



CITRA 1954-2011

A short review

The Annual General Meeting of the International Council on Archives has just agreed to endorse the recommendations that have been laid before it. And so, in accordance with this decision, CITRA comes to an end in favour of an Annual Conference of the ICA, the first of which will be held in 2013. Thus an important page in the history of the ICA is being turned today and we are part of this event, both as participants and as witnesses.

In these particular circumstances, the President of the ICA has asked me to present to you, in the form of a short review, certain important facts relating to CITRA and its history and it is true that the special occasion which brings us all together today is particularly fitting for such a review.

For almost sixty years, the International Conference of the Round Table on Archives, better known as 'CITRA', has constituted the annual meeting of the ICA and its members, forty-three meetings, to be precise, between 1954 and 2011. CITRA has allowed successive generations of national archivists to meet; it has also provided the framework in which the Annual General Meeting of ICA and, in the course of time, meetings of other ICA bodies and of its leadership, have taken place. It has been, without question, at once an occasion for exchanges and work, a showcase for our organization, a melting pot for new projects and new partnerships, a firm basis for networking and making friends, as well as a source of inspiration – let's remind ourselves that the idea for the Universal Declaration on Archives came into being at the Quebec CITRA in 2007.

We sometimes forget that CITRA originated in the early 1950s thanks to the vision of Charles Braibant, then Director of the French National Archives and President of ICA. Charles Braibant felt that the intervals between the world congresses of the fledgling organization, ICA, were too long. He wanted to offer the directors of national archives a more frequent platform for exchange, which would allow them to share their concerns, to work together and to find common solutions to the issues of the day, while promoting continuity and conviviality. He therefore established CITRA and hosted the first session in Paris in 1954, six years after the creation of ICA and four years after the first international congress.

The number of participants at the first sessions of CITRA was limited. Attendance was almost exclusively restricted to the directors of national archives, not only through choice, but also because the circumstances of those days were quite different. Travelling was not as simple; cooperation was still a somewhat delicate notion; the world was barely recognizable from the one that we know today.

The handful of participants in those days could easily fit round a round table. To be sure, though the term 'round table' has remained, the event has grown, and it has become increasingly difficult to accommodate participants around a table of any size. This session of CITRA at Toledo has brought together nearly 400 archivists, and the number of participants passed the 100 mark a long time ago.

In the course of its 43 sessions, CITRA has provided a forum for a multitude of topics to be discussed. Who remembers the themes of the first CITRAs?

1954: Paris, Archives and teaching

1955: Namur, Archives in training

1957: Zagreb, the place of archives and archivists in the state

In the decades which followed, numerous issues have been debated. For example: archives in the service of historical research (1959), the concept of archives and the frontiers of archival science (1962), archives and computers (1971), financing archives (1991), access to archives: legal aspects (1997). Far from being exhaustive, this list nevertheless gives an indication of the preoccupations of our predecessors and illustrates how enduring these questions are: they span the years.

We should also bear in mind that the very concept of CITRA has changed over time, as has the way it is prepared. 1997 saw the introduction of three-year thematic cycles. 1997-1999 was devoted to access to information; 2001-2003 to relations between archives and society and 2005-2007 to shared memory and globalization. Finally the desire to bring together ICA's strategic plan, the professional programme and CITRA has resulted in the cycle that we shall be finishing this week, here in Toledo. This cycle has allowed us to review questions on training, electronic records and conservation, three themes directly linked to the choices of members and their priorities.

Let us also remember that CITRA has travelled a long way in its time. Even if the first sessions were held in Europe, and we are finishing with three consecutive round tables organized by European countries, during the five decades of its existence, CITRA has set foot in numerous countries and continents: we call to mind the CITRAs of Gosier, Jerusalem, Ottawa, Nairobi, Kuala Lumpur, Austin, Mexico City, Washington, Abu Dhabi, Le Cap, Quebec and finally Curaçao, the native country of the last president of CITRA, Nolda Römer-Kenepa.

Of all the positive spin-offs arising from CITRA, we should make mention of publications. In particular I would like to speak about the Acts of CITRA. Several thousands of pages of professional texts have been published, all of them contributing to international archival science and its development. The Acts of CITRA have been read and re-read by generations of professionals seeking information and knowledge. It cannot be overemphasised just how essential the role of this literature has been in terms of the circulation of ideas, of training, of opportunities for comparison and as a source of inspiration.

It is fitting today, in this period of transition which we are embarking upon, to express our gratitude to the hundreds of individuals, to the governments, the institutions, the archivists, to the ICA secretariat in Paris, the representatives of the organization and to the volunteers, who between them have made the staging of these 43 sessions of CITRA possible.

Today represents for us the end of an era, as we embark upon a new adventure. It is up to us to maintain that same state of mind, positive, constructive, open, united and

professional, a state of mind that has prevailed during these past five decades against contrary winds and tides.

I thank you for your attention.

Didier Grange
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