

The appraisal process as a way to integrate the archival point of view in the planning, creation and use of electronic records and automated systems. A case study

Montserrat Canela,

Isabel Campos, Joan Domingo and Jordi Serra

The objective of this paper is to present how the appraisal process is being used by the *Arxiu Central del Departament de Cultura* (The central archives of the Culture Department) as a way to integrate the archival function in the planning, creation and use of electronic records.

The *Arxiu Central* is a unit included in the general administration area of the *Departament de Cultura* (a ministry of the autonomous government of Catalonia). Its functions are elaboration and implementation of a records management system for the current and semi-current records, and management of a records centre. The inactive records with permanent values are transferred to the National Archives of Catalonia.

Although our records management system was designed to include records in any kind of format, we find it difficult to intervene in the management of the complete cycle of electronic records. The causes of this situation have to be found in the traditional identification of archivists with paper and the idea that electronic records need a system completely apart from the traditional records management programs.

But electronic records, as well as paper records, are a product of the administrative work, and they need to be organized, stored and appraised for the same reasons, and using the same principles, that paper records need to be. Some of the consequences of keeping the electronic records out of the general records management system are:

- the existence of automated applications with poor classification and retrieval systems;
- the existence of tables with redundant information in different databases;
- the lack of policies for long-term storage and disposal of electronic records;
- the unnecessary, and uncontrolled, duplication of information.

These problems could be solved more easily with the incorporation of the archival point of view into the whole process of planning, implementation and maintenance of automated systems. But before this incorporation can become real, archivists have to cross the gap that exists between them and the electronic world.

Appraisal in the records management system of the Departament de Cultura

In the *Departament de Cultura* records are classed, filed and described in the offices using a corporate classification scheme produced and maintained by the central archive. This classification scheme is a hierarchical structure that reflects the functions and activities of the *Departament*. Thus, from the beginning of their life cycle, all records are situated in a wider context that explains why they were created and what their relationships are with other records created within the same activity or function.

The authors are members of the Arxiu Central del Departament de Cultura de la Generalitat de Catalunya. Montserrat Canela, head of the archives, Isabel Campos and Joan Domingo have a BA in history and an MA in archives administration; Jordi Serra, also has a BA in history and has specialized in information systems. This team has been working for five years, developing and implementing a records management system for the Departament de Cultura and for related agencies (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Museu de la Ciència i la Tècnica, Consorci per a la Normalització Lingüística, TERMCAT, etc.). Individually or as a team they have participated in different training courses and have published some papers based upon their professional experience.

We approach appraisal using the same hierarchical structure, that is, functions, activities and records. The appraisal process starts with the selection and study of a function (for instance the control of the cinematographic exhibition sector) and all the activities related to this function (inspection of cinemas, control of the screen quota, etc.). Then we analyse each one of them step by step. This way we know all the records, in any format, that are created or received in the offices, we also know why and how they are created or received, if they are duplicated, and where the originals and the copies of each record are filed.

We work with current activities, which means that we don't wait till the records are transferred to our record centre to appraise them. This also means that we work closely with the creators of these records and that we can discuss with them not only how these records have to be disposed but, also, if there is any aspect related to their creation, use, format or organization that should be improved.

Usually, while we are studying an activity, we come across electronic records and the automated systems that are used to create and manage them. In this case we appraise the electronic records and the application in the context of the activity: is this application useful for the users? Can it be improved in some way? Should this application incorporate our classification scheme? (and is this possible?). Which is the best format for using and keeping the records? If the best format is the electronic one, then does this application fulfil all the legal requirements? How should they be recorded in order to ensure their long-term conservation and access?

The appraisal procedure

To illustrate step by step the appraisal procedure, we will use two examples of activities that involve the use of informatic applications: the legal deposit management and the cinematographic activities' inspection.

1. Selecting the function and the related activities

The function and activities that are going to be appraised are selected from the classification scheme. The cinematographic activities inspection and the management of the legal deposit (DL) are functions that are included in a more general context and that, at the same time, are divided into a different number of activities. This can be checked in this abstract of our classification scheme:

Functions/activities description	Reference
Promotion of culture	K600
Cinematographic and videographic's activities	K637
Cinematographic's activities control	K647
Inspection	K652
Ticket sales control	K798
Cinema weekly declarations	K799
Ticket orders	K801
Inspection activities	K802
Cultural heritage management	K100
Libraries and bibliographic heritage management	K172
Control and inventory of the bibliographical production	K198
Legal deposit (D.L.) management	K199

2. Collecting the legislation

The second step is to locate all the legislation that regulates the function and activities appraised.

3. Describing the function and the related activities

The sources for this description are legislation, memorandums and interviews with the staff responsible for these activities.

Inspection: Its mission is to ensure that the cinema exhibitors fulfil all the legal requirements concerning ticket sales, film classification, quota of the screen time, etc.

Ticket sales control: ticket sales are controlled in order to ensure the payment of taxes to the government and royalties to the authors and to obtain reliable information for the establishing of cinematographic policies.

Cinema weekly declarations: they are used to control ticket sales, the fulfilment of the screen quota (it is compulsory to exhibit a certain numbers of the EU's films every year) and to collect statistical information.

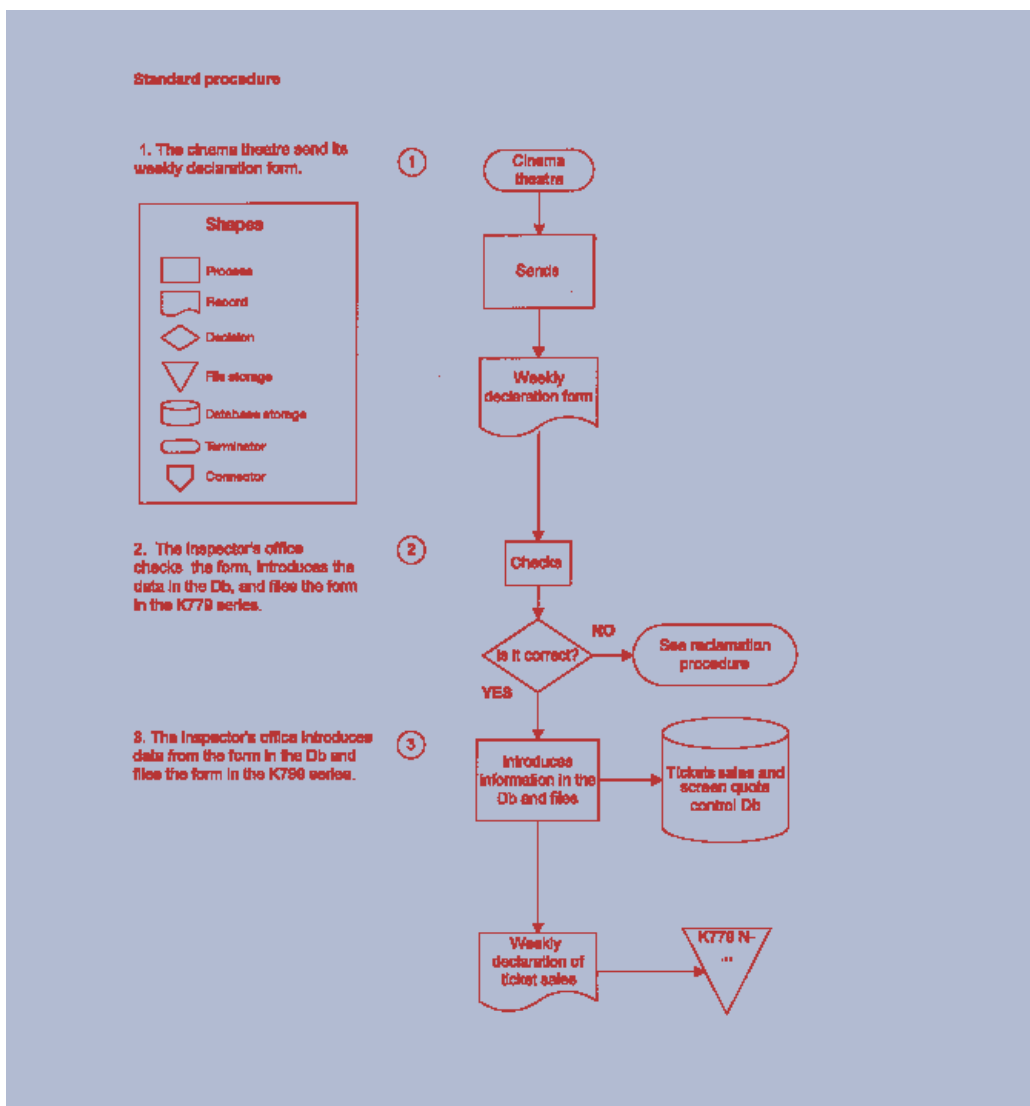
Legal deposit (DL) management: the legal deposit collects copies of all the printed and audio-visual productions in Catalonia in order to preserve them as a part of the national heritage and to create the national bibliography catalogue.

4. Analysing the activities

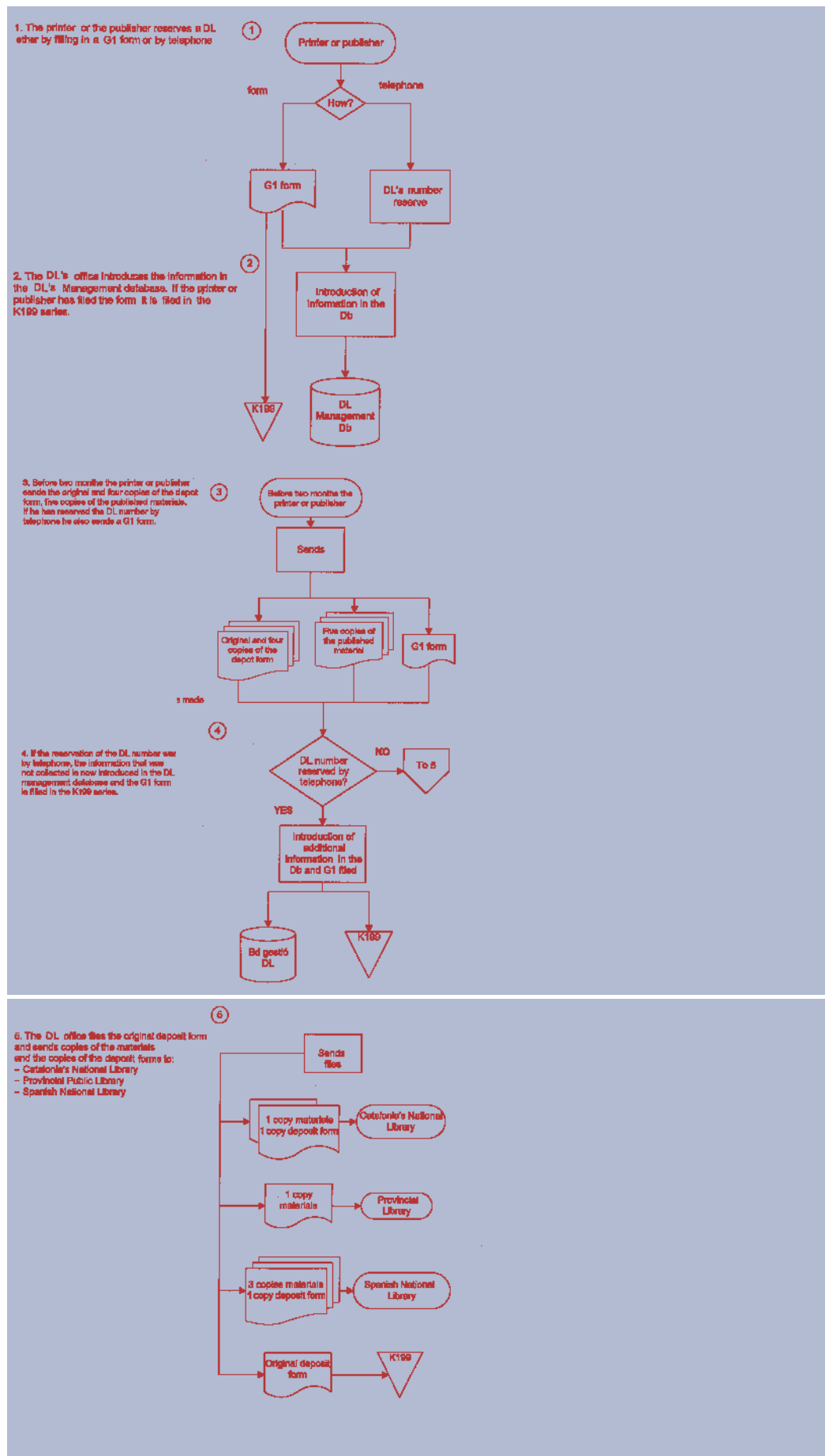
The objective of this step is to know in detail why and how each activity is performed by the organization. The sources of information are legal texts and interviews with the creators.

We represent each procedure in a flowchart so we can know without doubt which records are used and created, where originals and copies are filed and which information applications are used, when, for whom and why.

Cinema weekly declarations flowchart



DL management flowchart



5. Writing an appraisal report

All the information collected during the appraisal process is systematized in a report that also contains proposals referring to:

- records disposition;
- records access;
- informatic applications;
- bureaucratic procedures.

This report is sent to the legal department to be revised and, then it is discussed in an informal meeting between archivists, creators, administrative and technical staff, informatic experts and internal users such as documentalists and members of the studies services.

Usually several topics that are included in this report and discussed with the legal department and in the meeting involve electronic records and informatic applications. In the two cases that we are using as examples we have found that:

The series K799 cinema weekly declarations sales control and K801 ticket orders can be destroyed if it is possible to ensure that the information in the ticket sales and screen quota control database will be permanently and properly stored. This means that archivist and informatic experts have to decide how to ensure the permanent conservation and continuous accessibility to the information in this database.

The information in the legal deposit management database is not protected against modifications, this means that it is not possible to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the data. This data could be needed to produce certificates that will be presented as evidence in court. The information pointed out that this database must be protected accordingly to the specification of the Spanish Law and that, in the meantime, data for certificates must be taken from the K199 paper files. Once the database is protected, K199 paper files could be disposed of.

Conclusions

One of the principal characteristics of the appraisal method we are implementing is that we appraise records in context; another one is that we are using a cross-disciplinary approach. Appraising in context allows us to make the relationships between paper records, electronic records and informatic applications explicit; thus electronic records and paper records are not seen as two separate worlds but as products of the same activity. The cross-disciplinary approach means that non-archivists are helping to take decisions about records disposition and that archivists are contributing to the identification and solution of procedural and informatic problems. This is possible because we are appraising current activities and records, so any action we take directly influences the general administration of the Departament de Cultura.

We have just started to test our appraisal method and there are many answers we have not yet found (for instance which is the best electronic format for long-term conservation). But what we have already observed is that our suggestions related to automated systems are better understood, and much more appreciated, when they are based on appraisal considerations. We think that, now, the idea of a cross-disciplinary approach to the automation of the *Departament* that includes the archival point of view is becoming a reasonable possibility.

Barcelona, September 1996