

The second edition of ISAAR (CPF) and authority control in systems for archival descriptive systems

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Foreword

The process of developing standards for archival description started, at the end of the eighties, on the initiative of the International Archives Council that appointed an *ad hoc* Commission for descriptive standards in 1989. During the first half of the nineties the Commission produced the two final documents that are the basic cornerstones of the above process.

The first document, the International Standard of Archival Description (General) (ISAD [G]) showed the basic principles of archival description starting from the statement of its articulation according to a hierarchy of levels proceeding from the general (fonds) to the particular (item), thus reflecting the typical organization of fonds internally structured into series, sub-series, archival items and documentary items. ISAD (G) also identified the descriptive elements appropriate for archival description independent from medium or characteristics of documents, fonds structure and level of description.

ISAD (G) underwent a revision process between 1997 and 2000 and at the July 2000 Seville International Congress on archives a second edition was issued that may presently be regarded as the authoritative version of the international standard for archival description. It is also the reference source for the implementation of the national standards that are being developed – with different schedules and features – within the various archival communities in many countries, often in relation to the accomplishment of shared projects of on-line description of archives.

The second document, or rather the second standard, produced by the *ad hoc* commission was the International Standard Archival Authority Record (Corporate Bodies, Persons, Families), the standard for the implementation of authority files for creators of archives. This standard is presently under a revision process that started in 2001, it will be completed on occasion of the International Archives Conference to be held in Wien in 2004, where its final second edition will be issued.

In these months this process is at a crucial point because during the last meeting of the Commission for Descriptive Standards, held in Rio de Janeiro from 19th to 22nd November, a first draft of the new version of the standard was agreed upon. The archival community has been asked to voice comments and observations, previous to its final approval at the next meeting of the Commission. In this paper I will try and relate the new features in the latest edition of ISAAR (CPF), before that, I will expound what ISAAR (CPF) has meant and means for the international archival community.

Why ISAAR (CPF) is important

I believe we are not far from the truth when we say that ISAAR (CPF) has been and is – probably even more than ISAD (G) – a real turning point in the theory and practice of archival description. Furthermore, this standard appears, in many ways, a tool by which we may overcome some theoretical doubts the archival profession has been involved with for long and on which there was much thinking and discussing in the last decades of the 20th century, particularly in some national settings, like Italy, the one I obviously know best and the one I will often refer to in this paper.

Creators of archives have always been at the core of archival description and have always been held the basic access point to them. The person who enters an archive – Francesco Bonaini, founder of

the State Archives in Florence, declared 150 years ago – , must look for institutions (i.e. creators), not for subjects, thus distancing himself from previous attempts at arranging and presenting archival documents on the base of topics classification systems that, in view of collocating apparently similar documents regardless of their origin, cut their links with the context they originated from.

Today these statements sound obvious and granted. Archives are a by-product of a body's, institution's, person's or family's activities and business and of the keeping record systems they implemented, this is an accepted datum, as well as the fact that these individual and corporate entities' nature, structure, historical and biographical events are a basic key to understand and evaluate the documents preserved in the archives they created.

Therefore describing archives means, first of all, providing information about their creators and about the historical context of their creation . By tradition, information about the context of creation ended up in the introductions to finding aids, such as inventories, representing, as a rule, their most relevant component part, particularly in the Italian tradition, deeply influenced by Giorgio Cencetti's lesson. Nevertheless, the creators' administrative and historical or biographical sketches have not always acquired an autonomous and well defined dimension, being interspersed among information of a different nature in those introductions.

We find the same approach in the building of the first computerized systems for archival description in the eighties and nineties, when, as a general rule, information on the context of creation was considered and treated as an integral part of the description of single archival fonds. ISAD (G) too is based on a similar model, although it does not rule out different modes of structuring information "on context".

These are choices – the ones about integrating the description of the creator within the description of archival documents – perfectly in line with the traditional methodological trends of archival description and its theoretical foundations. An approach adequately and effectively reflecting an idea of the relationship between fonds and creators as linear, mono-dimensional, and static (in some interpretations, like the ones prevailing in Italy in the middle decades of the last century, a little mechanical too), an idea that sees a creator as corresponding (or due to correspond) to one and one only archival fonds and conversely, each archival fonds comprising (or likely to comprise) the documents of one and one only creator. In the past this type of approach had consequences of a practical nature, when, in the presence of archives that did not fit the model of direct match between fonds and creators there was a meddling "with the papers" (or, more cleverly, "on the paper" as was the case with *Guida generale degli archivi di Stato italiani*), creating such a match where there was none or there was none left – without even asking why it had been lost or whether it had ever really existed. Thus sometimes separate fonds created by the same creator, were unified in a larger fonds or fonds, made up by documents created by various creators, were separated.

More recently, archivists have become more aware of the inadequacy of the model of one-to-one relationship between archives and creators. This was due both to the remarkable complexity of the structure, functions and keeping records systems of contemporary institution (including the large firms) and to a better comprehension of the processes of transmission of archival materials in the past centuries. These processes, at a closer examination, resulted less linear than the archival theory had stated and envisaged.

In the course of these processes it often happened that archives were either divided or assembled, scattered or merged one into the other, according to modes and courses, often unpredictable, due to binding political-institutional, or bureaucratic-administrative reasons, or, sometimes, to cultural choices and influences.

A model of relationship between creators and archives like the traditional one seems inadequate to give an effective account of the ways in which both the vicissitudes of the transmission of archives and the interrelations of functions and structures in modern organizations affect the forms of accumulation of contemporary documents. In the language of one of the most widespread tools for creating representation models adopted by computer scientist, the entities-relationships model, such a situation does not imply at all a one to one relation between fonds and creators, rather a many to

many relation. This means that , when we represent the relationships taking place between archives and their creators, we must build up a model envisaging the possibility that more than one creator can be linked to one archive and, conversely, that more than one archival fonds can be linked to one creator. A model envisaging a multilinear, multidimensional, dynamic relation in a diachronic perspective.

Now, one of ISAAR (CPF)'s main merits - the one that influenced most not only the forms of organization of archival description, but the very ways of assessing archives - was the fact that it offered a model for separate and linked description of creators and archives apt to represent more effectively the complex and multidimensional relationship between fonds and creators that has been recognized with ever greater awareness in the last decades.

Describing creators autonomously, linking them to the documentation they really produced, independent from the institution preserving it or its place in the hierarchy of levels by which the fonds is divided, actually means, on one side, virtually bringing back to unity the whole archive produced by a given creator, on the other side, respecting the modes of organization and transmission of documents which are always rich in meanings and manifold implications. But founding archival description on such a model implies recognition of the possibility – and the opportunity – of sharing the descriptions of entities among archival institutions (and not only) which might keep documents created by the same creator. This sharing might have international scope, we cannot rule it out. These are some of the main needs which ISAAR (CPF) came from.

As the introduction to the new edition of the standard states, recalling concepts already voiced in the first edition:

There are many reasons why separate capture and maintenance (...) of contextual information is valuable. The practice enables the linking of descriptions of provenance entities to descriptions of records from the same creator(s) that may be held by more than one repository and to descriptions of other resources such as library and museum materials that relate to the entity in question. (1.4).

Where a number of repositories hold records from a given source they can more easily share or link contextual information about this source if it has been maintained in a standardized manner. Such standardization is of international concern when the sharing or linking of contextual information is likely to cross national boundaries. The multinational character of past and present record keeping creates the incentive for international standardization which will support the exchange of contextual information. For example, processes such as colonialization, immigration and trade have contributed to the multinational character of recordkeeping (1.5).

So, sharing of information – first of all information on creators of archives – as pivot of the new way of describing archives, a sharing certainly materialized and spurred by the spread of informatics, and mostly by the nets. I believe we are not exaggerating if we stress the decisive role played by the advent of informatics in the repositioning of the objectives and, most of all, the tools of archival description . If the advent of Internet has generally contributed to bringing to the fore the dimension of communication as non-detachable component part of any intellectual activity, as regards precisely archival institutions, it has been a powerful picklock to break down the self referential quality so common in them and in the cultural behaviour of single archivists, stressing vigorously the need to single out tools that make possible capture and linking of archival descriptions at local, national and international level.

The continuity aspects between the first and the second edition of ISAAR (CPF)

The theoretical principles guiding ISAAR (CPF) and the objectives, just outlined above, it wants to pursue, explain the basic features that, in spite of the notable changes made in the standard in its new edition, represent aspects of deep continuity between the first and the second edition.

Then, ISAAR (CPF) is mainly a tool for the authority control of the names of creators of archives; therefore a tool to standardize what in the new edition is defined “authorised form of name”. ISAAR (CPF), as an international standard, does not define any specific rule for the creation of the “authorised form of names”, it simply refers to the national rules, to the national and international conventions and points the general processes supervising its creation¹. The single national agencies will only have to adopt "codes" of rules on the subject already in existence (first of all the rules on author cataloguing in libraries), or to create them *ex novo*, obviously with an eye to well-established experiences in close subject fields. As regards Italy, for example, the archivists have been following this second course for about one year, thanks to the activity of an *ad hoc* work-group formed on the initiative of the Italian Archival Administration and of the Italian National Archives Association, entrusted to work out rules for the establishment of authority records of creating entities within local, regional and national archival systems.

Clearly, as a tool to optimize access and search in archival description systems, the model offered by ISAAR (CPF) has remarkable similarities and concurrencies with authority control of authors' names in library catalogues. A point stressed in the introduction to new edition of ISAAR (CPF):

Archival authority records are similar to library authority records in as much as both forms of authority record need to support the creation of standardized access points in descriptions. The name of the creator of the unit of description is one of the most important of such access points (1.7).

The differentiating elements start with the chief aspects that the authority records for creating entities take in archival description systems because of the basic role given to the context of production within the archival description. We cite again from the introduction to the new ISAAR.

Archival authority records, however, need to support a much wider set of requirements than is the case with library authority records. These additional requirements are associated with the importance of documenting the context of records creation in archival description and control systems. As such, archival authority records go much further and usually will contain much more information than library authority records (1.8).

Exactly because they are devoted to implement the model of separate description of archives and creators on which we have expatiated above, the authority records of creators are meant to include a much more complex set of information than traditional bibliographic authority records. Thus we find in the "Description area" elements crucial for the description of creators of archives as: the dates of existence (5.2.1); the creator's history and geography (5.2.2); the geographical areas in which he has worked (5.1.3); the legal status (5.1.4); the functions, occupations and activities (5.1.5); the mandate or sources of authority (5.1.6); the internal structure (5.1.7); the information on the political, social, cultural context in which the creator worked (5.1.8); other possibly significant information not included in the previous elements (5.1.9).

We notice that like the first edition, the second too openly admits – and more clearly – a plurality of forms to organize and present the descriptive information: unstructured prose, text structured into fields, links to external electronic resources or an ensemble, changeable according to the features of the specific systems of implementation, of the three forms together.

The most relevant new features in the second edition of ISAAR (CPF)

¹ “Record the standardized form of name for the entity being described in accordance with any relevant national or international conventions or rules applied by the agency that created the authority record. Use dates, place, jurisdiction, occupation, epithet and other qualifiers as appropriate to distinguish the authorized form of name from those of other entities with similar names. Specify separately in the Rules and/or conventions element (5.5.3) which rules have been applied for this element” (5.1.2).

In spite of the certain continuity of the basic features in the first and second edition of ISAAR (CPF), there are many relevant new features in the new version of the standard. We have already hinted at some, as the different organization of the descriptive elements. But it is on the ones with, so to say, a conceptual character, that it is worth lingering longer, stating beforehand that one of the factors that have driven towards a substantial rewriting of the standard was the initiative for the implementation of a DTD XML for the management of context information (the Encoded Archival Context, which is the object of a relevant paper at this conference), started at the same time of the revision of ISAAR (CPF) by a group of American and European archivists.

Very interesting theoretical and practical considerations and contributions issued from this experience, they could but flow back into the process of revision of the international standard for authority control of creators of archives and the need for the greatest possible concurrence of ISAAR (CPF) and EAC.

The first aspect of theoretical relevance, implied in the whole framework of the second edition of ISAAR (CPF), is certainly the greater emphasis on its feature as tool for managing the description of entities, rather than for establishing authority names. As we said above, both the first and the second edition intended and intend both objectives but their relevance and the modes to pursue them have undoubtedly changed. While in the first edition the aim was to manage first of all, standardised headings of creators, providing, in addition, information on their structure and history, today the framework looks overturned. The aim of ISAAR (CPF) 2ed. is to describe those entities (institutions, corporate bodies in general, persons and families) who happen to be creators of archives and form the context of archival material. The formulation of “authorised form of name” is consequent on this objective and aims first of all at univocally identifying those entities rather than making unambiguous similar names, as in the first edition of ISAAR. In short, the stress is on the thing (the real entity), rather than on the name of the thing (the authorised heading).

This difference in the framework can be seen mostly in the way the issue of the relationships among different entities (that is among the various creators) is faced in the new edition of the standard.

While in the first version they were managed mainly as relationships among authority entries, by "see" and "see also" references, in the second edition there is a special area whose purpose is to present the relationships of a given creator with other corporate bodies, persons, families², pointing to: name and identifier of the related entity (5.3.1); category of relationship (hierarchical, chronological, associative) (5.3.2); specific nature of the relationship and its description (5.3.3); dates of relationship (5.3.4). We sense, in this attention to relationships among different entities, the design to implement systems that are not limited to managing the fonds/creators relationship but that, putting the latter at the centre, can represent the complex links existing among the various creators, links that can be important traces from which a researcher can get information on relevant search courses to be verified and followed also inside archives and documents produced by the various creators. But we also sense something more in this model for managing relationships, that is the design to make possible for archival systems to get – so to say –out of themselves, in the direction of prefiguring the sharing of archival authority records in wider environments than the merely institutional ones pointing out links between local and national archival systems, but also between archival systems and descriptive systems or catalographic ones of a different nature (obviously I am thinking mostly of the ones of libraries and museums and, in general, of cultural assets). These connections might take place also by means of linking different entities that are described in specific authority records in diverse systems: for example linking a political party, that is the creator of archival fonds to one of its leaders who, on the contrary, is the author of essays, lectures and so on, recorded in a library catalogue.

² “The purpose of this area is to describe relationships with other corporate bodies, persons and families. In the case of complex hierarchies or administrative changes, refer to national rules for guidance on when to create separate authority records. Where it is decided to describe such complexity in the context of a single authority record, record relevant information in the Internal structure element (5.2.7)” (5.3).

Also other component parts of the new ISAAR (CPF) pursue to break what I have previously defined the self referential quality of archival systems and to envisage the possibility of sharing and linking data and information with catalogues and descriptive systems existing outside of the archival domain . First of all the descriptive element 5. 1. 4. ("Standardized forms of name according to other rules"), whose main aim is just to record authorised forms of names constructed according to different rules from the ones followed by the archival institution compiling the authority record, points to this direction³, for example giving an account of how the record for the same body can be represented according to Regole Italiane di Catalogazione per autore (RICA) or AACR2. I do not think I need to expatiate on the greatly innovative purport of this element. It gives the possibility of establishing authority records to which we can get access through archival descriptive systems by a given heading and that, at the same time, we can retrieve within search systems shared by archives and libraries, by access to a heading built according to different rules . This is a point that it would be worth thinking and discussing upon again because it is but a first limited step towards the design of systems that can talk to each other thanks exactly to the fact that they share and exchange authority records.

Anyway, it must be stressed that in the new version of ISAAR (CPF) there are other steps in the same direction. A section completely devoted to the modes for linking authority records, archival descriptions and information resources of a different nature has been introduced. As stated in the brief introduction to chapter 6 of the new edition of ISAAR (CPF):

Archival authority records are created primarily for the purpose of supporting the linking of descriptions of records creators to descriptions of the records they created. Archival authority records can also be linked to other relevant information resources that are related to the records creator. This Section provides guidance on how such linkages can be created in the context of an archival descriptive control system (6).

The aim of this section is clear. On one hand, it confirms the model of separate description for creators and archival material within an archival descriptive systems and explains their mechanism (also by an attached diagram to the purpose), on the other hand, it shows the possible extension of the same model also towards the linkage between personal bodies and families and other information resources. Here too we have an instance of the courses leading towards archives getting out of themselves I hinted above. The telematic and computer technology, first of all the development of Internet, have given topical interest to the opportunity and the effective possibility of implementing linkages between archival descriptive systems and resources of a different nature, bibliographical resources, descriptions of museum collections, texts, images and so on.

The tools for the authority control of creators look as the most profitable ground for carrying out such an objective. In the same way by which they are linked to the descriptions of archival documents produced, the authority records of persons, families and institutions can be easily linked to information resources related to them, to be found in databases different from the archival ones or in web sites accessible through the Internet.

Thus we witness a perspective encouraging the linkage of archival systems to other resources retrievable on the net, so as to allow, for example, to find, by means of the same authority record of a given person, the descriptive record of the archival fonds created by him, the catalogue records of the books he authored but also, if present in digital format, their texts and so on.

Archival description systems on the Internet and ISAAR (CPF)

Summing up, archivists are more and more convinced that the new technologies can but greatly change many features of archival descriptions. Creating archival descriptions in a digital environment and communicating them through Internet is not the same as doing it on paper, as traditional. In this case too, as in other cases, the medium greatly

³ "To record standardized forms of name for the corporate body, person or family that have been constructed according to rules other than those applied by the agency that has created the authority record." (5.1.4)

influences the structure and contents of information and leads to reassess the forms of organizing knowledge and the modes to acquire it.

It is not by chance then, given the central position the context of production has in the archival description, that the strongest impulses to change methods and praxis of archival description originate from the new models ISAAR (CPF) suggests in an implicit or explicit way.

Separate and related description of archives and creating entities on one side, and central position of the authority records of the latter as linking aids to various information resources on the other side, are the basic features of some of the most interesting archival systems on the web.

In the first case, suffice it to point at the *National Register of Archives* of the *Historical Manuscripts Commission* of the United Kingdom, a database containing thousands of records with brief information on the nature and location of manuscripts and fonds concerning the history of Great Britain, preserved in mainly, but not only, British public and private institutions. In this database the access point is only the creator of the archival material (mainly persons and families, but also corporate bodies and institutions), which is ⁴often scattered in libraries and archives in Great Britain and in other countries which were dominated or influenced by it.

Bright Sparcs has a similar framework but it is even more willing to include non-archival resources; it is a database implemented by the Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre, containing over four thousand biographies of persons who have played a role in the most diverse branches of science, technology and medicine in Australia during the two last centuries. The biographies are linked to descriptions of the archival materials produced by them or related to them, as well as to bibliographic resources of diverse nature⁵.

As regards the Italian situation, the most significant example of this reshaping of the archival finding aids in a digital environment is represented by the on-line guide to the State Archive of Florence. The model of separate and linked description of archival material and creators has been adopted and developed there too so that a research can be done starting from the bodies, institutions, persons or families who created the archival material. One can follow the network of connections and synchronic relationships (for example the correlations of hierarchical subordination among various institutions or the kinship, association, or clientele relationships between persons and families) and diachronic ones (for example the transfer of jurisdiction from one institution to another over time), connections and relationships that can point to as many searching routes and that often influence the organization modes as well as the presence/absence of specific documentary units inside archival fonds. The on-line guide of the Archivio di Stato in Florence is something more than what its name implies. In fact it is not a simple, sheer transposition of a traditional archival guide, based upon descriptions of fonds, series and, at the most, creators. Actually it is a complex information system that widens the boundaries of traditional guides, including the description of a large number of entities beyond the ones usually included in the latter. It implies, for example, a wider idea of the production context of documents than the one referring only to the creator's history and structure. We find in the system the outlines of each politico-institutional phase of the Florentine, Tuscan and national history, in which the producing institutions acted, coalescing inside the various "constitutional" systems in each phase. The link between these wider institutional contexts and the single institutions becomes in itself an extremely relevant historical datum and a crucial tool for critical guidance when for instance, it highlights the considerable stickiness of the administrative and bureaucratic machinery when passing from one "constitutional" system to the other, providing further context data that may prove significant for both a right setting of search strategies among fonds that show very strong connections and references and for evaluating the relevance and overall meaning of the archival documents to be consulted.

Besides, the Florentine system does not look like a database "closed" within itself, quite the reverse, it can be considered a starting point (or only a transit point) inside searching routes that see Internet as their own general horizon. The descriptions of fonds and of creators included in it are linked to archival and non-archival resources present on the site of the Archivio di Stato in Florence or on other sites. Thus links are provided to qualified, reliable sites that study in depth and develop themes referred to in the descriptions both of the fonds and of their creators, or to archival, bibliographic or other resources retrievable on the net and strictly related to the fonds preserved in the Florentine archives or to their creators: I'm thinking of the catalogues and inventories of archival fragmentary sections, or library personal and family fonds displaced to other institutions, even foreign ones, that are subsidiary to material in our Institute, like – just to give an example– Guido Mazzoni's library – whose papers are preserved in the Florentine

⁴ La banca dati del National Register of Archives è all'URL <<http://www.hmc.gov.uk/nra/nra2.htm>>.

⁵ *Bright Sparcs can be consulted at the è consultabile all'URL* <<http://www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/bsparcs/bsparshome.htm>>. *For further details on the project Per maggiori dettagli sul progetto cfr.:* see Gavan McCarthy, *Utilizing the Web to build a network of archival authority records*, in "Janus", XVII (1999), 1, pp. 96-107; Id., *The Structuring of Context: New Possibilities in an XML Enabled World Wide Web*, in "Journal of the Association for History and Computing", III (2000), 1, all'URL: <<http://mcel.pacificu.edu/JAHC/JAHCIII1/ARTICLES/McCarthy/index.html>>

Archives – a collection preserved at Duke University⁶ or the *Spinelli Archive*, part of which is presently owned by Yale University⁷.

These are only examples, not to make a general statement from; yet some of their peculiar aspects – for instance the central position of creators as preferred access point to archival descriptions – even though with diverse modes and at different levels, are rapidly spreading in many archival finding aids on the net and contribute to changing the styles, the methods, and most of all, the structures and the language of archival description. All this implies, and will imply ever more in the future, an inevitable reorientation in the way we consider and do research in archives and in the way users evaluate the results. A change for better we may foretell, or at least hope, also thanks to the international descriptive standards that have been developed for over a decade.

⁶ ~~The inventory can be seen at the Vedine la descrizione all'~~URL: <http://SCRIPTORIUM.LIB.DUKE.EDU/MAZZONI/>.

⁷ ~~Lo The Spinelli Archive is decribed at the è descritto all'~~URL:

<<http://webtext.library.yale.edu/sgml2html/beinecke.spinell.sgm.html>>

ISAAR (CPF)

International Standard Archival Authority Record For Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families

Draft Second Edition

*Prepared by the Committee on Descriptive Standards
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