

Butlletí 101

Informatiu de l'Associació d'Arxivers-Gestors de Documents de Catalunya

The visibility of archives and records management

With the publication of the Decree on the restructuring of the Ministry of Culture last March, the archive sector lost quite an important reference point of the last few years—the Sub-Directorate General for Archives and Records Management, the principal body in charge of coordinating the archival system in Catalonia and planning and implementing the Government of Catalonia's archival policy. With this Decree, archives were merged with the museum sector, leading to the loss of a specific sub-directorate general.

But that was not all. The organisational restructuring also swept away the “records management” aspect of competences long demanded by the profession. The loss of the institutional visibility of archives has been a backward step, but what has been most worrying has been the disappearance of the concept of records management within the organisational chart. This restructuring was surprising, particularly if we bear in mind that much has been said about effectiveness, efficiency and savings.

Although the deployment of records management was halted by the lack of the necessary human resources, the Sub-Directorate General for Archives and Records Management carried out important work over the last few years, both in the SIGEDA project and in other fields: XAC, subsidy policies, etc. And, most importantly, it was a reference providing a mirror for many institutions and serving to provide archives and records management and, by extension, our professionals with considerable visibility.

In this context of slimming down the administration, the Records Management Service was also abolished, showing that the cuts and abolitions are, in some cases, being carried out in a linear way, without considering needs or projects being carried out for the future. In our case, there has been an excessively heritage-centred view of archives, leaving the central administrative archives of the departments or the National Document Access, Assessment and Selection Committee (CNAATD) itself without support.

Despite the explanations given by those in charge of the Ministry of Culture at various meetings, the AAC expressed its unease at the *fait accompli* policy and that it was in disagreement with the disappearance of these archival institutions. Looking back, we cannot help but feel that they still did not understand the message concerning the usefulness of the implementation of records management systems in public institutions in terms of economic savings and rationalisation of services. Therefore there was a contradiction in the messages of cutbacks and making use of the resources given by the government and which continue to be present today.

In light of all this, among the conclusions of the 13th Congress of Catalan Archivists held at Lloret de Mar last May, the professional sector highlighted precisely the need to “to ensure that the government agency responsible for the archival policy of Catalonia maintains and develops the structures and bodies

necessary to guarantee the correct development of archival science and records”. Shortly thereafter, the White Paper on administrative simplification, streamlining and restructuring and the promotion of economic activity, known as the “Omnibus Bill”, proposed the establishment of the Catalan Cultural Heritage Agency, which would have included the National Archive of Catalonia and some coordination and dissemination competences that could have affected archival facilities. In response to this situation, the AAC decided to present comments on the White Paper within the public consultation period in June of this year. Finally, the Legal Office of the Government of Catalonia confirmed the acceptance of the AAC’s comments on the White Paper and decided to remove the National Archive of Catalonia and archival policies from this agency’s area of action.

The Catalan Cultural Heritage Agency is now being constructed to affect mainly museum institutions and, at the AAC, we therefore understand that this will mean the “museums” function disappearing from the competences of the current Sub-Directorate General for Archives and Museums. It would therefore be logical to think that the professional sector could recover the specific sub-directorate general it used to have.

That would also mean the organic recovery of the “records management” function and the provision of the vacant post of deputy director-general.

We are convinced that the heads of the autonomous community government will be receptive and sensitive to the demands of our professional sector, which is why the AAC is calling for the organic visibility of archives through the recovery of a specific sub-directorate general for archives and records management, as well as the promotion of the necessary archive policies.

But it is not only the Government of Catalonia that needs to recognise that archives are necessary. In this budgetary context, all governments must bear in mind the importance of archive and records management policies, because the organisation of documents and archives is a clear commitment to administrative efficiency and effectiveness and to the transparency and openness of government to society, as it facilitates public access to documents. In short, it is an example of policies of good governance.

