

## A Better World is Possible....: the Educational and Social Role of Historical Industrial Archives

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### *ABSTRACT*

Archives are arks of knowledge. Nevertheless, their potential has not been explored and used as it should. Historical industrial archives belong to an archival category which can contribute a lot to various social groups in many ways. Their content is attached to a recent historical period and it is written in a language which can be read and understood by most people, as it does not require special knowledge, like palaeography. In industrialized or recently de-industrialized regions, people have an emotional attachment to their industrial past or present which can be used to promote industrial archives. The recent past- industrial archives and industrial monuments- can be used to cultivate interest and care for older historical periods and for cultural heritage, in general, to promote education and contribute to an improvement of various social groups' lives

Un mondo migliore è possibile... Il ruolo sociale ed educativo degli archivi storici dell'industria

### *SINTESI*

Gli archivi sono arche di conoscenza. Ciò nonostante, il loro potenziale non è stato esplorato ed utilizzato come si sarebbe dovuto. Gli archivi storici dell'industria appartengono ad una categoria di archivi che può contribuire molto ed in molti modi a svariati gruppi sociali. Il loro contenuto è relativo ad un periodo storico recente ed è redatto in un linguaggio che può essere letto e capito dai più, dal momento che non richiede conoscenze specifiche, come la paleografia. Nelle regioni industrializzate o recentemente de-industrializzate la gente ha un attaccamento affettivo al proprio passato o presente industriale che può venir utilizzato per la promozione degli archivi industriali. Il recente passato – archivi industriali e monumenti industriali – può essere usato per coltivare l'interesse e la cura per i più vecchi periodi storici e per il patrimonio culturale, in generale, per promuovere la cultura e per contribuire alla crescita della vita dei vari gruppi sociali.

Boljši svet je mogoč... Družbena in izobraževalna vloga zgodovinskih gospodarskih arhivov

### *IZVLEČEK*

Arhivi so skrinje znanja. Kljub temu pa njihov potencial še ni bil raziskan in uporabljen tako, kot bi bilo potrebno. Gradivo gospodarskih arhivov sodi v tisto kategorijo gradiva, ki lahko na različne načine veliko prispeva k razumevanju različnih družbenih skupin. Vsebinsko se gradivo nanaša na nedavno zgodovinsko obdobje in je pisano v jeziku, ki ga lahko bere in razume večina ljudi, saj ne zahteva posebnih znanj, kot npr. poznavanje paleografije. V industrializiranih in nedavno de industrializiranih področjih so ljudje emocionalno vezani na njihovo gospodarsko preteklost ali sedanjost, kar pa se lahko uporabi tudi za promoviranje gospodarskih arhivov. Nedavno post-industrijsko in post-gospodarsko arhivsko gradivo in spomenike lahko uporabimo za zbujanje zanimanja in skrbi za starejša zgodovinska obdobja, in kulturno dediščino na sploh, pospeševanje izobraževanja in prispevanje k izboljšanju življenja posameznih družbenih skupin.

Ένας καλύτερος κόσμος είναι εφικτός... Ο κοινωνικός και εκπαιδευτικός ρόλος των ιστορικών βιομηχανικών αρχείων

### *ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ*

Τα αρχεία αποτελούν κιβωτούς γνώσης. Παρόλα αυτά, η δυναμική τους δεν έχει διερευνηθεί και χρησιμοποιηθεί όπως θα έπρεπε. Τα ιστορικά βιομηχανικά αρχεία ανήκουν σε μια αρχειακή κατηγορία που μπορεί να συνεισφέρει πολλά σε ποικίλες κοινωνικές ομάδες με πολλούς τρόπους. Το περιεχόμενό τους συνδέεται με μια πρόσφατη ιστορική περίοδο και είναι γραμμένο σε μια γλώσσα που μπορεί να διαβαστεί και να γίνει κατανοητή από πολλούς, καθώς δεν απαιτεί ειδικές γνώσεις όπως, παλαιογραφία. Στις βιομηχανοποιημένες ή πρόσφατα αποβιομηχανοποιημένες περιοχές ο κόσμος έχει ένα συναισθηματικό δεσμό με το βιομηχανικό παρελθόν ή παρόν του το οποίο μπορεί να χρησιμοποιηθεί για την αξιοποίηση

των βιομηχανικών αρχείων. Το πρόσφατο παρελθόν- τα βιομηχανικά αρχεία και μνημεία- μπορεί να χρησιμοποιηθεί για να καλλιεργηθεί το ενδιαφέρον και η μέριμνα για παλαιότερες ιστορικές περιόδους και για την πολιτιστική κληρονομιά, εν γένει, για την προώθηση της εκπαίδευσης και για να συνεισφέρει στη βελτίωση των ζώων πολλών κοινωνικών ομάδων.

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## The potential of historical industrial archives

Nowadays, history is taught via television and cinema blockbusters and it is a rather boring school lesson. Therefore, there is a need for the citizens to embrace their historical past, with the help of historical sources, which will help them learn and understand historic facts. There is a perception that only specialized scientists have the ability to consult historical sources but this perception can change and the historical industrial archives can contribute to that.

The industrial archives have a series of characteristics which makes them “user friendly”. They are related to a large part of the population, which has worked in industries. They cover a relatively recent past and the language used in their documents is mostly simple and does not require specialized knowledge so as to be understood. They are related to a broad range of scientific fields, from labor matters to the development of business accounting systems. So, they are addressed to a large audience which can develop a sentimental relation with them, beyond research activities.

According to these facts, the archival or other organizations which manage historical industrial archives can organize various actions to promote and connect them with the general public, which can have double profits: public awareness for the importance of industrial heritage and the promotion of historical past’s study.

The historical industrial archives cover a period from the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century until nowadays. This time is rich in facts and developments which keep busy lots of scientists from various fields. The information which derives from the historical industrial archives for this period is very important as it reflects the global economic and social status. This is a characteristic of the historical industrial archives which remains unchangeable through time. In the future, the historical industrial archives which are now created will be a valuable source of information.

For a lot of people or possible users, an industrial archive has been identified with accounting books and relative material in which a few people could be interested. But the truth is different. Of course, a part of the industrial archives, quite big actually, consists of the documents which describe the financial industrial activity. But, there are series of documents which are addressed to the medium user. Perhaps, the most attractive part is the one related to the personnel. It consists of documents concerning wages, social security and the personnel’s relation with the industry. There are also a large number of very personal documents such as birth, military, municipal and family certificates, photos, and personal letters addressed to the industry’s management which reveal the human dimension of a business archive.

The personnel series is one of the assets the archival organizations/ depositories have so as to approach more and new users. Especially, in the terms of a small community, such as a regional town, where communication between citizens and archival depositories is easier and more direct, such an approach could have visible results and be an example for its implementation into larger social groups. More specifically, as the language of the documents of the historical industrial archives is modern, it is obvious that this material can be consulted with a relative easiness by many users. Also, many people who have never been involved with historical research, try to learn or they would like to know details of their past. A lot of people may be indifferent but there a lot of others who do not know where to look for or they think that they do not have the adequate knowledge or qualifications as they do not hold a university degree. Many local communities have been identified with industrial activity and for some others it is part of their recent history. In these cases, local authorities should connect the citizens’ needs with the need for the historical memory’s preservation by inspiring citizens to participate in actions for heritage preservation. The motive to participate in such actions can easily become personal. The personnel series of historical industrial archives can be this motive. Many families had one or more members of their families who worked in the local industries. When these people look at the documents which involve their families and which they can read and understand they develop an im-

mediate relation with the archival material. The sentimental element should not be underestimated when it concerns the user's liaison with the archival material. Here, the goal is not to approach people, who would evidentially consult this material because of their professional or scientific activity, but to connect the medium citizen with the archival depository through the valuable tool of historical industrial archives. A non specialized user feels that in an archival depository there are not only documents which concern a particularly educated minority, but also a number of documents addressed to him in a more direct way, in terms of time and technique.

Of course, there are not only the personnel documents which have the potential to attract more users. In many industrial archives there are unique area or city maps, plenty of photos of machinery equipment, business happenings and galas, buildings, catalogs of enterprises which represent a business' clientele and rare technically specialized printed material. All this material is a mirror of the time periods, during which, the industries have been active and can be "user friendly". It is immediate as it does not need a lot of processing so as to be understood and it is also unique.

An archival or other organization which preserves industrial archives can organize events addressed to the general public so as to attract more possible users. But this is only the beginning. If the archival organizations do not organize more and various activities, they will not attract more users.

The collaboration between archival and educational organizations is very important which if it is conducted properly and regularly can lead to very positive results.

The implementation of educational programs, according to the philosophy of museum educational programs, is an activity which has the potential to approach younger social groups which are more receptive to knowledge. Of course, this activity demands a lot of work on behalf of the archival organizations so as to locate the documents which will support the programs, their elaboration and the way they should be presented. In addition, there is a need for further training of the archival organizations' personnel in order to support such activities.

### Organizing exhibitions of historical industrial archives

Exhibiting archival material is not an easy case. The choice of documents should have an educational aim. The exhibition's organizers should adjust the exhibition to the society to which they address. If the medium educational level is low, the exclusive exhibition of documents which only they can read will not lead to the users' connection to the archival material. Therefore, they should have deep knowledge of the industrial archives' content and the material's choice should be done in accordance with the local community and its particularities but also with the aim to locate archival documents which can offer satisfactory information for the industrial heritage. A simple placement of documents in showcases is of no use for anybody. First of all, the industry's or eventually and the archive's history should be visible from a central point of the exhibition's hall. This information can be available in the form of brochures, flyers or even recorded which users can listen to with the help of headphones, if this service is available from the archival organization which is responsible for the exhibition. In the case of a community which has been identified with industrialization, the organization of such an exhibition can become a collective activity as most users can have the chance to discover their own history through this material and often they can give complementary information from personal or family testimonies. In this case, the archivists responsible for the exhibition, after coming in touch with these people, they could train them to become the users' guides at the exhibition. The ideal case is the co-organization of such exhibitions from archival organizations and industrial museums/ centers.

### Cooperation of archival authorities with the educational community

All educational institutions of all levels can provide possible archives' users. The results which can follow by the training of these groups as users give the perspective of change in the approach of industrial heritage but also of culture and knowledge, in general.

In various countries, there have been established courses of local history for secondary education students. In many cases, these courses are organized with the help of the local archival authorities. Archivists teach local history based on the documents of the local archives and they organize visits to the archives so as the students to see and study these documents, in case they can do so. So, there can

be cooperation between the educational boards and the archival authorities to implement the teaching of industrial history in the teaching of local history, in communities where industrialization has been intense. One of the preconditions for the success of such an activity is the good and deep knowledge of the local industrial history and the related archival material on behalf of the archivist- teacher.

Except for the course of local history, the archival authorities can organize exhibitions especially for students and introduce them to industrial heritage. In younger ages, when children need to experience learning as a game, there can be organized educational programs in the spirit of museum educational programs with which children have the possibility to play and learn what an archive is, the elaboration works it needs and also more specialized subjects as what industrial heritage is and its presence in the region they live. As a result, children become accustomed to the archival premises and the archival material and slowly they learn to include them in their activities.

Teenagers can be taught to do research in archival material. As the documents of historical industrial archives are written in a modern language and they are dated quite recently- in comparison with other archival material- they are quite approachable for students of secondary education. For them it is a discovery of a new world when they realize that they have the possibility to study sources for the history of their region or and their family, despite their age. Archivists should give directions to the students and show them how to use the archival material. A choice of the most representing and “friendly” documents should be done. The aim of these activities is not to create assistants but to train new users.

The training of young people in the use of historical industrial archives results into sensitive citizens in the matters of cultural heritage and scientific research. The stimulation of young people can be the basis to stop making and correct mistakes in the field of cultural heritage and put the matter of the management of industrial heritage on to a new basis. The use of industrial archives can be the beginning for their further training in historical and cultural matters and also act as a means of simplification of a cultural good which, until now, seems unreachable for the medium citizen.

All this, presupposes that the archival authorities will be ready to become open to society and be in constant cooperation with it. Also, there should be a different approach of the material of historical industrial archives on behalf of the archivists themselves. They should first convince themselves for the importance of this kind of material so as to convince all others.

#### *SUMMARY*

The industrial archives have a series of characteristics which makes them “user friendly”. They are related to a large part of the population, which has worked in industries. They cover a relatively recent past and the language used in their documents is mostly simple and does not require specialized knowledge so as to be understood. They are related to a broad range of scientific fields, from labor matters to the development of business accounting systems. So, they are addressed to a large audience which can develop a sentimental relation with them, beyond research activities. According to these facts, the archival or other organizations which manage historical industrial archives can organize various actions to promote and connect them with the general public, which can have double profits: public awareness for the importance of industrial heritage and the promotion of historical past’s study. Many local communities have been identified with industrial activity and for some others it is part of their recent history. In these cases, local authorities should connect the citizens’ needs with the need for the historical memory’s preservation by inspiring citizens to participate in actions for heritage preservation. The collaboration between archival and educational organizations is very important which if it is conducted properly and regularly can lead to very positive results. The implementation of educational programs, according to the philosophy of museum educational programs, is an activity which has the potential to approach younger social groups which are more receptive to knowledge.

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