

**LA DIRECCIÓN DE DOCUMENTACIÓN, BIBLIOTECA Y ARCHIVO
DEL CONGRESO DE LOS DIPUTADOS: HISTORIA,
ANTECEDENTES Y SITUACIÓN ACTUAL**

**THE HEAD OFFICE OF DOCUMENTATION, LIBRARY AND
ARCHIVES OF THE CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES. HISTORY,
BACKGROUND AND CURRENT SITUATION**

Mateo Maciá
Head of Documentation, Library and Archives
Congress of Deputies

On 25 September 1810 Spain's first modern Parliament, or Cortes, were established in the city of Cadiz. The reason they did not meet in Madrid was that the country was at war with the French invader. This meant that the assembly had to establish its own new administrative apparatus. According to the Spanish tradition, the Cortes under the Ancien Régime appointed their own employees, so the new institution continued in this line. Two decrees passed on 17 December 1811 established the Cortes Secretariat and made the first appointments: Secretariat officials and a resident Archivist, a post which was initially held by Antonio Moreno Galea, official at the Council Secretariat and West Indies Chamber. He was already seconded to the role since 5 November 1810. Moreno Galea was succeeded by Baltasar Santos Maldonado and Nicolás Rascón, who resigned in 1823. The Cortes' first regulations "for internal governance" –that is, not parliamentary Standing Orders- were adopted on 7 February 1823, under the title Regulations of the Cortes Secretariat and Archives.

What I would like to underline at this point is that administration of the Cortes could not be conceived without the Archives, which were inextricable tied in with the parliamentary body's management from the outset.

The Cortes' Library was established on 24 January 1811. Its "direction and arrangement" was entrusted to Bartolomé José Gallardo, an enthusiastic liberal. Its initial collection brought together the libraries of the Cadiz Medicine and Surgery and Marine Guard Colleges. From the early days, it entered into more or less outspoken rivalry with the Royal Library to achieve National Library status, a battle it eventually lost. The first librarian came under fire for his political leanings. Initially, the library was intended "to provide

Members the literary support they may require”, but also “to gather on a single site all those works that may in one way or another serve for public instruction”. In other words, a library to support parliamentarians, but also a public library that was in fact open to the public “at those hours and in the fashion determined by the Congress”. Furthermore, 1813 saw the adoption of the “National Regulation regarding provincial libraries and the fundamental basis for the Spanish National Library of the Cortes”, which established a national library system under the sponsorship of the Cortes library, which would be the national institution.

Therefore, the Cortes library –which was to be dissolved under an Act adopted on 21 May 1834- was more focused on the custody of valuable items and on providing external services than on serving the Cortes. Through different channels, it obtained books from members of the aristocracy, parliamentarians and journalists. Upon its dissolution, it was replaced by the libraries of the Congress of Deputies and Senate, which still exist today. The library is thus established as a public service and a means for the Chamber’s external projection.

We will now take a major leap in time. The Documentation Department was established exactly 173 years after the Library and Archives, by means of a resolution of the Bureau of the House of 12 December 1984. The aim was to “improve and extend the information and documentation means available to the Members for the exercise of their parliamentary activities”. The idea was to “provide direct documentary assistance to each and every Member making a request” and prepare the “documentation necessary to parliamentary business”. This was to be done following in the footsteps of “the most advanced Parliaments in the field”.

The Documentation Department was therefore established to cover the Member’s information needs. In the context of an overall

scarcity of information, it focused its activity on providing articles published in periodicals –it currently receives over 1000 subscriptions- and national and international legal, EU, financial and statistical documentation.

In addition to the above, we could draw a number of dividing lines between the Archive, the Library and the Documentation Department: the first stored documents that were written by hand under the popularisation of the typewriter in the 20th Century; the Library gathered printed documents; the first therefore dealt with single copies and the second with multiple copies; the first was not governed by standardised description methods, while the second was. Archival materials were described by means of inventories subject to questionable criteria, but book cataloguing was standardised throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries. What it did not achieve was precisely a detailed description of articles in scientific journals, and that was, *inter alia*, one of the motivations for the creation of the Documentation Department. For that purpose, and because what we could describe as “documents” –neither originals nor books- and periodicals could not be accessed via the traditional channels. Legislation and court rulings –Spanish and foreign- were contained in specialised and regularly updated compendia that did not match the Library’s idea of a “book”.

Today all this has changed. To start with, all original documents are now electronic, not manuscript or typed or printed. Secondly, all users have network access, regardless of their status: civil servants, Members or general public. These changes have unavoidably affected the very organisation of the archive, the library and the documentation centre, as well as the services they provide. Over the next few pages, I will look into these issues.

ON THE SCARCITY OR OVERABUNDANCE OF INFORMATION

The three departments that make up the Congress of Deputies Documentation, Library and Archive Directorate were established in situations of information scarcity. They were therefore intended as information repositories to meet immediate and future demands. Essentially, the Archive to store own information, the Library to guard Spanish literary and bibliographic “treasures”, and the Documentation Department to compile and store collections on national and international legislation and case law.

However, the situation today is entirely different, if not diametrically opposite. Documentary IT and databases first and the internet more recently, have taken us into an environment where information is overabundant rather than scarce. The key problem today is not a lack of information or repositories, since the internet acts as a vast universal information repository by virtue of its extension and accessibility. There is no precedent in history of a situation like today's.

FROM STORING TO ACCESSING

Archive, Library and Documentation Centre were created to store information. What really mattered was the documentary collection. Therefore, a large share of the resources –financial and human- were devoted to creating collections and storing information. The basic criteria for defining what was to be stored was its literary or artistic value, as regards the Library; its historical value, as regards the Archive; or its informational value, as regards the Documentation Centre. In general, most documents were initially purchased and stored for their informational value, but this value, over time, tended to become historical or cultural. Conservation became a heavy financial load, demanding new approaches to the collection's use:

exhibitions organised independently or jointly with other institutions, creating audiovisual or web-based contents, or others. For Parliaments, documentary institutions tend to become symbols of historic continuity.

However, given this change in the situation, what matters now is not so much to store and preserve an own collection, as to access the universal collection that is the internet. Therefore, information and documentation specialists must be trained less in storage and conservation techniques –or even in document description, which was the archivist and librarian’s key skill- and more in accessing information that is not stored by the institution itself. In parallel, the Parliament’s own and unique collections –i.e., the Archive’s- and the Library’s heritage must be made accessible via the internet, usually from the institutions website and also perhaps through a specialised portal. There is therefore a need not only to access eternal information, but to provide access to the institution’s own collections.

DYNAMIC VS. STATIC DOCUMENTS

New media provide for the mutability of documents. In some respects, things are no longer what they were, nor what they will be. While Libraries store static information, new electronic media allow for a limitless transformation of contents –which are permanently updated- and formats. As a result, traditional description methods are no longer applicable to new media, requiring the use of others such as metadata. We must find dynamic description systems that reflect the state of a document at a given moment.

THE SAME CONTENT ON ANY MEDIA AND IN ANY FORMAT

The borders between archive documents, graphic documents, audiovisual documents, books or periodicals are vanishing. The same

content is to be found in any of these formats or on any physical medium: paper, tapes, discs, magnetic memory, digital memory... but they all meet in electronic format. Often this is the text's original format, with hard copies being a by-product. This is the case with many electronic periodicals and even with the Parliament's journals of debates. On the other hand, a single parliamentary sitting generates an audio recording, a video recording, a transcription in electronic format, a publication on paper... these versions can be manipulated in different ways to obtain new documents focused on a given speaker or on given topics. This all implies that access must be provided by content, regardless of the format that the document will finally be used in.

VOLATILITY AND OBSOLESCENCE OF INFORMATION

Face to a documentation that used to be in force or useful for a long period of time, most current documentation is ephemeral. Digital newspapers change constantly their contents and web pages from institutions or political parties are updated daily which makes very difficult its full preservation. On the other hand, we can store now an enormous amount of obsolete information. Documentation becomes historical very quickly. A key factor of the documentation work is now to capture and disseminate updated information and to discard obsolete information.

DOCUMENTATION NOT CENTRED AROUND THE DOCUMENT, BUT AROUND THE USER

Today's parliamentary documentation revolves around the user, who does not strike a distinction between one or other document or format. Ultimately, he or she requires speedy, up-to-

date, cheap and versatile information, to view on screen, to print or to store on a range of memory bases.

Users must be enabled to help themselves in a digital environment or may also request the support of specialised services, which must provide added value to the documentation and guide the user. The documentarist shifts from custodian to intermediary and “guide” in a digital universe. Informative value becomes the document’s core value. On the other hand, librarians and archivists in turn become specialised guides in traditional media, increasingly removed from everyday reality.

THE SERVICE: FROM INSTITUTIONAL TO FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE

Acquisitions function

Traditional Material (documents, books, printed periodicals...)

Electronic Material

Conservation Function

Conversion Function

Description / cataloguing Function

Access Function

Own resources, external resources

Capture Function

“Trawling” on the web

Circulation Function

General, customised

Educational Function

Regarding digital media

Regarding traditional media

These functions make no difference between libraries and Documentation Centres. There are no frontiers: Their functions are identical. Archives still keeping some different functions on their own. They have to comply with old rules that force them to preserve documents in paper format. But these circumstances are changing due to economic reasons. This will bring closer working methods of libraries, Documentation Centres and Archives.