Our Industry on Paper: Challenges and Experiences around Bunge & Born Argentina Business Archive

Introduction:

The Bunge & Born business archive is one of the most important worldwide and is currently under the custody and management of the namesake Foundation. Bunge & Born was a significant multinational corporation founded in 1884 by Ernesto Bunge and Jorge Born. Established in Buenos Aires, Bunge & Born initial activities were based on the international trade of commodities such as corn, wheat, wool and leather. This corporation controlled a vast majority of the Argentine and worldwide cereals exports.

Building a Business Archive

- **Main facts and statistics**
  - Total amount of records: 16,923 documents
  - 1885-1992 (Fond)
  - Total digital pages: 1,050,000
  - 547 metres of storage space
  - Total staff: 31 archivists, historians, librarians, photographers and employees

- **A unique business and archive case**
- **Specific protocols and standards**
- **Training Programme in business archives**

Looking for a suitable classification scheme: Between Corporate Bureaucracy and Archive Theory

Making a relevant classification scheme for Bunge & Born Business Archive has implied surpassing several challenges and problems:
1. Lack of experience regarding this type of business archives arrangement in Argentina.
2. Archival literature is commonly focused on public archives. Therefore, a public archive classification scheme is hardly a "standard" for this type of business archives.
3. Making a classification scheme involves a negotiation between archival theory and corporate bureaucracy. Private archives reflect another kind of institutional organization.
4. The classification scheme involved matching the organization chart of all the companies that integrated the Bunge & Born Business Group. Here we faced another difficulty because of the absence of data on the entire organization’s chart of the Business Group.
5. We explored other alternatives to elucidate the lack of the companies organization charts and we consulted secondary sources such as magazines, books, and oral testimonies from oldest employees and legal staff that worked for Bunge & Born Business Group.

Working Methodology

The process of making a suitable classification scheme for Bunge & Born Business Archive included:
1. Identify all the records available in the archive’s collection.
2. Identify all the important document types.
3. Explore the history of the business group and the background of all its different companies over the years.
4. Recognize the original and previous classification of the records.
5. Perform a balance between the bureaucracy of the business group and the archival classification theory.
6. Gather all the Bunge & Born business group records under different categories such as Accounting, Staff Records, Legal Affairs, Finance Administration and Bunge & Born Sporting Club.
7. For the rest of each companies’ fonds, it was decided to gather all the records belonging to those companies by source that represent the collection.

"The tree as an effective iconic representation; a tool for viewing a document or an archive [...] is it really true that trees mirror archives?". Giovanni Michetti, 2012.

Results and impact:

1. A remarkable business archive in Argentina: state-of-the-art regarding technological equipment for digitization of historical collections and qualified staff.
2. Highly training center with a huge variety of seminars, courses and internships for professionals interested in digitizing historical collections.
3. A unique national and international center for the academic studies of companies and business history, as well as society and culture studies.
4. Archival services: we provide services such as arrangement, organization, digitization and curation for others business archives collections.
5. Financial awards and grants for archives in Argentina.
6. Foundation of the most important network of business archives in Latin America. https://fundacionbyb.org/