

# Tehnični in vsebinski problemi klasičnega in elektronskega arhiviranja

Zbornik referatov dopolnilnega izobraževanja s področij arhivistike, dokumentalistike in informatike

v Radencih 25. - 27. marca 2009



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## PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENT AS IMAGE ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

# André Porto Ancona Lopez

UDK: 930.25:77

André Porto Ancona Lopez: Fotografski dokument kot slikovno arhivsko gradivo. Tehnični in vsebinski problemi klasičnega in elektronskega arhiviranja. Zbornik referatov z dopolnilnega izobraževanja, Maribor 8/2009, str. 263—272.

Izvirník v angleščíní, Izvleček v slovenščíní in angleščíní, povzetek v slovenščíní.

Cil) prispevka je poudarit, da posebnosti fotografskih dokumentov zahtevajo posebno pozornost, ko jih vključujemo v arhiv. Avtor predstavi nekaj primerov arhivske organizacije za tri tipe arhivskega fotografskega gradiva: fotografije, ki so uvrščene med druge dokumente (npr. v dosje); posamične fotografije, ki so nastale kot rezultat nekega dejanja (npr. slike urada za komunikacijo); in fotografije, zbrane v zbirki, ki niso bistveno povezane z administrativnim ustvarjalcem. Avtor zaključuje, da so arhivski principi, predvsem v primerih fotografij v arhivih, večinoma edino zagotovilo za pravilno razumevanje pomena dokumenta.

UDC: 930.25:77

André Porto Ancona Lopez: Photographic Document as Image Archival Document, Technical and Field Related Problems of Traditional and Electronic Archiving, Conference Proceedings, Maribor 8/2009, pp. 263—272.

Original in English, abstract in Slovenian and English, summary in Slovenian.

This work aims to discuss how photographic document's specificity needs particular attention when those materials are integrated into an archive. The author presents examples of archival organization for the three types of archival photographic materials occurrences: photographic pictures integrated to other documents (e.g. in a dossier); isolated photographic pictures as a final result of an action (e.g. pictures of a public agency's communication office); as well as photographic pictures gathered as a collection, without any organic relation to an administrative producer. We conclude that archival principles, mainly in the case of photographic picture in archives, are most of the times the only guarantee to a correct comprehension of documents' meaning.

Ključne besede: arhivistika, slikovni dokumenti, bistvene informacije, fotografija.

The aim of the reflection is the archival images availability issue. More specifically, it is focused on topics related to the organic information description. We do not propose to build a technical panel about "tools" and programs that allow the retrieval of image contents. On the contrary, the idea is to analyze how the information management related to archival origin (organic information from administrative contexts) should occur, despite of the continuous creation, innovation and availableness of content management "tools". As an extension of such scheme, it is necessary to consider the information image content recycling phenomenon on other records, as, for example, a copy of the same image composing two different records. On electronic dissemination those records usually do not bring data about archival organicity.

The current solutions for archival image material situations are frequently very distant from the bottom line. Generically, a record is defined as any information

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fixed on a support material. However, archival records are produced due to an administrative motivation and, for the organization of that material, the most important task is to identify such will; in other words, establish the documentary production context. In order to accomplish that, it is mandatory to know "who", "when", "how" and, mainly, "why" the records were created.

The archival record is, predominantly, a proof that certain administrative actions were executed. The organization and availableness of an archival record ought to contextualize its administrative creation origin and the direct interactions with the processes and functions responsible for its existence.

The archival concept also demands an action deliberately taken with the purpose of keeping the records after the completion of the activities that they were created for. The following example best illustrates the need of an archival contextualization of the creator's context in order to bring a full comprehension of the record.

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Picture 1: Library card, copied by the Brazilian political police during the dictatorship period. \(^{\text{!}}\)

That record, in its past and in its actual role, is a true record of the Brazilian political police and it attests a part of the investigation activities developed by those bodies. In its first origin it was, certainly, a register of the library, used for book

Source: Departamento Estadual de Arquivo Público. Arquivo Público do Parana. Fundo Delegacia de Ordem Política e Social. Dossiê "Delegacia de Polícia de Maringa (Antiga)". Box 62, folder 556. Reference: DIGOFOTO, 2006, photo # 40.

controlling. But it has developed into another register, of another organization, with other administrative and proving functions. The main point is that none of that newness is explicitly registered on the record. The only clue to establish its real role is the archival contextualization, which allows to establish the bonds between the record and its creator. Without the archival context, the systematic violation of citizens' privacy would never be proved. No one would ever imagine that somebody could be considered suspicious of attempting against the Brazilian government just for being a reader of Plato if this record hadn't been contextualized.

On archives, photographic materials are the most frequent incident image records. Before the photograph invention, on the first half of the XIX century, the image records occurrence was very restricted on archives and it was composed, in general, by maps, outlines, blueprints and eventual sketches. Photograph was lately considered as a resource for administrative records creation; however, it has rapidly spread on multiples sectors of the society. In the case of archives, the inclusion of photographic records occurred on a later moment, after the wide dissemination of that technique over the society<sup>2</sup>. Nowadays, that reality tends to be transformed with the dissemination of digital technologies of image capture, storage and diffusion (with or without sound, fix or moving). Such change is more related to the technological particularities than the records management itself, since the image archival agenda has not been changed.

The absence of a corresponding convergence development of photograph diffusion and its full incorporation to the administrative practices<sup>3</sup> has caused an attraction to the photographic register, as an image, in divergence to its documentary role. A great importance has been given to the pictured scene and to its execution technique, overlooking the promotion of archival contextualization of the document in the scope of the record creator activities. With that, an equivocal consensus about the image eloquent strength that would speak by itself was built. Today, that issue acquires more extensive borders with the continuous creation of technical apparatus that are twisted to systematize and manage image contents.

Contemporaneous archives have a great volume of records and documents as a characteristic, which coexist with diversified supports of information. On the side of the traditional support - the paper - we can mention films, magnetic tapes, optical disks and a vast kind of new technologies. In the same way, new documentary types begin to be aggregated to archives, expanding the document concept.

Another feature of the contemporary archives is the fractioning of the proceeding registers, which tend to cause contextual information loss. In the Internet, that problem is a raising tendency, since it is an area, by excellence, of information recycling. Image records and documents have increased their reproduced visual information, and generated new records without the register of such transformation. That practice stimulates the multiplication of image manifestations of a same content, homogenizing different contexts and records.

It is important to remember that the erroneous identification of the complete record, the one that is proficient to generate consequences, may lead to disastrous outcomes at the research level as well as on the execution of administrative tasks.

<sup>2</sup> Aline Lacerda (2008) conceives an excellent retrospective picture about the incorporation of photographic records by the archives.

The mentioned work of Aline Lacerda (2008) also historicizes the utilization of photographic techniques on administrative activities.

This aspect is more delicate when it involves records and documents which validation signs and proceedings are incorporated as an attach register, like on image and electronic records.

The disconnection of such bond might have disastrous consequences not only during the execution of the administrative activities but also on their proof. The identification of the record's genesis is the only resource able to avoid the pitfalls posed by the image polysemy character. Some authors postulate that it is necessary to comprehend the technical origin in order to understand photographic images (i.e. Jean-Marie Schaeffer, 1996). Others advocate the need of doing a social-historical genesis, like photograph historians (i.e. Kossoy, 1996).

In the case of archival image records, all those actions are equally important, but only as a complement of the correct discovery of the archival context. The absence of the knowledge of the image's original meaning due to a deficiency of contextual data could generate an improper use. For example, in journalistic reports, producing what is known in Brazilian jargon as "belly". The following image illustrates that situation.



Picture 2: VAN ES, Hugh. The fall of Saigon (1975).

During a quarter of century that image was considered to be the register of the last withdraw of United States' citizens, made by the U.S. Army, during the Vietnam War, indicating the fall of Saigon (actual Ho Chi Minh City), on April 29th, 1975. That image supposedly represents U.S. citizens getting on a helicopter, landed on the embassy ceiling, about to take off on what would be later known as the "last fight. However, on the ephemerid of 25 years of the fact, it was disclosed that the photographed building could not be the embassy, that most of the people pictured

were Vietnamese, that the helicopter depicted was of a very different kind from those that were used for the American forces withdraw.

The ability that an image has to be disconnected from its original context, allied to the raising importance of its contents, generates problems about definition and proper identification of the image record. The situation gets worse with the advance of techniques of image reproduction. The status of "mirror of reality" itself (even if it was later relativized<sup>4</sup>) is questioned when photographical image reproduction - and/or recycling - modifies a certain "reality" representation. Thus, a gap for the misunderstanding between authenticity and veracity is initiated. Veracity is linked to the record information quality and authenticity is interrelated to the record's creation process. On an image record, lonely considered, the veracity has the propensity to be bewildered with image's authenticity, since there will not be enough data to determine the record's context.

Therefore, it is impossible to establish its authenticity. When it is possible to relate the record with the organicity of its institutional creator - instead of an isolated image - veracity is completely separated from authenticity. For the photographer's personal archive, that image is a register of his professional activities in the Vietnam War and pictures a specific scene. In that sense the record, for Van Es, is also authentic and veridical.

For the news agency, it has another record, with the same internal content. But, in this case, it is related to the activity of spreading news about the Vietnam War and, despite of the wrongness of the reported scene identification, that second record is also authentic for the news agency archive. In that context (as a proof of accomplishing activities) the veracity does not matters at all. It will only be relevant to the communication relation of the news agency and its public. But that relevance is not related to an archival characteristic.

The two next examples indicate how the correct identification of an image's meaning only by its visual content elements could be dubious. For entertainment uses such dubiety, many times, it could also be intentional and positive, or, in the best scenario, something that could be fixed by legends and/or some explicative texts.

In an archive, due to proofing proposals, the ambiguity should not have place. Thus, for isolated image, the only way to correctly deal with the meaning of the record is the understanding of the creator's context, comprehending the reasons for generating such register and the purposes for its keeping, as an administrative proof. Deepening the problem, an isolated image usually does not have any contextual element in the record itself.

Picture 3 portrays a huge crater made by a meteor. Without any extra information it is very difficult to know that a) it is a hollow rather than an elevation; b) the image was reproduced facing down. For picture 4, mostly of the spectators would say the depicted scene is about the United States racist movement, Ku-Klux-Klan. Actually, the photograph represents a catholic manifestation in Seville (Spain). But, for archival purposes it is also necessary to know who the record creator is, why that creator did produced such register and why the creator kept the record. The correct identification of the content is only the starting point.

Philippe Dubois (1994) makes an interesting history about the photograph realism, analyzing three moments: the photograph as a mirror of reality, as transformation of reality and as a reality trace.



Picture 3: QUALITY TRADING CO. Amazing Arizona crater optical illusion



Picture 4: Participant of Holy Week procession at Seville (Spain).5

Basically, it is possible to find two kinds of photographic archival organization: by content and by context.

The content approach has its theoretical foundation based on Library and Information Science principles. They put in relevance the retrieval of the information present in the image and are more connected to the information management than records and documents management. They usually present order criteria as equivalent to arrangement, aiming individual classification of the images (not the records). Their instruments generally came from de Library, like the AACR2, key words, MARC, Dublin Core, Thesaurus etc. They tend to group the photographic records as one unique series (or class, or even a separated collection), respecting, most of the times, their producer's origin.

The contextual approaches, on its turn, are theoretically founded on Archival Science principles and are more linked to records and documents management. They do not consider the photographic register as "special records", from the point of view of their organicity and archival bond. Those approaches take mainly into consideration the retrieval of documentary groups by their functions and administrative activities. The fond arrangement came in first place; it is the outset of the archival activities of description and information retrieval. A same archival fond might have different series composed by photographic records. The librarian retrieval "tools" are to be used on a second stage, as a complement for the cases where individual content description is required.

Generally saying, the basic difference between these two kinds of approach resides on the necessary distinction between archival record/document management and information management. Record management is applicable to records and documents accurately contextualized as long as, the information management is

<sup>5</sup> Reference: FERNANDEZ DURÁN, 1992, p. 107.

centered at the content of the registers; they are not self excluding. On an archival situation, the information management has low value in relation to proofing aspects. Record management can guarantee the possibility of register retrieval by their generation activities.

On image records, as it was exemplified, the informative content can be absolutely distant from the record's creation context. Therefore, it is perfectly possible that different archival records (due to their administrative and proofing functions) have the same image content (as the library card example).

Unfortunately, as a consequence of a strong content tradition, there still is a very strong tendency to make a comprehensive description of individualized image subjects before (or instead of) the elaboration of an archival arrangement filing system. Sometimes, that state of things is impelled by the absence of preservation politics, which obliges archival institutions to physically separate the photographic material ahead of its archival arrangement. When that occurs, the evidences that can link the image records to their generation activity are commonly and hopelessly lost forever.

The image, as an integrant element of other records and documents, cannot be separated from its arrangement; on those cases, the image does not exist as a documentary item. To attend preservation requirements, what can - and ought to - be done is just the physical disjointing, after arrangement with precise references. Archival description, even when it is done on a meticulous particularized level, must be focused on the larger record, from which image's content is only a part of the whole archival information. It does not exclude the possibility of a partial reference based only on image contents. That would represent an additional activity to the archival arrangement - and complementary to the documentary organization. In the arrangement, any particular procedures, specific to image records could not exist. However, in that situation, the description activity would transcend strictly archival tasks, being more connected to the researcher's interests than the archival needs.

On a more schematic thinking, it is possible to define three types of image records and documents manifestation in the archival universe: a) integrated to other records (as photographic positives attached to a administrative dossier, for example); b) as a final result of an administrative action (photographic registers of a communication assistant sector, for example); c) as a collection without any organic bond to its creator or when such bond is no longer possible to be established. That differentiation presents fundamental characteristics about the records and documents organicity.

The holding of the Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española (AGC)<sup>7</sup> - that was a subdivision of the Archivo Histórico Nacional, located in Salamanca - was constituted with a thematic direction, keeping together records and documents related to the Spanish Civil War. The holding was initially composed by army records, as a result of the Franquist repression against masons and communists. It was

On an archival description manual (LOPEZ, 2002) we posed that such activity have to be turned to systematized information from diverse documentary holdings and groups of an archive and their interrelationship with the respective records and documents. Archival description in that sense referrers to the description of the fond organization and not to records contents.

Our observations about that institution are based on a technical visit made on Sept. 4, 1998 and on photographic archival project that was being held at that time (DESANTES & CLARES, 1996). We also used information from the official web page of that period (Ministerio DE EDUCACIÓN, CULTURA Y DEPORTE, 2000). In the past years, the Spanish system of archives has been undergoing a reformulation process that has affected the location of the AGC, which is not contemplated by our analysis.

constituted by the acquisition of documents from private collections, related to the central subject, with significant photographs sets. Those photographic positives were, in a first stage, physically separated for preservation requirements and. subsequently described and connected to other photographic documents of the institution, related to the Spanish Civil War. The main difference in this situation is that the positives were only separated after the elaboration of the arrangement filing system. Reference cards were inserted on the original image's place, remitting to their new physical location. From the point of view of the images, they were submitted to a detailed description, based on ISAD standards, which has incorporated information about the archival origin of the documents, from which they were removed. That information is also present in the filing system and in the documents themselves. They are cross-related on a database, connected to other images from other fonds and collections. Another similar situation can also be observed on the Archivo del Reino de Galicia's (1995) treatment for its cartographical material (maps, drawings, plans). That material had its references noted on a selective catalogue, gathering data from multiple fonds and collections and precisely indicating the archival situation of each documentary group into the respective arrangement filing systems. In the proceedings of both institutions, the description proposal represents an activity distinguished form the arrangement activity - and complementary to the documentary organization - without any particular solution for the intellectual arrangement of the image records and documents.

The image document, as a final product of an administrative action, happens, for example, on mayor communication assistant sectors of city offices. That material usually presents great volume, which does not allow the adoption of complex individualized and detailed description systems. On the other hand, for being a typical institutional material, the reconstruction of its organicity (when it is a case of accumulated documentary mass) represents a desirable and possible task. For that, the photographs generated for registering the official acts divulgation would compose archival series, bringing organicity to the assemblage. The Arxiu Municipal de Figueres (Cataluña) holds that kind of material associated to three series: official visits, official acts and also popular and civilian celebrations (GIL i TORT, 1992). The archival organization of that material according the creator's context allows, for example, better understanding of the municipality's actions concerning popular feasts and citizens manifestation during the Franquist dictatorship period. For Gil i Tort (1992, p. 170), the increment of the record production of that period indicates the municipality's interest for promoting events with political personalities and simultaneously putting the people, the average citizen, in the role of passive spectator. In the same way of the preceding examples of Salamanca and Galicia, the Figueres archive only executes description activities after establishing the arrangement schema. Again, there is no specific treatment for the image record arrangement; the distinction appears only at the description phase.

The third type of image record production that was mentioned before is the one with collection characteristics. In general, it is composed by photographic positives and/or postcards, collected with no criteria of archival organicity; its contextualization is practically impossible to be rebuilt. That situation represents, probably, the majority of image records occurrence on private collections and fonds. The adoption of descriptive procedures, detached from the documentary creation context in these cases is the only manner to grant access to the records. However, the acceptance of extraordinary attitudes in that state of affairs should not be viewed as a standard procedure, applicable to all manifestations of image records and documents. The descriptive treatment given to the divulgation of the postcard

collection of the Archivo Municipal de La Coruña is preceded by an explanation that justifies such practice, sustained by the fact that the mentioned collection does not constitute a typical archive material; in other words, without organic precedence fundament<sup>8</sup>. The description card was made in accordance to ISAD standards.

In sum, we endorse that the archival image document should really be treated as any other archival document, as sustained by Teresa Muñoz (1997, p. 40) in the notorious Spanish photographic archival manual: "the archival treatment applied to photographs does not differ, in general terms, from that received by others documents of an archive." The important matter in these situations, independently of the selected option for the description, is the fact that such activity is always driven by archival arrangement. The archival principles, in many circumstances, are the only possibility to make sure the archival records fulfill their main function and reason of existence. Therefore, they mustn't be neglected on behalf of the construction of thesaurus or electronic search engines, based solely on image topics. These instruments are essential, but they should only be used after the archival contextualization of the documents.

Aline Lacerda (2008, p. 20), when referring to the archival literature aimed to the discussion of the photography phenomenon, uses the term "aridity" to characterize the little amount of archival studies for that subject. Following her metaphor, it is adequate to say "desertic" to describe the archival literature associated to digital photography. The few existing studies are still based on analogical photographs, which digitalization is understood as a copy activity (for preservation purposes) or as a new record creation (recycling the image information). There is a deficiency of more systematized studies about the aspects that this topic assumes on records that were digitally created and have their access, divulgation and recycling in a totally digital way. Despite of all the technological mutation, we are tempted to think that, in essence, there are no significant changes, except for technical features9. The main problem remains untouchable, changing only its scale of impact. Such idea requires more systematized reflection, but in relation to electronic textual records some authors have been walking in that direction, as, for example, the different phases of the Interpares Project. As a manner of making possible the permanence of the organic information on image records, which are digitally designed, some studies have proposed the insertion, already in the record creation moment, of adequate metadata. The problem is that for the most popular procedures of image information recycling ("cut" and "paste", for example), there are no guarantees about the continued existence of such metadata.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. SUÁREZ RODRÍGUEZ, 1998, p.12.

In a complementary way, we posed (LOPEZ, 2004) that by only maintaining the archival principles it is possible to assure the continuity of the basic characteristic of archival records and documents, making sure that they could fully exercise their proofing value.

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#### POVZETEK

#### FOTOGRAFSKI DOKUMENT KOT SLIKOVNO ARHIVSKO GRADIVO

Cilj prispevka je poudariti, da posebnosti fotografskih dokumentov zahtevajo posebno pozornost, ko jih vključujemo v arhiv. Avtor predlaga, da najprej razmislimo o primarnih vidikih, ki definirajo arhivski dokument, in potem primerjamo in razvrstimo sodobne arhivske institucije glede na način, kako fotografske dokumente integrirajo v arhiv. Ta tema zahteva razmišljanje o odnosih med predstavitvijo fotografske podobe in verodostojnostjo arhivskega dokumenta ter o odnosih med predstavitvijo fotografske podobe in domnevno »verodostojnostjo« fotografske informacije. Razjasnjevanje teh problemov povzroča obstoječ kontrast med dvema glavnima organizacijskima modeloma za razvrščanje fotografij v arhivih: po temi (za knjižnice in široko uporabo) in po vsebini (bolj primerno za arhive). Arhivska kontekstualizacija se v mnogih primerih pojavi kot edina alternativa za razumevanje dvomljivih slik, slik z varljivimi efekti ali z zelo splošnimi informacijami. Na koncu avtor predstavi nekaj primerov arhivske organizacije za tri tipe arhivskega fotografskega gradiva: fotografije, ki so uvrščene med druge dokumente (npr. v dosje); posamične fotografije, ki so nastale kot rezultat nekega dejanja (npr. slike urada za komunikacijo); in fotografije, zbrane v zbirki, ki niso bistveno povezane z administrativnim ustvarjalcem. Avtor zaključuje, da so arhivski principi, predvsem v primerih fotografij v arhivih, večinoma edino zagotovilo za pravilno razumevanje pomena dokumenta.