

ARCHIVES, HARMONY AND FRIENDSHIP: SUSTAINING THE SPIRIT OF SEOUL

The global archival community, as represented by 2,049 archivists from 114 countries attending the 20th International Congress on Archives in Seoul, Republic of Korea, between 5 and 10 September 2016, acknowledges that the context in which archivists work has changed out of all recognition over the last twenty years.

Technology has generated an exponential growth in the amount of records created by individuals, families, public authorities, voluntary organizations and private companies in a bewildering variety of formats. These records need to be responsibly managed, based on a careful balance between the right to privacy and the right of access. The *information* contained in records are potentially an immense asset but need to be managed wisely for the benefit of society as a whole.

For a long time archive institutions were considered as a backwater, meeting the needs of a comparatively small section of society familiar with its specialist procedures and erudite terminology. The rapid development of innovative online services has changed all that for good, enabling millions of users to access the information that they require without ever setting foot in an archive. The general public can now access the collective memory kept in archives in a way which previous generations could never have imagined.

In this context of rapid technological change in a new digital age, Congress participants should be aware that several major policy initiatives recently approved by international governmental organizations have significant implications for the records and archives professionals, which cannot be ignored.

*United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as defined in 'Transforming Our World – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'*¹

Goal 16 is to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, to provide access to justice for all and to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. More specifically, the following targets among others have been set: to reduce substantially all forms of bribery and corruption; to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

*UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage, including in Digital Forms (November 2015)*² encourages member states 'to support their memory institutions in establishing selection, collection and preservation policies by research and consultation, guided by internationally established and defined standards regarding documentary heritage in their territories. The documents, fonds and collections should be managed in a way that ensures their preservation and accessibility over time, and assigns means of discovery, including cataloguing and metadata' (1.1) It also points out that 'in the case of digital documents, action and intervention are desirable from before the point of creation and acquisition' (2.2).

*UNESCO Universal Declaration on Archives (November 2011)*³: recognizes that 'archives are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions; that they play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory; and that open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life.'

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabledevelopmentgoals>

² http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49358&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

³ <http://www.ica.org/en/universal-declaration-archives>

*Open Government Partnership (launched in 2011)*⁴: this a multilateral initiative which currently brings together 69 member states, NGOs and representatives from civil society in a collegial governance.

At the global level, OGP is committed to promoting the principles of open and transparent government through civic consultation and participation, reinforcing public integrity and the fight against corruption, and increasing access to new technologies to foster democracy, promote innovation and stimulate progress. Since the OGP's creation, participating countries have made over 2,000 commitments to make their governments more open and accountable.

As a forum for sharing best practices, OGP provides a unique platform that brings together, stimulates and expands the community of state reformers worldwide.

Recommendations for Action

During the Seoul Congress records and archives professionals have reaffirmed their determination to make a powerful contribution to modern society in the digital age by sharing their professional knowledge to the fullest possible extent, in a true spirit of 'Harmony and Friendship'. In the light of the challenges and opportunities presented by all the above initiatives, the Congress participants now call on the International Council on Archives to ensure that the spirit of co-operation that has been so evident throughout this week is nurtured and sustained throughout the records and archives profession in the coming years. More specifically, they recommend that **the International Council on Archives** should take forward the following actions over the next four years:-

Call for Action

Acknowledgement of Records as an Information Resource

1. Emphasizing that archives are a unique and irreplaceable information resource, to increase the visibility of archives on the international stage by developing clear position statements, on such issues as Intellectual Property, Open Government, Access to Information and Data Protection, and communicating these positions effectively both inside the organization and to external stakeholders.

Digital Record Keeping Policy Development

2. To harness the expertise available in the global ICA network in order to develop standards and best practices, enabling archivists to put in place robust measures for digital preservation, for example the PERSIST project, and to exploit in a responsible way the opportunities for increased access to archives offered by digitization.
3. To encourage constructive dialogue among ICA members on shared archival heritage in a neutral environment and on the basis of mutual respect, and to promote schemes that will make this heritage more accessible to all.

Sustainable Financing and Human Resource Development

4. To continue advocating the need for investment in the establishment and maintenance of new digital technology-based infrastructure, and to research different ways of constructing a new financial model to support these purposes.
5. Through PCOM, to provide a better training offer for archivists worldwide through eLearning tools, while upholding the different archival cultures and practices as well as ICA's linguistic and cultural diversity.
6. Through PCOM, to coordinate the various training projects developed by ICA bodies to ensure that the organization delivers training opportunities meeting its programme priorities and respecting diverse needs of our communities.

⁴ <https://en.ogpsummit.org/osem/conference/ogp-summit>

Support of International Organizations' Policy Initiatives

7. Through the forum of National Archivists and the ICA regional branches, to encourage all member states to take full account of the UNESCO Recommendation on Documentary Heritage and to participate in its flagship Memory of the World programme.
8. Also through the Forum of National Archivists and the ICA regional branches, to encourage member states to take part in the Open Government Partnership and to develop national action plans based on effective records and archives management.
9. To continue the modernization of the International Council on Archives as an organization so that it reaps the full benefits of technological improvement while upholding linguistic and cultural diversity, and in particular to capitalize on the opportunities of social media to attract new audiences and to recruit new members.

Strengthening of International Cooperation

10. To enable colleagues working in low resource environments to share in the opportunities of the digital age, especially through its Fund for the International Development of Archives (FIDA) and its Africa Programme
11. To build on existing links with sister Non-Governmental Organizations, such as IFLA, ICOM and ICOMOS, in order to carry out joint programmes in areas of common interest

The participants at this Congress do not wish these recommendations to become pious sentiments which are quickly forgotten. They insist that they should guide the actions of the ICA leadership over the next four years and they expect a full report on their implementation to be presented at the next Congress in 2020.

Version 5

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