

ICA Committee of Best Practices and Standards Activity Report on Description Area

Development of an International Standard for Describing Functions (ICA-ISDF):

To complement ICA-ISAD(G) and ICA-ISAAR(CPF), a working group of the Committee of Best Practices and Standards of the International Council of Archives (ICA/CBPS) is developing a new International Standard for Describing Functions (ICA-ISDF). Brazil, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and Africa (Ivory Coast) are currently involved in the project.

During its existence, any corporate body as a records creator may lose one of its responsibilities because this responsibility no longer needs to be carried out. As well new responsibilities may be assigned to an organisation, corresponding to new needs, in particular for implementing new legislation. Functions are often transferred from one corporate body to another. Transfers can also be internal, i.e. the function is transferred from one organism to another. These various forms of changes in responsibilities generally occur when the services are re-organised and result in all kinds of changes of structure, creation or removal of offices or of divisions within an organism, creation of new organisms attached or subordinated to still existing organisms, etc.

Authority records compliant with ISAAR(CPF) make it possible to collect any important information on the records creators, corporate bodies, persons or families (dates of existence, history, places of existence or of activity, attributions, relationships with other entities involved in the creation and the management of the *fonds*, etc.). Moreover, separate but linked descriptions of records and of their creators enable archivists to develop dynamic and multidimensional descriptive systems. Records can thus be connected to records creators, which avoids linking artificially to one records creator a series of documents independently from the institutional context. However, authority records do not provide all the necessary contextual information. Another way could be the functional approach of records managers.

Functions and activities are used by records managers to analyse and classify records, rather than an administrative and organisational structure. This renewed principle of the '*respect des fonds*', which could be qualified as principle of functionality, transcends the records creators to the advantage of the functions, enabling us to testify the governance rather than the government.

This approach constitutes the basis of the future international standard. The ICA/CBPS project group has drawn upon models of functional description and analysis currently being applied in archives and records management in Australia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom as well as international work that has been done by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) such as ISO 15489 International Standard on Records Management and ISO 23081 –1 Records management processes -- Metadata for records, and a first draft was completed, discussed, amended and expanded during the first meeting of the working group at Paris (May 2006). Then, the draft was circulated to the international archival community for comment (January-March 2007).

More than 30 pages of comments have been received from Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Finland, France, Iceland, ISO/TC46, Latvia, Mexico, Norway, Romania, Spain,

Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and last but not least, from United States (Society of American Archivists). During its annual meeting at Dresden (Germany), 2007, May 2-4, the working group examined how these comments could be taken into account. After discussion, a number of decisions were made.

Many comments concerned the terminology, the levels of the functional classification scheme and the definitions of “function”, “activity” and “transaction” that came from multiple sources, each with its own intellectual underpinnings. The WG has chosen to use only the term of “function”. In the glossary, it is stated that “functions can be subdivided into sub-functions, business processes, activities, tasks, transactions, etc., in accordance with the terminology used. The name of the standard has also been changed to “International Standard for Describing Functions” (ICA-ISDF) instead of “International Standard for Activities/Functions of corporate bodies” (ICA-ISAF)”.

The names of some elements that were not explicit or redundant with the name of the area in which they were included have been changed.

Three elements instead of two in the previous version are now considered as essential:

- Type (element 5.1.1)
- Authorised form(s) of name (element 5.1.2); and
- Function description identifier (element 5.4.1).

Chapters 6 and 7 have been grouped into a unique chapter and a paragraph has been added at the beginning of this new chapter explaining why and how linking functions with archival resources and corporate bodies.

Like ICA-ISAD(G) and ICA-ISAAR(CPF), the future standard will be available in English and in French, and it will include about twenty descriptive elements, organised into information areas. The draft of the standard (<http://www.ica.org>) comprises also one chapter giving recommendations for establishing links between descriptions of functions and archival descriptions compliant with ICA-ISAD(G) or with authority records compliant with ICA-ISAAR(CPF). The appendix contains examples of applications in different languages.

The definitive version of ICA-ISDF will be presented in the international congress of archives at Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) in 2008. Thereafter, a revision of ICA-ISAD(G) and ICA-ISAAR(CPF) will proceed during the next four-year programme 2008-2012, in order to introduce a group of elements for linking archival descriptions and authority records to descriptions of functions.

Development of an International Standard for Institutions with Archival Holdings(ICA-ISIAH):

Another project concerns the description of institutions with archival holdings (ISIAH – International Standard for Institutions with Archival Holdings).

Information about the institution which has custody of archival materials is essential for users to access these archival holdings. In addition to the overview of fonds and collections, guides usually include general information about archival institutions that hold documents and the services they provide. With the Internet, it is increasingly important for users to connect

records descriptions to relevant information on their custodians. Without this information, the users are unable to access the archives.

ICA-ISAD(G) provides guidance for the description of fonds and their component parts. ICA-ISAAR(CPF) provides guidance to record authority information about the creators of archives. For a consistent archival information system the description of the same entity as creator or as custodian requires different approaches and elements of description. This is the purpose of ICA-ISIAH, which provides rules for preparing standardised descriptions of institutions which have custody of archives. ICA-ISIAH can also be applied to cultural institutions other than archives.

Furthermore, the possibility of describing archival institutions, as separate entities, may be useful for generating authority lists or directories of archival institutions, as well for establishing connections with similar authority lists of cultural heritage institutions at the regional, national and international level.

Some archival descriptive systems already contain separated but linked descriptions of records, of records creators and of custodians and exemplify ISIAH. For example, in UK, ARCHON is the sister database of the National Register of Archives - the NRA, which contains information on the nature and location of manuscripts and historical records that relate to British history. ARCHON records the contact details for repositories and other institutions whose records feature in the NRA. Furthermore, ARCHON includes a code which is the unique identifier for each repository. At least, the final section of ICA-ISIAH is designed to specify how a repository should link to the authority records which relate to that repository. ARCHON complies with this by linking to all the relevant authority files on the National Register of Archives. So there are links in place from an ARCHON entry to all the people, businesses, organisations and families whose records are at that archive.

Another example is the Spanish Censo Guia, that includes a directory describing more than 40,000 archival institutions. The Censo Guia is the practical model for the standard. There is no other example worldwide for such an extensive, clear and well-formed web-based oversight of archival institutions of different archival systems and their links and connections, including archives from countries around the world. ICA-ISIAH, which is based on that experience has the task to make it easy and simple for archives (and other institutions of the cultural heritage sector) especially in archival systems of countries where archives want to become more "visible".

The draft of standard is available on ICA website (<http://www.ica.org>) and has just been submitted for comments. The deadline for the reception of the comments is: 31st October.

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