PROMOTING ARCHIVES: A KEY COMPETENCY OF THE ARCHIVIST

ICA ROME MEETING MAY 2022
THE ICRC

• **1863 Creation** in Geneva of the Committee for Relief of Military Wounded in the Field, which later became the ICRC

• **2021**: 

  ✓ **Budget** of about **2.6 billion** US dollar

  ✓ More than **20’000 staff** in over **100 countries**

• **Mission** to protect and assist **people affected by armed conflicts** and other situations of violence

• Guardian of **International Humanitarian Law** (IHL) and the **reference** on IHL
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A FEW DATA (NON EXHAUSTIVE)

19 kml
19000 shelf meters of paper archives

9 million
Digital records in ICRC records management systems

41'000
Bibliographic references in the library

9500
Digital film/video archives

115'000
Digital Photos

8700
Digital sound files

A unique heritage on modern humanitarian action and on IHL
1863: creation of the ICRC – first archive of the ICRC (minutes of meeting)

1869: first mention of an archivist

1942: first dedicated department for archives

Since 1950: systematically described

Since 1996: open to the public

Since 2010: digital born records

Currently digitizing some collections
WHERE ARE OUR COLLECTIONS?

**ANALOGICAL ARCHIVES**
- All our general archives
- WWII archives on PoWs on microforms: through our archivists (limited resources = limited accessibility)

**AV ARCHIVES PORTAL**
- Internal and public portal
- Digitized and digital born AV

**WWI PORTAL**
- 5 millions index cards of WWI POWS digitized
- Public portal
- Set up in 2014

**LIBRARY CATALOGUE**
- Includes all the publications and public documents of the ICRC

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In Geneva

online
IS PROMOTION A SKILL THAT ARCHIVISTS NEED TO MASTER?

• In the past decade, **archival sciences have become increasingly complex**, calling on new digital skills and begging for more specialized archivists vs “generalists”.

• **Promotional**/communication sciences require a extensive, totally different and equally complex range of skills.

In other words:

➢ 2 different expertise requiring different profiles and trainings.

➢ Archivists are not professional communicators
WHY DO HAVE ARCHIVES?

“The ultimate objective of an archivist is to render accessible and prepare the dissemination of information contained in an archive” (Couture)

Accessibility covers different undeniable archival tasks such as:

• They are described and therefore searchable
• There are rules governing their access
• There are accessible in situ or on line

We also need to communicate on the value of archives if we want them to be consulted.
ARCHIVISTS DO COMMUNICATE

- Through the ICRC official website
- Briefings (internal and public), open doors to archives, tour of the archives, events on genealogy
- Leaflets
- Lending material for exhibitions
- With our historian: roundtables, seminars, academic papers etc.
- Fora, meetings with archivists

These means of communicating remain very valid
AND THEN CAME BLOGGING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

How to:

Create visually appealing, multimedia content, with video clips, emojis, Gifs etc..

Write short messages

Master the hashtags

Understand the algorithms

Be creative… every day…

Understand the rhythm of posting

Post at the right moment

Be active on other posts etc…

Measure the impact
WE ADAPTED…

• We recognize that to promote our archives, we needed to be on these platforms
  ➢ Focal points were designated, a blog, a Twitter and a FB account were set up and a workshop was organized to strengthen skills
  ➢ We benefited from advice from our communication colleagues

AND

• We needed more than goodwill. The first impulse is to create new products and tools, without thinking the why and the what. It is very exiting, but often this will not make it sustainable and will soon prove to be insufficient to reach out to target audiences.
  • It leads to discouragement within the teams
  • Online communication soon became the activity we do when we had time.
We should not be communicating for the sake of it...

We need to strategize our communication
WHY A STRATEGY?

Align and adapt our communication on our sources to the overall institutional ambitions, taking into account the fast changing communication environment and our limited human resources.
OUTREACH STRATEGY (2019-2023)

WHAT GUIDES US
• We think digital
• **We support corporate priority areas**
• We innovate
• We think holistically
• **Efficiency and sustainability**
• We partner
• We relay posts from sisters organisations
• We remain ethical
• We measure our impact

OUR OBJECTIVES
• We foster independent historical and legal research
• We are recognized as the reference academic resource center in IHL
• We contribute to public knowledge about the ICRC
• We support family research
• We promote our online resources

OUR TARGET AUDIENCES
• Academia (historians, legal and international relations scholars, students)
• ⚫ IHL/IHR experts
• ⚫ The general public
• ⚫ The beneficiaries of our Protection program and their families

OUR VECTORS
• **We provide information through the ICRC website and favor online events/articles, through our blog, our social media and relevant publications.**
• Standard promotional material
• Colloquas, seminars, round table for priority areas
• Sizing opportunities for exhibitions
WE SUPPORT ICRC PRIORITIES AND PROVIDE A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

30 AUGUST
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE DISAPPEARED

The ICRC’s action to help families know the fate of their loved ones in conflict dates back all the way to the Franco-Prussian War. Find documentation retracing its 150 years of action to trace the missing and reunite families in our research guide:

FIGHTING AGAINST FAKE NEWS

Ukraine: Addressing misinformation about ICRC’s activities

Geneva (ICRC) - Over the past days, false information about the ICRC has been circulated that we must address, as it could have a major impact on people affected by the conflict in Ukraine. This misinformation is also putting at risk Red Cross staff and volunteers on the ground and could jeopardize our access to people in need of urgent aid.

The ICRC vs. fake news: Setting the record straight in the First World War

33 April 2021, ARCLIB / Centre de Recherche Cédric Cotter, Researcher

We have constantly been asked to take sides in a conflict, as proven by our 160 years old archives. This is not the way we work. Misinformation in an increasingly polarized and connected world does not help.
In 2022, the ICRC archives with the support of the Arolsen Archives launched an effort to digitize the Drancy file, with the aim of making the documents available online to researchers around the world. The Arolsen Archives – an international centre on Nazi persecution located in Bad Arolsen, Germany – are funding the digitization of the archives and will incorporate them into the collaborative digitization project #everynamecounts.

The documents in the ICRC’s Agency archives are at once both unique and universal: They protect the memory of the identities, experiences and suffering of victims of conflict, but they also resonate personally within each of us.

Some, however, are particularly evocative. The Drancy file is among them. The file contains information on approximately 35,000 Jewish deportees of various nationalities who were arrested by the Vichy government on French territory and kept in the internment camp in Drancy, France, between February 15 and March 16, 1942.
EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

REUSE ONLINE POST AND ARTICLES WITH A NEW TWIST

KEEP IT SIMPLE

CROSS-REFERENCE SOURCES

KEEP TRACK OF ANNIVERSARIES, SPECIAL DATES, EVENTS,
LET US NOT FORGET OUR OWN COLLEAGUES

• Objective: Improve policy and decision making in the ICRC; make them aware of the importance of a proper records management

• Target group: managers, field staff, legal advisors

• Sources: internal reports based on classified archives; public library sources
OUTREACH ONLINE PUBLIC PLATFORMS

**CROSSFILES**
New blog in 2017
Experts and general audience
Articles, research guides, promotional material, story maps
Link to all our platforms and to our social media

**FB PAGE**
Created in 2017
General public audience
Series of posts throughout the months
Use of AV material

**LIBRARY TWITTER**
Created 2020
Expert audience
Already more than 2000 followers
Daily posts

**WWW.ICRC.ORG**
Specific section history under who we (ICRC) are
General public audience
Entry point to ask questions and book rdv
A FEW DATA ON OUR ONLINE PUBLIC PLATFORMS (2021)
MORE AMBITIOUS PROJECTS

UN MONDE À GUÉRIR

NEW EXHIBITION | OPENING ON 16 NOVEMBER 2021
INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED
PLAN, REVIEW, BUDGET: A MUST

• A board was set up (Comité de valorisation) and meets monthly
  ○ Members: a focal point per archival and library source + our historian/researcher
  ○ Part of their yearly objectives
  ○ Reviews what has been done, what worked, what did not work so well
  ○ Plans for the future and coordinates
  ○ Seizes opportunities

In total, we dedicate probably 1 FTE throughout the year for promotional activities (except the very ambitious ones)
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LESSONS LEARNED

• Don’t make it only about resources or skills

• Learn from the kings and queens of communication in your own institution and from your network

• Plan for continuous training

• Don’t expect to have everyone master the new technologies in communication

• Dare to explore

• Consider the emotional value of your collections when you communicate
CHALLENGES

• Social media: needs constant content whilst it is difficult to measure the impact.

• Not feasible to quit existing platforms (lose a certain type of audience) or integrate new ones (for lack of resources).

• Images work well, text less.

• Not all audiences want short messages or blog posts. But writing an academic article, participating in round tables, animating debates or building an exhibition (in situ or virtual) requires a lot of time and very specific skills.

• Internal promotion is often left aside.

• Promotional activities bring more requests, yet we have a limited capacity to follow up upon certain.
• Yes, communication/promotion is definitely part of an archivist's job description.

• There are challenges, but overall the focal points in our teams have been quite enthusiastic on the overall feedback they get from what they post/write.

• So, for those who are more in advance then us, please share with us your experiences, tips and tricks, for those that are starting, don’t hesitate to communicate. If we can do, all of you can.
THANK YOU