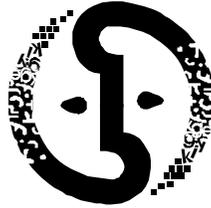


**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES ARCHIVES**



***Committee on Best Practices and Standards /
Comité des normes et des bonnes pratiques***

Report to SAA Description Section, 2008, August

Under the direction of the Programme Commission (PCOM), the Committee on Best Practices and Standards (CBPS) serves as the professional home for the maintenance and development of standards and best practices and related activity within ICA. In the past attention was mainly concentrated on descriptive standards, but from 2004 onwards, the initiative was enlarged to encompass all those professional and related activities that would benefit from the development of standards and best practices, including, for example, appraisal, legislation, dictionaries, *Archipaedia*, archives buildings, etc. ICA/CBPS welcomes the opportunity to participate in the meeting of the SAA Section Description and to make this report regarding its main activities in archival description area.

Development of two new international descriptive standards

To complement ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF), ICA/CBPS has just developed two international standards.

The main scope of archival arrangement and description is to preserve the original context of records creation, by safeguarding their evidential value and their authenticity. Authority records compliant with ISAAR(CPF) make it possible to collect any important information on the records creators, corporate bodies, persons or families. That's the reason for providing separate but linked descriptions of records and of their creators – this enables archivists to develop dynamic and multidimensional descriptive systems.

Functions are often transferred from one corporate body to another. Therefore, it will be much more difficult for the users to reconstitute the context of records creation, if they are only provided with authority records describing corporate bodies that performed the same function. Separated but linked descriptions of functions can improve the understanding of that context and can be used in conjunction with ISAD(G) compliant descriptions and ISAAR(CPF) authority files as a tool for efficient retrieval of archives and creators descriptions in archival descriptive systems. This approach constitutes the basis of the first new international standard (*International Standard for Describing Functions* or *ISDF*) which provides guidance for preparing descriptions of functions of corporate bodies associated with the creation and maintenance of archives.

The second standard aims to enable archivists to describe institutions with archival *holdings* (*International Standard for Describing Institutions with Archival Holdings* or *ISDIAH*).

Information about the institution which holds archival materials, as mentioned or referred to in traditional finding aids, is essential for users to access archival holdings.

With the World Wide Web users have more opportunity to access online catalogues and archival information systems describing records held by a number of different institutions with archival holdings. Connecting records descriptions with information about creators and holders is essential to provide users with a comprehensive understanding of the archival material described.

ISAD(G) provides guidance for the description of '*fonds*' and their component parts. ISAAR(CPF) provides guidance for the creation of authority record information about the creators of archival materials. ISDF provides guidance for the description of functions of records creators. To make an archival information system more usable, a separate standardized description of holders of archives can be useful. This is the purpose of ISDIAH.

Both standards were made available on the web, reviewed and revised based on input during the vetting process. They were presented to the Program Commission with a report on the process that was followed and forwarded to the Executive Committee for formal endorsement. ISDF and ISDIAH are available in English, in French, in Spanish, in Portuguese and in Romanian on ICA web site, including examples of applications in different languages (<http://www.ica.org/en/node/38665> and <http://www.ica.org/en/node/38884>).

International Archival Congress 2008

ICA/CBPS held its annual meeting during the International Archival Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2008, 21-27 July. The Committee also organized two sessions and four workshops on archival description.

The first session concerned ICA and descriptive standards. Standards: What? Why? Who develops standards? What are the principles for developing standards? What is the history of ICA and standards? The start point was the 1980's with the development of the first standards for different reasons: resources economy, better information retrieval and exchange information. In 2000, the Committee on Descriptive Standards also developed guidelines for the preparation and presentation of archival finding aids. The recent evolution is the awareness of the fact that the description involves records, creators and functions. More participation of Latin-American, African, Arabian and Asian countries is required. It is also suggested to create an archive of national description standards and translations.

The second session was devoted to the presentation of the 2 new international description standards, ISDF and ISDIAH.

4 workshops were also organized:

- strategies of implementation of ISAD(G);
- strategies on joint implementation of ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF);
- strategies on joint implementation on the 4 ICA standards;
- and forum of discussion on the revision of ISAD and ISAAR.

The countries represented in these workshops were very diverse: Algeria, Austria, Australia, Burkina Faso, Chile, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Ivory Coast, Korea, Liechtenstein, Macao, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands, Philippines, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Timor, UK and United States of America.

In the workshop 4, the participants discussed about the difficulty for users to browse fully most multi-level descriptions. Some of them would like more openness of ISAD(G) about the rule of non repetition of information. Others stressed on the point that you have to establish a distinction between the way you retrieve and input information. You must be very flexible in your display but it shouldn't interact with input of your archival finding aid. Output representation shouldn't reflect the capture format. You have to allow users to have multiple perspectives of representation of an archival finding aid. ICA should give more attention to users.

Another difficulty encountered by Anglo-Saxon countries in the implementation of ISAD(G) is the fact that the descriptions at the lower levels are often leer and poor. On the contrary, in Latin countries, descriptions are generally detailed at the lower levels.

Some comments about the recent work on archival standards recommended that ICA renew its approach by developing a conceptual entity-relationship model, in order to make ICA standards more hospitable to a variety of implementation strategies. But standards have a very didactic role. Too important changes could put in risk the basics of multilevel description. The idea of non repetition of information is a good idea. But the fact that information may be repeated in order to make the descriptive units more understandable is not against the rules of the standard. ISAD(G) shouldn't be considered as an independent standard but rather as one among a set of standards. In addition, we can deplore that ISAAR(CPF) is not so popular as it should be, whereas many descriptions based more or less on ISAD(G) can easily be found on the web.

Other projects involving CBPS

ICA AtoM Project

The ICA AtoM project aims to develop a web-based archival description software. 'AtoM' is an acronym for 'Access to Memory'. The purpose is to provide a free and open-source software:

1. that enables institutions to make their archival holdings available online, especially those who could not otherwise afford to do so
2. that manages archival descriptions in accord with ICA standards
3. that provides multi-lingual interfaces and content translation features
4. that supports multiple collection types
5. that is fully web-based, user-friendly and follows accessibility best practices
6. that is flexible and customizable
7. that is useful to both small and large institutions alike
8. that supports single or multi-repository implementations

AtoM also enables anyone to convert archival descriptions into EAD instances. The beta version has just been released and it may be downloaded at: <http://ica-atom.org/>.

Database on archival best practices and standards (DABS)

CBPS entered into a partnership with the Standards Committee of the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA) to expand the scope of CCA's Database of Archival Best

Practices and Standards to include languages other than French and English. The objective of the Database is to provide an easy and efficient means of accessing archival standards and best practices from around the world. The database is searchable by archival functions, by bodies that endorsed standards, and by key words. Information on how a standard can be obtained and an abstract explaining the standard is also included. A link from ICA/CBPS webpage to the CCA database will be provided as soon as it is ready. Volunteers are being sought to assist in the identification of standards particularly in languages other than English and French and to help in translating the abstracts.

Action Plan 2008-2010

An action plan for the 2008-2010 term was drafted with activities to include on-going tasks related to monitoring standards development, etc. for all archival functions; maintaining and developing the Database on Archival Best Practices and Standards; enhancing promotion of standards; improved communication through the web site (see: <http://www.ica.org/en/standards>); consultation on and identification of needed standards, best practices; implementation guidelines for ICA Descriptive Standards (illustrating how ISAAR, ISAD, ISDF and ISDIAH are used together); review of ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF) and in respect to recent developments in EAD and EAC recommendations for harmonization; this review could be the first step toward the development of a single reference model to reconcile and harmonize the four international descriptive standards which have been developed since the 1990s, following the approach that has been successfully applied within both the international library and museum communities (e.g., Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model (CIDOC CRM)); cooperative projects with ICA Section for Archival Education and Training to develop an e-learning instrument on description that is compliant with ICA standards.