





Digital archives, cultural heritage (and YOUsers...)

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What's up?

Tri Elizabeth of Cloath



what is an archive in a traditional or a digital environment?
what does it mean context for cultural digital resources?
digital apps create more or less context?
archives and invented archives in digital world
archival resources and the rest of Cultural Heritage
the role of users for archives quality
the digital users of archives
some critical issues for digital archives users satisfaction
an happy end: some good practices of archival YOUser interactions



What we mean exactly with *archives*?



- An archive refers to a <u>collection</u> of historical records, but also to the location in which these records are kept (Wikipedia) Repository is a place where <u>things can be stored</u> and maintained (SAA glossary)
- Archives are made up of records which have been accumulated over the course of an individual or organization's lifetime (The word archive is derived from the Greek ἀρχή (arkhē) meaning government or order (Wikipedia))
- Archival bond: The relationship that links each record to the previous and subsequent ones and to all those which participate in the same activity. It is originary (i.e. it comes into existence when a record is made or received and set aside), necessary (i.e. it exists for every record), and determined (i.e. it is characterized by the purpose of the record). It places a record in context and gives to it additional meaning (*InterPares* and SAA Glossary)
- They are NOT a long-term storage area for backup copies or a file containing one or more files in compressed format (ICT definitions))





So what are digital archives?

Archival contents in a digital environment are descriptions, interpretations or reproductions of archives

The word **archive** in the digital world is used more widely to call digital repositories, collections of digital objects, digital libraries, portals, inventories, lists of items or links... Selected group of objects without archival bonds among them.

Some examples from *Wikipedia*:

•The <u>Digital Archive Project</u> is an online collaboration that provides advice and support for individuals **interested publishing television programs** that are not produced or distributed through mainstream content distribution.

 <u>European Digital Archive on Soil Maps</u> is a digital inventory of the maps holding valuable information pertaining to soil

•The <u>National Geospatial Digital Archive</u> is an **archive of cartographic information** funded by the Library of Congress, University of California Santa Barbara, and Stanford University.



Context and digital resources



- The archival phisical order normally keeps most of the bond among records
- In case of digital-born records or digital objects/items the bond must be ensured by metadata
- The metadata standards suggest the manadatory elements to describe digital objects in order to manage, preserve, find, make searchable and findable them.
- Thus, some bonds are granted, but in the global dimension of WWW other links are created: digital/network environment creates new contexts



Archives



and invented archives

The separaton of single records/objects from their original context is easy in digital environments So, items are put in an artificial context, the invented archives, and take another dimension, similar to that of monuments This can be done for different purposes: education, exhibitions, cultural dissemination, scientific thesis, historical events The maintaining of a minimum set of metadata is necessary to treat those documents as history sources Otherwise, documents lose most of their original sense and can be used even as alibis to re-invent history as we like, like for negationism: see the Institute for Historical Review or the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust



Archives and



the CH sector: digital helps?

A **museum** is distinguished by a **collection of often unique objects** that forms the core of its activities for exhibitions, education, research, etc. This differentiates it from an **archive** or **library**, where the contents may be more paper-based, replaceable and less exhibition oriented. (Wikipedia)

À **digital library** is a digital environment that keeps together collections, services, and people in support of the full life cycle of creation, dissemination, use, and preservation of cultural data, informations, and knowledge.

The issues to be taken in consideration to co-operate are: •Museums, Archives and Libraries sometimes hold the same objects but treat them using different standards

- The connection among holdings is too important to be lost
- •Cultural Heritage descriptions are not necessarily at item level, we must consider the connections/metadata at collections level too
- •The item level must be considered especially for digital reproductions

Minerva Knowledge Base

the role of users for Archives quality



Archivists normally monitor the use of archives in order to plan new finding aids, new ways to grant access and phisical management of records Archives on-site users could be classificated in **two families**:

- users with a research plan (browsers)
- they have to browse archives, they verify on documents their theories, they are good finding aids readers, are interested in archives creators, need to scroll finding aids, include and exclude search paths, can appreciate the lack of records as useful informations. They know that archives need time
- users who look for specific records (searchers)
- they have no theories, they want quick results and don't want to read complex finding aids, they love miraculous fishing tools, they have no time.



users and archivists



Archivists must govern the transition

•from the traditional way of giving public access to archives in on-site reference rooms, with the constant help of archivists:

individual - personalised - mediated - analogic - synchronous - flexible - sacerdotal

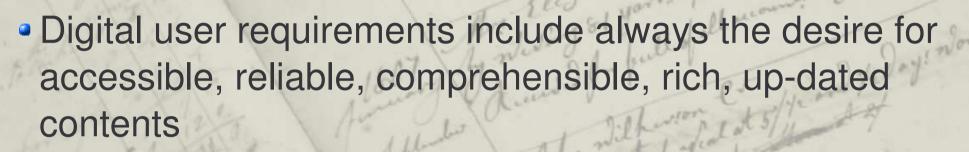
to the new way, based on ICT and on international standards

asynchronous - interactive - faceless - anonymous - general - remote - automatic - secular



of digital archive use(r)s

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- How to face the increasing use of searching instead of browsing, preserving the serendipity?
- Do we presume to know what digital archives users need (and how they behave, and what they are able to understand)?
- Are we sure they love just digital reproductions of ancient documents?



ntent Together some critical issues for digital archives use(r)s

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Content/Language

- Archival descriptions use often a too technical language (referred to discipline or to administration history)
- The research utilities are limited to words in the title or to chronology

Structure/Syntax

- Description structures (vertical and horizontal) are often too complex and non easily rendered
- Complexity is taken as a quality criteria...
- Domain of research
- Users often can't understand if what they seek is in the site, is somewhere else or doesn't exist at all...





An happy end: digital archives good YOUser interactions

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What could be done:

(keeping the context informations of archival materials as primary):
Being extremely clear on what you offer and how to use it
Helping browsing the complexity according to different user requirements

Offering links to your potential neighbours

Providing training e-tools, thematic paths, references, widgets
Collecting users experiences (see MICHAEL EU) and use data mining apps

.. and daring more:

Post-classificate historical archival descriptions
Use semantic tagging to give additonal (and automatic) meaning to descriptions





and

An happy end: digital archives good YOUser interactions

Some good examples:

UK Public Record Office

•Australian Vrooom Nor//wroom.naa.gov.au/

Canadian Library and Archives Flickr/YouTube Albums

•Friul in prin (http://www.triblinprin.benicultural.in/ italian archivalbased geneaology site: users can ask services and add their family stories)



Digital Her EUA/

Good examples

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Thank you for your attention!

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any question?

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