

Long Life Training for Archivists: a Present and Future Challenge

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ABSTRACT

Archival profession faces in nowadays more challenges than ever before. It has always been multidisciplinary but the adoption of new technologies has completely changed archival profession which has become quite demanding. Archival science in the Information Era has been transformed and the people involved in it need to educate and train themselves continuously. The diffusion of information in new grounds asks for new skills, fresh ideas and open minds but with respect to the principles of archival science. Archivists now and in the future need to be continuously trained in new principles, standards and techniques but with big respect to the beginnings of archival thought.

Formazione permanente per gli archivisti: una sfida presente e futura

SINTESI

La professione archivistica si trova ad affrontare al giorno d'oggi più sfide che mai. È sempre stata una professione multidisciplinare, ma l'adozione di nuove tecnologie ha cambiato completamente la professione archivistica, che è diventata molto impegnativa. La scienza archivistica nell'era dell'informazione è stata trasformata, e le persone coinvolte hanno bisogno di educarsi e formarsi continuamente. La diffusione d'informazioni in nuovi settori richiede nuove competenze, idee fresche e mente aperta, ma con rispetto per i principi della scienza archivistica. Ora e in futuro gli archivisti devono essere costantemente formati a nuovi principi, norme e tecniche, ma con grande rispetto per gli inizi del pensiero archivistico.

Življenjsko izobraževanje za arhivista: sedanji in prihodnji izzivi

IZVLEČEK

Dandanes se arhivska stroka sooča z več izzivi kot kdajkoli prej. Multidisciplinarnost je bila vedno del te stroke, toda vključitev novih tehnologij jo je naredila posebej zahtevno. Arhivska znanost se je v informacijski dobi preoblikovala, kar zahteva stalno izobraževanje in usposabljanje arhivskih delavcev. Difuzija informacij z novih področij potrebuje novo strokovno znanje, sveže ideje in odprte glave, a hkrati upoštevanje arhivskih načel. Današnji in prihodnji arhivisti se morajo vedno znova usposabljati na področju novih principov, standardov in tehnik, hkrati pa ohraniti veliko spoštovanje do začetkov arhivske znanosti.

Δια Βίου εκπαίδευση των αρχειονόμων: Μια πρόκληση του παρόντος και του μέλλοντος

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Το επάγγελμα του αρχειακού αντιμετωπίζει στις μέρες μας περισσότερες προκλήσεις από ποτέ. Υπήρξε πάντα ένα διεπιστημονικό επάγγελμα αλλά η υιοθέτηση των νέων τεχνολογιών το άλλαξε εντελώς και το έχει καταστήσει ιδιαίτερα απαιτητικό. Η αρχειακή επιστήμη στην Εποχή της Πληροφόρησης έχει μεταμορφωθεί και τα άτομα που τη θεραπεύουν οφείλουν να επιμορφώνονται και να εκπαιδεύονται συνεχώς. Η διάχυση της πληροφορίας σε νέα εδάφη απαιτεί νέα προσόντα, φρέσκες ιδέες και ανοιχτά μυαλά αλλά πάντα με σεβασμό στις αρχές της αρχειακής επιστήμης. Οι αρχειονόμοι τώρα και στο μέλλον πρέπει να εκπαιδεύονται σε νέα πρότυπα, αρχές και τεχνικές αλλά με μεγάλο σεβασμό στις απαρχές της αρχειακής σκέψης.

Archival profession is deeply misunderstood by the general public, which identifies it with dust, microbes and strange, not quite friendly people hidden behind piles of ancient documents. The nature of this profession is complex and archival processes need a long time to be fulfilled, but these are things that most people ignore and so, there was created a false image of archivists and their profession.

Apart from dust and spiders, what people ignore about archivists is that one needs to be almost a mental superman to do his job well. This means that an archivist needs to have deep knowledge on various scientific fields, apart from his archival education and training. An archivist has to know history, paleography, chemistry, various languages and management and recently he owes to be fluent in the new technologies. In addition to all these, he has, to specialize, in most cases, in the field which covers the archives he preserves. This is the case if he has a permanent position in an archival institution from the beginning of his career. If he changes posts for some years, coping with various kinds of archival material, he has to adapt to these kinds, each time.

Time has been always an issue for archivists. Recording, classification, inventorying, evaluation and archival editions are slow procedures, which, in older times, were much slower. All archival issues need a lot of details to be fulfilled, and details take time, as well. For centuries, archivists had to fight against time in order to accomplish an archival issue from beginning to end and often, it took them a lifetime. They also had to cope with space, where and how to preserve their material. Time and space, in addition with, the multilevel nature of archival material, turned archivists into chaotic scientists, absorbed by the goals of their work, having lost touch with society.

Times change and the appearance of new technologies over the last forty years changed everybody's life and archivists' life, as well. At the beginning of this new technological era, archivists discovered that they could save their work in computers' hard disks, in floppy disks and to print documents they wanted but the revolution that took place, in the last twenty years, in the field of computer science changed archival profession forever. New technologies save time and space for archivists, but they also make their profession more demanding than ever and with a new, open perspective towards society.

In nowadays, archivists need to add to their classical skills, technological efficiency, as well. Their profession is transformed, and a lot of them feel that they cannot deal with this revolution. It is too much for them. All new technological implementations in archives have added new duties to archivists, and this is something that has muddled them. Often enough, they do not know how and when they will be able to fulfill their obligations. A lot of contemporary archivists specialize in areas of the new technologies, and they carry out similar duties when they start working in an archival institution. If they are the only ones who can accomplish technological tasks, soon enough, they become detached from the origins of the archival profession. For this reason, all archivists older and younger should be in touch with technology. As a reaction to technological invasion, a lot of older archivists want to stay attached to what they used to do before technology changed everything. Unfortunately, this is not possible in contemporary society. Whoever does not implement the new technologies in what he does, stays behind in his field. Also, there is another archival mentality which supposes that archivists should pay more attention to new technologies than to traditional practices. It is a mistaken mentality as it will lead steadily to the disappearance of archival science. Balance is the key for modern archivists. No one can and should erase centuries of archival thought and theory which led archival science to its present form. Technology is just a tool, a quite useful one, which is totally useless if it does not have a strong theoretical background. In addition, technology is easier to learn than everything else an archivist needs to know.

It is true that, modern technologies seem to be like strong winds, which carry everything along with them. Undoubtedly, they made life easier, and human communication became amazingly fast and direct. They forced archival institutions to expose themselves to society and request a new place in it. Today, most archival institutions own a web site, where they present the archival material they preserve, their premises, activities and their relations with other institutions. EAD-DTD gives the opportunity for the representation of archival information in an electronic environment. It is a revolution! Users do not need to visit an archival institution so as to ask for the archives it preserves and then to see what they contain. They can do it on-line. They have the possibility to see and study unique, digitized material, which is available on-line. Not only have the users benefited from this change.

Archival institutions finally have the chance to show the wealth they preserve and how influential and difficult their role is. They can be in touch with users and other institutions, as well. They have the possibility to promote the extraordinary knowledge they owe to maintain in all ways they wish and they can. Archival institutions are not dark and scary buildings with strange staff, anymore. They are enthusiastic beehives serving society. This new reality demands more staff for archival institutions, which is not always possible. An allocation of duties, which have been multiplied due to new technologies, should take place in archives, but this does not imply that there will be archivists of two categories: the technology literates and technology non literates. If there are these two archivists' categories, there will be a problematic cooperation between them, as both categories will ignore basic knowledge, theoretical and technological and the final result will not be satisfying. The best practice for an archival organization is to train its staff, equally, in modern technologies and distribute the various tasks. These facts mostly take place in historical archives' institutions where tradition meets the new era of technology. There are new kinds of archives born in the last decades, such as the audiovisual and digital archives. In these archives, technology is everywhere, as it gave birth to them, but this does not suppose that archivists, who work there, should be technology maniacs. Archival material has not only form but content, as well. For this reason, even archivists, who work at these modern and specialized archives, should also have a traditional and broad archival education, so as to understand and promote the content of these archives. As, various archival schools, silently, try to create different kinds of archivists or others try to promote only technology, it is vital for the archival world to insist on archivists' broad and traditional education. Archivists are not just classifiers. They are responsible towards a part of human heritage; therefore, they must be highly qualified scientists.

As far as it concerns archives' opening to society, it is a new role for them, which is quite demanding, but particularly challenging, as well. It supposes that, especially via Internet, an unlimited number of possible users will have the chance to inform and educate themselves with the help of the preserved material which is unique. This is a momentous responsibility for archivists. They have to choose which material to make available or/ and promote to users, the reasons to do it and how to do it efficiently. This demands a lot of work and traditional, technological procedures, and so, archivists cannot rest on their laurels any more. The most important element of this new situation, for archivists, is that they have to use their social skills and often to step out of their organizations. They have to answer to the questions of various users, create training groups for the education of children and adults, organize exhibitions of archival material inside or outside their premises, and participate in various cultural events. Also, the archives' web presence demands a constant contact with many remote users. There has to be a continuous interaction between web users and the archive, in order to assess its image towards society, and especially to users that do not have the possibility to visit the archive.

Social skills do not have to be innate, but they can be exercised with the help of seminars. Additionally, not all archivists are able to carry out educational tasks because, apart from skills, one must have the will and inspiration. The archivists who are entitled to organize educational actions should have an adequate background with further training especially for archives. If an archival organization does not have staff with such a background, it must choose the archivists, who wish to indulge into these activities.

Of course, there are a lot of archivists who want to continue doing their job quietly without dozens of users coming by and without having to play a role in society but just to assist some specialized scientists; nevertheless, it is the information era and as libraries and museums open to society, so archives must be. Probably, this is the biggest challenge for archival profession in nowadays: its new, extrovert self.

It appears that, if archivists wish to do their job well, now and in the future, they have to be continuously trained in everything new, as all good professionals should do. Archivists should not lose touch with their origins, traditional archival science, as it is the heart of everything they do. Although, it seems, that all the required knowledge and skills, for contemporary archivists, are excessive, one should not forget that archivists are the guards of knowledge and memory, and this has a high price.

SUMMARY

Archival profession has been always difficult and challenging. It demands a lot of qualifications in which, recently there were added technological skills. Information era imposes a new role for archival institutions. Archivists' job is more demanding than ever, and archivists feel that the contemporary demands of their profession exceed their potential. New technologies changed human life forever, and archivists have to balance between traditional archival thought and practices, and the vast dynamic of modern technologies. There is a tendency to abandon tradition but this will eventually eradicate archival science. Even the archivists, who deal with entirely modern archival material, such as audiovisual and digital archives, should have a broad education and traditional archival training, which will enable them to assess and promote the material they preserve. Only balance between traditional archival science and new technologies can lead to a continuous and healthy evolution of archival science and profession. Also, information era forced archival institutions to open themselves to society and engage new roles towards it. Even if, the contemporary archival profession's demands appear extreme, one should never forget that archivists should be highly qualified because they are the guards of a part of human heritage.

Original scientific article

Submitting date: 10.04.2012

Acceptance date: 30.06.2012