents can be regarded as the transient elements of communication, and their preservation owes more to the business model and unlimited storage space of the service providers than to the intentions of the data subjects. The tasks of storing such a continuously growing volume of data and turning it into a researchable format, in themselves have presented a formidable theoretical and practical challenge for the archives, both traditional and unconventional, not to mention the fact that this phenomenon was one of the original motivation for the RTBF.
The digital documents – like their paper-based predecessors – easily outlive their data subjects. There is one fundamental difference, however: in the case of digital documents, the death of the data subject cannot be established in a simple and unequivocal way; on the contrary, the deceased tend to go into some sort of a digital afterlife, and this situation presents a peculiar challenge for the archives: as a consequence of this, they stand an even smaller chance to establish the data subject’s death, or even his or her identity.

According to a 2012 survey, roughly 375 thousand Facebook users die annually in the US alone. Their profiles, along with all the messages, pictures, music and videos they uploaded earlier on, will not be removed; anyone can send them messages and a chatbot might even answer them. And as for the more advanced forms of virtual personalities, be they the creations of actual people (network users) or the creations of artificial intelligence, these avatars can continue living their virtual lives, interact and create new documents and form new virtual legal relations, regardless of whether their creators are alive or not.

Who are the parties in these virtual legal relations? Should the archives collect the resulting documents? And if so, who should be named as donors? How is it possible to establish whether the subjects are alive, or indeed whether they have ever lived? Who should have control over the data, who should have the right to decide about researchability, who can be regarded as next of kin?

These are questions, to which the archival theory and practice have not yet found an answer. The one certainty that has emerged is that the previously applied legal and ethical principles are no longer valid – or at least hardly interpretable – in this domain, while the volume of data requiring an archival decision continues to grow steadily. For the time being, we only know the specific responses and policies of the large service providers, but even these are directed at the access right management and erasability of dead users, rather than at the archival preservation of the digital data of the deceased and the clarification of their status.

Both the data protection laws and the archival laws need to find a solution for handling this situation. Until now, the work on conceptual proposals began only in the realm of data protection laws, but the majority of even these reflect the approach of the commodification and hereditariness of data, rather than the extension of the current, right-based approach. As for the archival laws, here even the conceptual foundations are lacking. Until the time that the situation is legally resolved, the archives must make preparations to handle the situation, or at least to actively cooperate in the drafting of proposals and options.

DO ARCHIVES HAVE A FUTURE IN THE DIGITAL AGE?

If all information will be preserved and will be retrievable in future, then the question seems entirely justified: What will be the point of maintaining memory-preserving institutions, places like the archives? If crowdsourcing replaces processing, and folksonomy supplants taxonomy, then what will be the added value of the institution? To a superficial observer it might appear that the archival institutions are making a last-minute effort to get on the super fast train of the digital world, presenting the – sometimes remarkably vigorous – digitization of their paper-based collections as a strong case for their claims, while the “Internet” – in other words, the services seen by the users – on its own can provide all the main functions of the archival history and information operations, from recording through multiplication to sharing.

In addition, a number of non-traditional archival institutions have sprung up in the past few decades, including human rights archives and experimental workshops, which try to break new grounds by creating novel fora for public debate and demolishing existing legal and technical barriers. Seen in the light
of these developments, the conservative archives’ efforts to adapt to the digital age might seem tardy and obsolete. In the field of theory, these problems are further compounded by such post-modern ideas as the suggestion that in today’s world everyone functions both as the producer and the consumer of content, an archivist as well as a user of the archive, while the institution of memory preservation is merely a transient element in the cultural history of mankind.

So do the archives have a future in the digital age? Naturally, we cannot make long-term predictions on a historical scale we have used for the past, not even if we take into account the exponentially growing pace of social and technological progress. What we can do on the basis of our current knowledge is to offer a mid-term projection about the next couple of decades: in our assessment, in this time interval the prospects of archives as an institution, of the archivists’ profession, and of archivistics as an academic discipline, remain stable, regardless of all pressures to change and to adapt. In saying this, we are not driven by some kind of a mandatory optimism or respect for archivistics. In the following, we shall briefly outline our reasons to make that projection:

• The structural inertia of the archival institution, the traditions of the profession, the public archives’ institutional embedment in the system of government administration, themselves act as forces for stabilization;
• Since even in the rapidly changing political, economic and social environment a great many of the document and data types have persistent functions, the institutions designated to handle them should also operate in a persistent manner;
• Since not all data and documents are created in a digital format, the physical copies must also be preserved somewhere, not to mention the historical documents, which require restoration, and for these tasks the archives are the most suitable institution;
• By handling, describing and cataloguing the materials in their care, the archives preserve not only the data and the various documents, but also the context of their creation;
• Pending on their types, the archives have institutional responsibility in protecting the truthfulness and integrity of the documents placed in their care, and this responsibility constitutes an important social, legal and administrative requirement.

It is with this optimistic outlook that we would like to conclude our paper identifying and analyzing the paradigms of archival history, and also briefly outlining the challenges of the present and the immediate future – with the added remark that if the archival institutions and the archival profession will not be successful in marrying their traditions with their innovative responses to the new challenges, then they themselves will become history, enriching the collections of the museum of archives, or of the archive of the archives, if you prefer.

REFERENCES


The Four Paradigms of Archival History and the Challenges of the Future


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**KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

Access: The possibility to use a resource, esp. information.

Archives: The term archives (lower case “a”) is the totality of the documents collected and preserved by any individual or organization; Archives (upper case “A”) is the institution charged with the preservation of archives.

Archivistics: Archival science.

Digital Death: A metaphor for the vanishing of digital or digitized personal information that typically outlive their data subject.

Information Operations: Actions or procedures performed on informational units, such as recording, coding, storing, multiplying or processing.

Memory-Preserving Institutions: Institutions whose primary aim is to preserve collective memory, such as archives, libraries or museums.

Paradigm Shift: A fundamental change in a framework of concepts, contexts and practices.

The Right to Be Forgotten: The popular name of the right of individuals to have their personal data deleted or to prevent the further use of such data.

**ENDNOTES**

1 Naturally, there are some other types of memorial institutions recognized by society – cemeteries and memorial parks, for example – and also the preservation of the relics and memories of the past – besides their other functions – is also one of the fundamental tasks of educational and church institutions.

2 Standing on territory that later was transferred to Austria, the castle belonged to the Esterházy family for centuries.

3 See John Roberts’s much quoted and criticized article “Archival theory: Much ado about shelving” (Roberts, 1987).

4 For example, the archival conferences of Stockholm on provenance and the concept of *record* (1996).
Charles Kecskemeti’s writing (2005) has been the immediate inspiration for the ideas expounded in the present article; I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude for his valuable comments to the first version of this paper.

For example, Laura Milla, Ian Wilson et al.; for more on that, see Terry Reilly (2005, pp. 3-5). This demand was already incorporated in the 1789 Declarations of Human and Civic Rights.

Regardless of what has been said here, there are ten European countries where (according to a pan-European research to be cited later) obtaining access to otherwise unclassified documents still requires the submission of a formal request, even though the application is a mere formality in most of the cases and the archives automatically grant permission to the applicants (Kecskemeti & Szekely, 2005, pp. 23-25).

Greene et al. (2004), albeit from a general perspective, are criticizing this concept, saying that “the universal nature of archives is neither universal nor natural”; instead, archives are social creations for social purposes, thus referring to the social theories regarding archival appraisal (Eastwood, 1992).

Naturally, no one should be under the illusion that the democratization of the technology would automatically go hand in hand with the democratization of access to information. The downloading of classified or restricted documents over the Internet will still not be possible for members of the general public.

By now, the two models have converged somewhat: Sweden has abolished the independent archives of its Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defense, while in 2003 Great Britain set up its National Archives of jurisdiction extended to the entire Kingdom.

In the US libraries of private universities fulfill a similar function.

The controversial and potentially dangerous nature of these intelligent agents is two-fold. First, users get only a filtered version of the world what they think is the existing totality, and since filtering is being fine-tuned dynamically, according to the preferences of the user (in the case of Google what most users “want to find”), the individual user’s chances are ever decreasing for finding alternative information and views, and the alternative opinions’ chances are ever decreasing for becoming dominant some time. After the title of Eli Pariser’s highly successful book (2012) and popular lecture (http://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles) this phenomenon is now known as The Filter Bubble. Second, it is the intelligent agent which possesses the most detailed profile of the user; in turn, the user has no means to learn how (and for whom) the agent works and what conclusions it draws from the behavior of the user. About potential solutions to the second problem, see the Common Position on Intelligent Software Agents of the International Working Group on Data Protection in Telecommunications (1999), or Bygrave (2001).

A fundamental right of the individual to determine in principle the disclosure and use of his/her personal data; a concept originated from the landmark decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court (1983).

Understood as the virtual compensation of the society of former dictatorships for being deprived of vital information about the past political regimes.

Naturally, global access, with its user-friendly online tools, makes life easier for the academic elite, too, but in this case it is the appearance of lay archival users that brings fundamental new changes here.

Collaborative classification or tagging, a practice and theory, which became popular in parallel with the rapid spread of social software applications and Web 2.0 services.
As one anecdotic example, we would like to mention the time when the OSA Archivum (Open Society Archives at Central European University, http://www.osaarchivum.org) put up the virtual version of its exhibition “Sex and Communism” on its webpage. (The exhibition was designed to document the attitudes of the former regime towards such topics as sexual relations, people’s dresses at work, abortion, nudity, deviant behavior, private parties, etc.) There was an immediate and significant increase in the number of people visiting the website. A quick analysis revealed, however, that the majority of the new visitors were Internet users who did search on the word “sex” and landed on the homepage indexed highly by Google by accident. It is, of course, possible to filter out the majority of such users from the statistics, because they only enter once and they leave immediately, but some of them might be more persistent, making repeated attempts to find more sex and less communism.

The so-called Freedom of the Press Act, regulating the freedom of expression and the public access to official documents (originally enacted in 1766) is one of the four fundamental laws constituting the Swedish Constitution.

An incident, which occurred in connection with a pan-European research led by the present author, put this openness in a somewhat ironical perspective, when the Vatican’s archives was asked to provide data on its own accessibility – there was no answer… Commissioned by the Council of Europe, the monitoring project covered the national archives, academic researchers and civil societies of 48 countries. For its major findings, see Kecskemeti & Szekely (2005).

About the problems of opening up the archives of former dictatorial regimes, see the UNESCO/ICA report (Quintana, 1997), about the specific problems of the post-1989 archival situation see Kecskemeti (1999), and on the spectacular opening and re-closing of Russian archives see Pustintsev (2000).

Recommendation on a European policy on access to archives (2000).

Naturally, “professional” access requiring familiarity of context does not necessarily have to be awkward and cumbersome, just as the tools designed to be used by amateurs do not have to be unprofessional and shallow.

They are archivists, who, similarly to reference librarians, help researchers with guidance and advice.

Having said that, it is precisely the medium and long-term archiving of digital documents, which is posing some fundamentally new problems that have adequate solutions only in theory at the moment.

As Rhodes (2001) phrases it, “Two things could happen to a public document in a Greek state: the text could be deposited in an archives; and it could be displayed temporarily in a public place” (p. 33).

For example, the National Archives of Australia is so popular among children that they literally drag their parents inside so that they can listen to the recorded voice of one or the other famous ship captains, while the parents themselves are having fun at the actual exhibition (at the time of the author’s visit, the subject of the actual exhibition happened to be the culinary culture of the immigrants). Entitled Memento, the magazine published by the national archives is a high-quality popular-science magazine, which explains (and advertises) the workings and the use of the archives to the general public.

On the situation of access to archives in the Member States of the Council of Europe see the survey results by Kecskemeti and Szekely (2005).
In opposition to the vision of “eternal memory” and its power/political/business marketing, several authors bring up the social advantages of forgetting and forgetfulness: “the right to forget and the right to be forgotten” (Mayer-Schönberger, 2009, Blanchette & Johnson, 2002). And while in a country, which completed the transition from dictatorship to democracy only recently, this idea may have a sinister ring to it, we must not forget that a new beginning, a new life, or a new identity – in other words, the spatial and temporal limitation of communal memory – often formed an integral part of the early inventories of individual human freedoms.

From time to time, the digital data files created or stored in an earlier format have to be converted (migrated) to the up-to-date format, while preserving the functionality, appearance and authenticity of the original as best as possible.

In this case, what is actually being stored is not the information itself, but the instructions to reproduce the information.

According to this concept, the same standardized coding procedure should be used for the creation of all future digital files, in order to ensure that they be uniformly back-traceable and re-useable regardless of the actual environment.

In Europe the profession itself was symbolically recognized by the establishing of the École Nationale des Chartes in the first half of the nineteenth century, with the mission of training archivists and librarians.

It deserves attention that in professional literature the notion of information (or information) operation is dominated by its military and law enforcement interpretation, in the context of “information warfare” and similar areas. Among those who use the notion from a theoretical approach the majority follow the Shannon–Weaver school, i.e. the mathematical-computational abstraction of sending, receiving and manipulating information. Those who examine informational phenomena within the thesaurus of the information society studies, tend to overemphasize a single element of the spectrum of informational operations: communication – in harmony with the present marketing boom in “communication studies”, “communication rights”, or “communication” as such. Some cognitive scientists regard human mind as a single informational operation (Palmer & Kimchi, 1986); others treat high level informational operations as part of the organizational competencies (Riverin-Simard & Simard, 2009); there are comprehensive philosophical works analyzing “the informational”, combining philosophical notions such as consciousness, meaning, informational emergentism etc. with algebraic rigor (Zeleznikar, 2004); nevertheless, the comprehensive theory of the role of informational operations in the information society is still missing. The author is of the opinion that high level informational operations such as creating, duplicating, storing, sharing, forwarding, destroying, modifying etc. information can more adequately describe and explain the existence of informational activities, professions and institutions than the communication-based approach (see, for example, Szekely, 2009, p. 308).

Ridener’s paradigms: Consolidation, Confirmation and reinforcement, Modern, and Questioning (Ridener, 2009).


The most comprehensive legal opinion on the definition of personal data so far has been produced by the Article 29 Working Party (2007), an advisory body set up under the EU Data Protection Directive.

For more on the arguments, see Szekely (2014).

In our analysis we use the version of the draft proposal, which was valid in Spring 2014.

The title of the provision according to the current draft proposal is “the right to erasure”, in other words, the provocative and somewhat misleading “right to be forgotten” was removed from the title.

The data subject is entitled to require the deletion of his or her data only if the purpose of data processing no longer exists, or the data subject withdraws consent and there is no other legal ground for the processing of the data, or the data subject objects to the processing of personal data and there are no overriding legitimate grounds for the processing, or the data have been unlawfully processed, or the data have to be erased for compliance with a legal obligation to which the controller is subject. (Article 17 (1) of the draft Regulation).

Article 17 (1) of the draft Regulation.

Article 17 (5a) of the draft Regulation.

For more details, see Szekely (2014).

Since most of the data protection laws (including the EU’s data protection directive and draft regulation) tie the concept of personal data to natural persons, the legal protection of the deceased is achieved by other legal means, such as funerary law or other legal instruments of civil law.

Quoted by Harbinja (2013).

A Facebook user can request the deletion or preservation of his or her Facebook profile, as well as the release of the associated password (Memoralization Request); on Twitter, the verified heir can deactivate the account (without the option of learning its content); in exceptional cases, Google may agree to releasing the data and the letters of the deceased (but not the password); in response to an inheritance procedure, MS Hotmail is willing to release the contents to the executor (but not to the heirs); Blizzard (World of Warcraft) outright excludes the possibility of the users’ right to digital properties, while Linden Labs (Second Life) allows the inheritance of digital properties, including virtual personalities.