Classification Scheme And/Or Aggregation Scheme? A View Based on a Romanian Case

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ABSTRACT

Since 1957, in Romanian methodology for managing records were introduced two tools: *indicatorul termenelor de păstrare* (retention schedule) and *nomenclatorul* (file plan). They were used as separate tools until 1996, when they merged, as *nomenclator arhivistic* (file plan with retention periods). The use of separate tools was re-open for debate with the issue of the specification MoReq2010®. This paper presents the pros and cons of using the two separate tools, both for the physical and digital records.

Classificazione o aggregazione? Uno sguardo basato su un caso romeno

SINTESI

Dal 1957 nella metodologia romena per la gestione documentale sono stati introdotti due strumenti: schema di classificazione e titolario. Sono stati usati come strumenti distinti fino al 1996, quando sono stati uniti col nome di titolario con periodi di ritenzione. L'uso di strumenti separati è stato riaperto al dibattito successivamente alla pubblicazione di MoReq2010®. L'articolo presenta i pro e i contro dell'utilizzo di due strumenti separati, sia per i documenti su supporto tangibile che digitali.

Klasifikacijski načrt in/ali načrt kopičenja? Mnenje, temelječe na romunskem sistemu

IZVLEČEK

V romunski metodologiji upravljanja dokumentarnega gradiva sta bili od leta 1957 uvedeni dve orodji: roki hrambe (*indicatorul termenelor de păstrare*) in klasifikacijski načrt (*nomenclatorul*). Uporabljali so ju ločeno vse do leta 1996, ko sta bili združeni v klasifikacijski načrt z roki hrambe (*nomenclator arhivistic*). Uporaba ločenih orodij je privedla do ponovne debate z izdajo navodila MoReq2010®. Avtor predstavlja v prispevku prednosti in slabosti uporabe dveh različnih orodij tako za dokumente v fizični kot v digitalni obliki.

Schemă de clasificare şi/ori scheme de grupare a actelor? O perspectivă bazată pe o experienţă românească

REZUMAT

Din 1957, în arhivistica românească s-au introdus două instrumente de lucru pentru arhiva la creatori: indicatorul termenelor de păstrare şi nomenclatorul. Ele au fost folosite separat până în 1996 când au fost unificate, sub forma nomenclatorului arhivistic. Existenţa a două instrumente separate a fost însă readusă în discuţie de specificaţia MoReq2010®. Acest articol ia în discuţie avantajele şi dezavantajele folosirii celor două instrumente de lucru separate, atât pentru arhiva fizică, cât şi pentru arhiva electronică.

Introductory remarks

ISO 15489 defines classification as the "systematic identification and arrangement of business activities and/or records into categories according to logically structured conventions, methods and

procedural rules, represented in a classifications system"[1]. This arrangement is a *sine qua non* process in managing records, even though, historically, it recorded different stages. At the "beginning of time", when the number of records generated per unit of time was very small, the simple arrangement of records one after another was enough for the purposes of retrieval and control; the classification meant simply the natural "enumeration" of records. With the development of the bureaucratic activities, the amount of records increased dramatically and demanded new approaches. The easiest way to control them was to group individual items (records) into larger units, that is, to create aggregation such as files[2] or series[3]. In order to formalize this "filing" of records, the units of classification (i.e. the classes) were recorded and formally included in classification schemes, as every employee should put the record in the appropriate file and to manage the aggregation resulted as a whole[4].

At a creating body level, there were, traditionally, two approaches. One very common—the functional (business) classification scheme, that group the records based on the process that generated them; and "organizational" classification scheme that group the series based on the creating offices and departments[5]. No matter the approach, the function of this classification scheme was to "describe standard categories used to organize materials with similar characteristics"[6].

Despite this "common" methodology, one recent product in digital records management— *Mo-Req2010®: Modular Requirements for Records Systems - Volume 1: Core Services & Plug-in Modules*, 2011, published at http://moreq2010.eu/ introduced a "new" approach. On the one hand, the specification allows for the functional classification scheme to be implemented and use. On the other hand, it allows also for an aggregation scheme. Is this approach new, useful and usable?[7] Is there a need for making a difference between the two? Or is it valid only for digital environment?

The MoReq2010 approach

MoReq2010® is the most recent specification of DLM Forum (assumed informally as sharing European Union point of view on the topic) on Electronic Records Management Systems. Beside IT component, every chapter is introducing to the readers the "key concepts", most of them pertaining to records management. In this respect, MoReq2010® brings not only new approach to technology, but also an innovative approach to traditional records management.

The key concepts of classification and aggregation can be found in chapters 5, 6, 201, with a general overview in chapter 1.4.5. According to these provisions, every record in a MoReq2010® compatible records system must be classified[8]. "Classes represent business functions, activities and transactions, and associating a class with a record provides it with a definitive business context that continues to link the record with the business process that generated it… [Also, the business context]… gives it a default disposal schedule"[9].

MoReq2010® states that "while classification is concerned with providing the business context for a record and establishing the relationship between a record and the transactional activity by which

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1. ISO 15489:2001–1.

2. In this paper, we shall understand by "file" an aggregation of records (documents), related by various reasons derived from their content: reference to a certain subject, topic or person. A file has generally records in a limited timespan (generally, one year or until a certain project is finished) and it has the physical form of one or several folders (for large files). Not to be confounded with IT file (datafile). The digital equivalent will be the "folder".

3. In this paper, we shall understand by "series" the whole records included in a class of the classification scheme.

4. This simplistic presentation is intentional.

5. A good insight on classification in Stuart Anthony ORR, *Functions-based classification of records: is it functional?,* Northumbria University, 2005, available at http://www.irma.is/Portals/6/frodleikur/ Orr_Functional Classification.pdf (accessed 25 May 2012).

6. Richard PEARCE-MOSES, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, at http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=603. A good presentation of classification mechanism in records management in E. SHEPHERD - G. YEO, *Managing Records: a handbook of principles*, London 2003, pp. 81–100.

7. This topic was also approached in a Twitter conversation in 27 February 2012 (see http://thecardigancontinuum.wordpress.com/, February 24, 2012 posting).

8. In this paper, except for a specifically indicated situation, the meaning of term " classified" does not mean "secret".

9. MoReq2010®, heading 5.2.1.

it was created, aggregation describes the activity of assembling related records together"[10]. Records are also placed in aggregations for business convenience, to allow them to be managed or use collectively, as a whole. Aggregation are considered particular important, because "the aggregation as a whole may thereby collectively provide a vivid descriptive narrative of its subject"[11].

A breaking point with traditional records management classification systems is the acceptance for heterogeneous aggregations that contain records with different business classifications. That is, some records can be classified as belonging to different classes, while they will be placed in the same folder, as one coherent aggregation. "This allows, for example, the creation of project aggregations, where all the records relating to a particular project undertaken by an organisation are aggregated together, regardless of which transaction produces them"[12]. In this way, "MoReq2010® supports heterogeneous aggregations containing records with different classes, such as those generated as a result of separate business transactions, activities or even functions"[13]. As a representation, the MoReq2010 approach would look different than traditional records management classification, at least as different as Yahoo! Mail or Hotmail vs. Gmail approach[14]. Traditionally, in physical world and/or in Yahoo! Mail, the records were "put" into a container, be it folder, box or virtual folder; the buzz word for the action would be "(put) into". In Gmail, as in MoReq2010 approach, the record entity is marked with a "label"; the buzz word would be "(stick) onto". In traditional way, entity classified and arranged in one place can be also put somewhere else only by duplicating the original. In the new proposed approach, the original record "stays" where it is, while the "labels" can be classified in any way possible[15].

Therefore, "by providing a clear distinction between the related concepts of classification and aggregation, MoReq2010® allows for greater flexibility in making planning decisions about what records to keep together, combined with what classification scheme to use and how to apply it"[16].

A Romanian case: aggregation and classification

Once the Communism came to power in Romania, alike with other fields of activity, the archival area was also strongly influenced by Soviet professional perspectives. As a result, based on some internal developments too, in 1957, a new framework for records and archives management in Romania was formally defined[17]. The State Archives got extended responsibilities on supervising and control of the managing records activity undertaken by all types of organization across the country. In this respect, State Archives had the authority of approval over two important tools: in*dicator al termenelor de păstrare* (= retention schedule) and *nomenclator* (= file plan).

Before introducing the two tools, several remarks should be made. Firstly, the time span for using these tools coincides with a centralized state system and all provisions should be understood in this context. Then, there were some developments in regulation, but they did not change basic functions of these tools. At last, the legislation and the literature on topic showed some terminological inconsistencies, so the intentions of regulator are not always clear. Such situation will be solved using also the author's own knowledge on different situations.

Indicatorul termenelor de păstrare (the retention schedule) was introduced by the *General Instruc-*

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10. MoReq2010®, title 1.4.5.

11. MoReq2010®, heading 6.2.1.

12. MoReq2010®, heading 201.2.4.

13. MoReq2010®, heading 201.2.4.

14. These commercial products are not included here for their market value, but as example of entities with opposite philosophies.

15. This is, in fact, the approach of "the Orders of Order", preached by David WEINBERGER in *Everything Is Miscellaneous The Power of the New Digital Disorder*, New York 2007.

16. MoReq2010®, heading 1.4.5. MoReq2010® increases flexibility also by allowing also other types of classification schemes, such as Keyword AAA—a polyhierarchical structure derived from an ISO 2788 compliant monolingual thesaurus.

17. *Decretul pentru înființarea Fondului Arhivistic Național al Republicii Populare Române* (*Decree For The Foundation Of State Archival Fund Of Popular Republic Of Romania* in "Buletinul Oficial" no. 19/26.07.1957 (Due to the international audience of this paper, for a better understanding, we shall provide also the English title; in fact, all the papers were published in Romanian only).

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tions issued by the State Archives in 1957[18]. It was a summary tool, with a structure based on business functions. It was created by the ministries or other central bodies on their economic sector and then it was approved by the State Archives. It was defined as "a structured table, indicating the retention periods, groupings of documentary materials belonging to an institution or organization"[19]. Within this table, the documentary materials were theoretically "aggregated" (based on their "nature" and "informational value") into groupings and a description of such a grouping got a position (also called "article") in the table and a unique code. These groupings were further aggregated based on a common activity, no matter the office of origin. The headings of these last aggregations reflected, in fact, activities and functions in that respective economic sector.

Table 1: Retention schedule (Indicator al termenelor de păstrare)

No.	Title of categories of files, book-registers and other documentary materials	Retention period		Remarks
		Central body	Teritorial division	

To each article it was assigned a retention period, derived from the value of records from that grouping. It must be noticed that retention periods were assigned at collective level and not for every record type and that all the records inside of an article should possessed the same value (classical example, annual reports should not be filed in the same folder with monthly reports, because they present different values). In order to ensure the consistency and standardization, a General Retention Schedule (*Indicator-tip*) was issued by the State Archives[20], comprising the common "documentary material groupings".

A second working tool was *nomenclatorul* (the file plan). This was a detailed tool, hierarchical structured, reflecting the organizational structure of the creating body[21]. It was designed at organizational level and also approved by State Archives. It was a table that comprised all the categories of documentary materials created by every division in a certain organization.

Table 2: File plan (nomenclator)

Division	Departament	Title of the file (abstract of the subject records contain refer to)	Remarks

Each position got a classification code that had to be marked on physical folders, highlighting both the class of the folder and its retention period.

The mechanism envisaged by these tools was based on a cascaded approach. The State Archives outlined the common categories in General Retention Schedule. At the central level, the body regulates the aggregations of records and their retention schedule, for all their records production. At a lower level, each subordinate territorial organisation developed its own file plan, based both on the grouping and by the retention periods established by higher authorities in their retention schedule. Once developed and set, the *nomenclator* was used at the registration room, for dispatching the records received, and in working units, for arranging the records into pre-determined files[22].

18. *Instrucțiuni generale pentru organizarea și funcționarea arhivelor organelor și instiuțiilor de stat, ale organizațiilor economce socialiste și ale organizațiilor obștești* (*General Instructions No. 6720/27.11.1957 For The Organization And Operation Of The Records Centre Of State Bodies And Institutions, Of The Socialist Economic Organisations And Civic Organisations*), Bucharest, 1957 (hereafter: *General Instructions*).

19. *General Instructions, para 21.*

20. *Indicatorul-tip cuprinzător al termenelor de păstrare a dosarelor, registelor și a altor materiale documentare comune organelor și instituțiilor de stat, organizațiilor economice socialiste și organizațiilor obștești* (*General Retention Schedule Comprising Retention Periods For Files, Book-Registers And Other Documentary Materials, Common For State Bodies And Institutions, Socialist Economic Organizations And Civic Organization*), Bucharest, 1959.

21. Teodor NECȘA, *Precizări privind întocmirea si folosirea nomenclatorului si indicatorului în arhivele curente (Notes on constitution and use of file plan and retention schedule in current archives)*, "Revista Arhivelor", 1975, n. 1, p. 61.

22. Emilia COHN, *Nomenclatorul de dosare si indicatorul de termene de păstrare — instrumente de bază în activitatea*

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In 1971, a new archival legislation was adopted[23], that maintained the previous system, with a few improvements. These changes envisaged the change of terminology (no more "grouping of documentary" materials, but "records groupings"[24]) and introduced the retention period also in the file plan:

Tabel 3: Nomenclator (1971–1996)

Branch	Departament	Title of the file (abstract of the subject records contain refer to)	Retention period	Remarks

Also, in the *nomenclator* were introduced not only files, but also other documentary forms, like book-registers, film-rolls etc. covering, in this way, all the records types and aggregation of one organisation[25]. It is also worth to remark that, despite the on-going existence of a centralized system, the archivists decided to abandon the General Retention Schedule and to allow each central economic organization to decide for their records retention periods[26].

These tools was used until 1996[27] when, keeping into account the changes occurred after the fall of communism, mainly the dismantling of centralized state system, it was decided to abandon the centralisation in setting out the *nomenclator* and *indicator* and to merge the two tools used until then. As a result, since 1996, any organisation should only prepare a *nomenclator*, which serves equally as file plan and as a retention schedule. This tool should be approved by departmental branch of the National Archives.

Tabel 4: Nomenclator (after 1996)

Branch	Department	Title of the file (abstract of the subject records contain refer to)	Retention period	Remarks

Regarding retrospectively to these experiences in using tools for managing records, some conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, a centralized complete standardisation of aggregation of records was proved not to be, even under communism, realistic; in real life, organisations prefer to define their own file plan, based on concrete needs. Even this is not particularly important for the purpose of this paper, I consider important to emphasise that the flexibility offered by the classification services in MoReq2010 is definitely welcome and was felt necessary even under centralised systems.

Secondly, the choice to promote the structural approach and not the functional one led to serious issues in practice. The dynamic of organisation divisions is very high; therefore the *nomenclator* becomes very quick obsolete. This generates once more a large number of file plans, because, at least theoretically, every significant change in the structure of an organisation generates a new file plan, and also new class codes, very difficult to manage. Again, the flexibility of MoReq2010® is welcomed.

arhivistică (*The File Plan And The Retention Schedule—Basic Tools In The Management of Records*), "Revista Arhivelor", 1979, n. 1, p. 19.

23. *Decretul 472/1971 privind Fondul Arhivistic Național* (*Decree 472/1971 on National Archival Fund of the Socialist Republic of Romania*), "Buletinul oficial", I, 30.12.1971.

24. Not to be confound with *records group. Records groupings* should be consider as files that can consist of many folders. Also, a file has as cutoff the end of the year, while a category is ending when the activity ceased to be undertaken. On the other hand, the only professional dictionary issued in Romania until now, describe the *indicator* as comprising "records groupings", while the *nomenclator*—"records categories" (*Dicționar al științelor special ale istoriei/Dictionary of the Special Sciences of History*, Bucharest, 1982).

25. *Norme tehnice pentru înregistrarea, gruparea în dosare, selecționarea și păstrarea documentelor scrise și tipărite, a sigiliilor și ștampilelor, de către organizațiile socialiste și celelalte organizații* (*Technical Standards For Registration, Filing, Disposition And Preserving Written And Printed Records, Seals And Stamps, By The Socialist And Other Organizations*), para 17, "RA", 1973, n. 3, p. 515.

26. *Tratatul de arhivistică (Archival Compendium)* (unpublished), Bucharest 1978, p. 222.

27. Legea Arhivelor Naționale (National Archives Act — Law no. 16/1996), "Monitorul Oficial", I, no. 71 din 09.04.1996.

However, in these two cases, the only challenge with unknown answer yet is how to manage too much diversity in filing plans and classification schemes.

Thirdly, the fusion of the filing plan and retention schedule was, in Romania, a natural evolution, considering the lack of clear-cut differences between the two[28]. Despite that, the fusion led to some undesired side effects.

For instance, the way records are aggregating into "groupings" or "categories" was unclear from the very beginning. Initially, regulations were oriented towards the idea of grouping records having the same "content and form" and "value" (i.e., retention period)[29]; but, since the "value" was identified by the *indicator*, and there was no tool to classify the importance of a certain record based at least on record type, it was the free will of every employee that decided what to classify in one category. This led, in time, to "fat files", full of transient or short-time necessary records, but classified as having long retention periods, even "permanent". In order to avoid such situations, the further regulations stipulated that, even if the records have the same forms, content ant type, if they have different retention periods, they should be in different categories in *nomenclator*[30]. However, this provision collides with practical needs of an organisation, to group all their records pertaining to one activity into one file, no matter their final fate…

Another side effect of merging the tools was the total chaos of retention periods. Since every economic field has its own needs and line regulation, since every organisation (or organisation management) has its own perspective, since every departmental branch of the National Archives has its own findings on facts, all this "democratisation" and "decentralisation" lead to huge discrepancies, both in file plans and in retention periods. Often, one can find that two City Councils, despite the same regulations and functions, have different file plans and retention periods.

At last, a *nomenclator* is now made, effectively, for the future. That means if an organisation failed to organise its records in the past, it has no tool for retro-planning the filing and to determine retention periods. It would be necessary to prepare a classification tool not only for the future, but also for the past, which, again, would lead to the existence of several classification schemes in one organisation.

Closing remarks: what good from MoReq2010®?

At the beginning of this paper, we posed several questions related to the universal validity and the novelty of classification and aggregation approach in MoReq2010®.

So, is this approach new? Definitely not. We have presented here the Romanian methodology that is not at all unique: a similar manner of working can be also found at least in France[31]. There were, therefore, practices of dissociating the two processes (classification and aggregation), precisely on the same ground explained in MoReq2010®: classification, the one that determine the value of record/grouping of records may, in various contexts, differ from aggregation-based on pragmatic reasons.

This dissociation also allows for solving some real-life issues. The existence of classified (secret) records, for instance, pertained to a subject, may require physical preservation of parts of the file, in separate locations. Physically, they are two separate aggregations. Based on the content, they relate to the same subject, so they are a unit and so may be classified. No matter of environment (physical or digital) for records, having two different tools is useful.

However, what is even more useful is the implementation of this approach in digital environment. This will allow what it is quite impossible in physical environment: appraisal and disposition at record level, not only to grouping level. In such circumstances, it is likely that those developments

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28. Not only the use, but also terminology was confusing. Despite it was assumed they are classification tool, the name of "units" within a *nomenclator* and *indicator* varied (category, grouping, article, but never class); the "title" of this unit was "title of file" or "title of category" or "abstract of file, book-register" etc., which led to further confusions with file lists, for instance.

29. *General Instructions, para 29. See also* T. NecŞa, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

30. *Instrucţiuni privind activitatea de arhivă la creatorii şi deţinătorii de documente (Instructions concerning the records management activities at records creators and holders)*, Bucharest 1996 , art. 11.

31. *Abregé d'archivistique*, Paris 2007, pp. 77–82.

where the file plan merged with retention schedule ought to divide them again, in order to manage the new features. On the other hand, despite IT sector opinion, defining the value of a record will not be reliable enough to be based on record type solely. Records typology and standardisation would require a lot of effort, in order to make the content and its value consistent across different institutional behaviours. Once this task accomplished, an automated disposal of certain ephemeral records (or semi-automated disposal for other short-time preserved records) will be possible, based on their classification (read *retention periods*), no matter in which aggregation they will be arranged. But this will only be possible for digital environment, since, even precisely identified, one has not the resources to "scan" each physical folder to eliminate a useless record as an item.

Of course, a great challenge for such a process stays in disposing without spoiling the integrating context for remaining records. It is very easy to dispose different records, but, as it is common place in archival knowledge, different contexts defines different values. An investigation over an air crash might not be relevant for permanent preservation. But, if that air crash revealed the existence of some war plans, for instance, the records pertaining to that investigation might be considered as having enough value for long term preservation. May these circumstances be automatically detected by a machine? Definitely not, at last with nowadays tools.

Therefore, distinct tools for classification and aggregation are useful in practice both for physical and digital environments. For digital records, the separation seems more appropriate and more useful in a proper disposition of useless records. Despite that, at least in this stage of development, the human input on both processes seems mandatory for a proper outcome.

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SUMMARY

Since 1957, in Romanian methodology for managing records were introduced two tools: *indicatorul termenelor de păstrare* (retention schedule) and *nomenclatorul* (file plan). They were used as separate tools until 1996, when they merged, as *nomenclator arhivistic* (file plan with retention periods). The use of separate tools was re-open for debate with the issue of the specification MoReq2010®. This paper presents the pros and cons of using the two separate tools, both for the physical and digital records. The conclusions of the analysis showed that, independent of environment, there might be a use for separate tools that formalize aggregation and classification schemes. However, in digital environment the advantages of using two tools are undeniable, allowing for a more effective classification and disposition. Despite that, there are some issues where a human input is mandatory for a proper, controlled outcome.