Archivistics Research Saving the Profession

Eric Ketelaar

Abstract

The archivist has to understand the ways people create and maintain records and archives. This is particularly important as archives and archivists go through a paradigm shift from provenance defined by stable offices and roles to one of dynamic process-bound information. In all stages of records and archives management and archival usage, the socially and culturally defined “software of the mind” plays a role. This new “archivistics” demands that archival education be comparative and multi-disciplinary. Likewise, research in archival science, broadly defined, is a key instrument for experimenting, inventing, changing, and improving professional education.

What is an Archivist?

The International Council on Archives’ Code of Ethics states quite simply: “The term archivists as used in this code is intended to encompass all those concerned with the control, care, custody, preservation and administration of archives.” This is in line with ICA’s Dictionary of Archival Terminology. That dictionary also defines archives as non-current records preserved because of their archival value. But are archives just that? Not quite. In many European countries the terms “archives” or “archival documents” encompass current, semi-current, and non-current records. For example, in Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and French archival terminology and legislation, there does not exist a specific equivalent for the term “records”. We call it all “archives”. When we want to point specifically to archives-in-the-making, we have to add a qualifying adjective, such as current or dynamic. The consequence is that, in Europe, an “archivist managing archives” may be a records manager, a business archivist, a manuscript curator, or an archivist keeping historical archives only. However, the ICA’s Code of Ethics does not apply to all professionals managing the records continuum in all European countries. In

Germany, for example, there is a sharp distinction between *Schriftgutverwaltung* (correspondence and files management) and *Archivierung* (archiving). The two are divided by appraisal carried out not by records managers, but by archivists of the archival institution to which the archives will be transferred. German *Archivare* (archivists), are dealing with archives, not with current records, only to the extent of *vorarchivische Betreuung* and *Beratung der Schriftgutverwaltung*: service and consultancy to the records-creating agency concerning appraisal and transfer of the small portion of records with archival value. The German archival profession is closed to those who work in the *Registra tur* (the registries).

The same applies in France. French archival legislation applies to archives in the broadest sense, including current records, but a French government archivist has nothing to do with records management, apart from ensuring that records are appraised and that those with archival value are transferred to the archives.

In short, in many European countries the archival profession has, by self-perception, by history, and by law, an aura of the historians’ erudition, not directly attracted by or involved with records as they are currently created by public and private administrations.²

**University-Based Archival Education**

In many European countries, archival education is, in fact, in-service training; professional training of individuals who have started to work in the archives and who are seconded by their employer to the archival training institute. Such was the situation in The Netherlands, where the Archives School provided training for practitioners. In 1996 the whole system of Dutch archival education changed drastically.³ The archival education was “de-institutionalized”—to borrow an expression from Theo Thomassen the then-Director of the Archives School. In this case, “de-institutionalized” meant that archival students and archivists were no longer identified by the type of records or archives they manage or by the institution which employs them. The program was redesigned to account for the shift of focus from skills to attitudes. This entailed cutting the traditional apprenticeship in an archives and limiting

---


practical work in archival arrangement and description. The Archives School has allied with the University of Amsterdam; both institutions have invested in staff and infrastructure. A four-year university course leads to a master’s degree in library, archives, and information science. That degree is valid at any place where recorded information has to be managed. The law requires the degree only for senior positions in state and local archives, but many public and private employers have included the degree in job descriptions as a requirement or as a preference.

Students in Amsterdam, after a first year in any school or department of the university, take a three-year course. A little less than half of the course is taken in information science, history, organization science, and philosophy of science. The other 55 percent is devoted to archivistics, which includes one semester for research in archival science. Students participate in a class research project, and each student writes his or her master’s thesis.

**Theory and Practice**

Archival science is a science in the German sense of Wissenschaft, but to avoid confusion with the natural sciences in the Anglo-Saxon meaning, I personally use the term “archivistics,” being the equivalent to the Dutch archivistiek, the German Archivistik, the French archivistique, and the Italian and Spanish archivistica. Archivistics consists of theory, practice, and methodology. Archival theory can only flourish if it is, as Angelika Menne-Haritz said at the ICA congress in Montreal (1992), “free from the constraints of direct practical application and in exchange with other scholars’ ideas in discussion meetings and seminars, essays and dissertations.”

Archival theory is despised and rejected by many practicing archivists. “Much ado about shelving”—that famous and defamatory expression—can be heard in Europe, too. It is also a common expression in The Netherlands, the country of Muller, Feith, and Fruin. The Dutch Manual of 1898 codified and standardized archival methodology before archival theory could develop. This

---


5 The term archivistics has also been used by Angelika Menne-Haritz in, “What Can be Achieved with Archives?” The Concept of Record: Report from the Second Stockholm Conference on Archival Science and the Concept of Record 30–31 May 1996 (Stockholm: Riksarkivet 1998), 21.

is the paradox of professional quality. Their early professionalism constrained
Dutch archivists to ask “what” and “how,” instead of “why.” It led them to focus
on the procedures, methods, and technologies of archival work and to put mat-
ter over mind.8

It is correct that an archivist may well process archives adhering to the
methodology and not to archival theory.9 Archivistica applicata and archivistica
pura are not opposites, they follow naturally from one to another, because every
practitioner—even the manager—starts from hypotheses and ideas. The prac-
titioner (other than the theorist) often accepts these hypotheses straightaway
as true. The practitioner is thus concerned with the operational side. Yet at
some point he or she will have to address more fundamental questions to pre-
vent archives’ management from becoming routine and to find answers to
changing technologies and challenges.

A New Paradigm

Changing technologies and challenges have recently opened the eyes and
minds of archivists. Earlier revolutions in information and communication
technologies (like the vertical file, punch cards, and carbon paper) changed
the physical appearance of the record but left the intrinsic qualities untouched.
Records managers and archivists continued to manage records as artifacts. This
has changed fundamentally with the advent of digital records, so fundamentally
that the old paradigm of archivistics has had to be replaced. Recently, Theo
Thomassen presented an important paper on the paradigmatic revolutions in
archival science.10 The concept of the paradigm has been introduced by
Thomas Kuhn in his classic work on the structure of scientific revolutions.11
According to Kuhn, a paradigm is a universally recognized scientific achieve-
ment that for a time models problems and solutions to a community of practi-
tioners. Applied to a science as such, a paradigm provides the explanatory
model of a scientific discipline in the specific stage of its development and
defines its fundamentals.

Imagination. Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor edited by Barbara L. Craig (Ottawa: Association of
Canadian Archivists, 1992), 38–70.
9 Trevor Livelton, Archival Theory, Records, and the Public (Lanham, Md. and London: Society of American
Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1996); Preben Mortensen, “The Place of Theory in Archival Practice,”
10 Theo Thomassen, “The Development of an Archival Science and its European Dimension,” in The
Theo Thomassen, “Paradigmatische veranderingen in de archiefwetenschap,” in Peter J. Horsman,
Frederick C. J. Ketelaar, and Theo H. P. M. Thomassen, eds., Naar een nieuw paradigma in de archivistiek.
Jaarboek 1999 Stichting Archiefpublicaties (Gravenhage: Stichting Archiefpublicaties, 1999), 69–79.
Thomassen asserts that the classical paradigm in archival enterprise, as codified by the Dutch Manual of 1898, had as its object the archival *fonds* as an organic whole. The methodology of classical archivistics was based on the principle of provenance. In the 1980s, Hugh Taylor proclaimed and predicted the paradigm shift. The object of the new paradigm of archival science is what Thomassen calls “process-bound information,” that is “information generated by business-processes and structured by these processes in order to enable contextual retrieval with the context of these processes as the starting-point.” He considers “archival quality” as the objective of archivistics in the new paradigm, “which stands for the transparency, the strength and the enduring stability of the bond between the information and the generating business processes.”

Thomassen has been influenced, as I myself have, by the writings of Hugh Taylor and Terry Cook. Cook summed it up in his article “What is Past is Prologue.” “[This new paradigm for archives has] a renewed focus on the context, purpose, intent, interrelationships, functionality, and accountability of the record, its creator, and its creation processes, wherever these occur. Because this suggested focus goes well beyond drawing inspiration for archival activity from the study of records placed in the custody of an archives, it has been termed a postcustodial mindset for archives.” Speaking frankly, I would say that the prevailing mindset in Europe is not yet post-custodial in this sense, since many archivists still consider themselves custodians of the historical record and nothing more. I consider transforming this attitude to be the challenge for educators and researchers; they have to lead the profession

Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose garden . . .

( T.S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton”)

**Social and Cultural Archivistics**

Records are always created and used on account of work processes and actions that give the archives their context and structure. These elements

---


Archivistics Research Saving the Profession

determine the form of the documents. Archivistics focuses itself on context, structure, and form as determined by these processes, and not on the contents of the document. This idea—a concept that also forms the basis of new methods for archival appraisal—is not new at all. For the past hundred years, the Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives has required the archivist to understand how administrative machinery functions. He or she therefore has to study the administrative records. Archivists are “scholars of recordkeeping,” as Richard Cox wrote.¹⁵ That scholarship uses historic knowledge, its methods, and its auxiliary disciplines—administrative history, legal history, heuristics, paleography, and diplomatics. When archival science was dominated by the paradigm of archives being historical sources, these were auxiliary subjects of classical descriptive archivistics. But today, those studying modern functional archivistics also have to master the historical method and its auxiliary disciplines, to study administrative history and the history of records creation and maintenance.¹⁶ Terry Eastwood addressed this issue in his article “Reforming the Archival Curriculum to Meet Contemporary Needs,” in which he wrote, “Archivists do not study historical subjects in some diffuse effort to comprehend past social contexts for their own sake, but rather to understand, critically interpret, exploit, preserve, and communicate the archival heritage.”¹⁷

Records are created in an organization to support and manage work, to record why, when, where, in what capacity and by whom particular actions were carried out. Archivistics is concerned with basic questions such as the ones Frank Burke asked in his seminal article in 1981:

What makes a society or an organization create and use archives the way it does and will a better understanding of the way people in organizations create and maintain archives enable us to make statements about an efficient and effective way of creating records?²⁰

We therefore look at the societies, organizations, and people that create archives. This, I have named social and cultural archivistics.²¹ Its object is defining the continuum of records creation, processing, and use.

¹⁵ Cox, “Advocacy in the Graduate Archives Curriculum,” 32.


Archivalization

Traditionally, the object of archival science was the body of archives once the records had crossed the threshold of the repository. The archivist used to be a mere custodian or keeper, at the receiving end, dependent upon what the administration had created and passed on.

But recently, and as an outcome of the already mentioned conversion to a post-custodial mindset, the archivist’s focus has shifted (Hedstrom and Wallace recently used the expression “catapulted”) from the inactive stage of the life of recorded information to the front-end of the records continuum. There, he or she has a contribution to make even before documents are captured by a recordkeeping system. To be able to develop the information strategy and the recordkeeping system of an organization, the archivistics professional has to understand the way people create and maintain records and archives. To arrive at such an understanding, one should take into account the stage that precedes archiving. That is what I have recently called, in my inaugural lecture at the University of Amsterdam “archivalization.” This is a neologism, inspired by Jacques Derrida, denoting: the conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving. In the Popperian metaphor, the searchlight of archivalization has to sweep the world for something to light up in the archival sense; it must do this before we proceed to register, record, and file it—in short, before we “archive” it. By distinguishing archivalization from archiving, we gain an insight into the social and cultural factors, the standards and values, and the ideology that infuse—the expression is Jackson Armstrong-Ingram’s—the creation of records and archives.

Archivalization does not only determine whether and how actions are recorded in archives. In the subsequent stages of records and archives management and archival usage, the socially and culturally determined software of

---

the mind also plays a role.26 People create, process, and use archives, influenced consciously or unconsciously by cultural and social factors. People working in different organizations create and use their records in different ways.27 Even within the same organization, accountants, lawyers, and engineers create their records differently, not only because of legal requirements, but because they have different professional—that is social and cultural—standards. Richard Cox and Wendy Duff write that we must “extend our understanding of how organizations work, and how records fit into this work-environment and culture.”28 Therefore, archivistics not only deals with the records as they are created, but also encompasses the organizational culture and the people in these organizations who create records; and all this in their social, religious, cultural, political and economic contexts. This, again, is not totally new. Traditionally, the archivist studies law and administration in order to understand how society functions and creates its archives. But the archivist has to go further; he or she has to understand the social and cultural factors of archivalization.29 And as the archivist dealing with historical archives uses history and its auxiliary disciplines, so the archivist caring for today’s and tomorrow’s records has to be acquainted with sociology and anthropology, especially organizational sociology, organizational anthropology, and organizational informatics.

**Comparative Archivistics**

Archiving and archivalization are influenced by social, religious, cultural, political, and economic contexts. Most of these variables fit in the catalog of Grover and Greer:30

1. Culture—language, philosophical and moral values, history, educational system, concept of time, etc.;


29 Barbara L. Craig, “Serving the Truth: The Importance of Fostering Archives Research in Education Programmes, Including a Modest Proposal for Partnerships with the Workplace,” *Archivaria* 42 (Fall 1996): 112.

2. Physical geography—aspects such as climate and topographical characteristics;
3. Political structure of society—the system for governance and underlying values regarding the role of government;
4. Legislation and regulations issued by legislative and regulatory agencies of government;
5. The economic system;
6. Technology—the level of sophistication in terms of computer and telecommunication technology;
7. Information policy—copyright laws, policies regarding secrecy, censorship, privacy, the public’s right to know, government responsibility to inform, and those policies which influence the transfer of information.

These contextual factors may vary in any given time and in any given place. This challenges archivistics to be a comparative science. Comparative archivistics is more than treating and teaching a subject from an international and multicultural perspective, since it asks for ethnography followed by ethnology, for “what” followed by “why.” Comparative research should be carried out in the present (cross-cultural and cross-societal), but also in the past. This is not only a scientific requirement. To quote Barbara Craig, even practitioners’ archival choices are “less rational and . . . poorly supported when they are made in temporal and contextual vacuums.” Comparative archivistics is global, the more so since practitioners, scholars, and students in the digital environment are dealing with global “archives without boundaries.”

Memory Building

The archivist, operating at the front-end of the recordkeeping system, has to ensure accountability, evidence, and the meaning of records to be created and maintained—the archivist shaping the archival heritage. This must sound heresy for those who still believe that the archivist is a disinterested, impartial receiver of neutral archives.

Archives are not neutral. “Even when straight from the dusty archive,” writes Alan Munslow, “the evidence always pre-exists within narrative structures

---

34 Livelton, Archival Theory, 47; Mortensen, “The Place of Theory,” 21.
and is freighted with cultural meanings—who put the archives together, why, and what did they include or exclude?” Archivists do shape the context and thereby the meaning of records and archives. When a record is designated as archival, or when an archival document is designated in a schedule for permanent retention, it is put on a pedestal, as Tom Nesmith remarked; it gets a special status, obliterating non-archival records. By preserving some documents, while destroying others created within the same context, that context is changed. This change of context will irrevocably result in a change of meaning. Such changes of context and meaning also happen when records created in the dynamic archivalization and archiving phase enter the semi-current phase and are stored in state or local archives and other “memory institutions.” Archival repositories are “lieux de mémoire” (realms of memory), to quote the French historian Pierre Nora, but what is kept is no longer “mémorial vécue,” a living memory, but a deliberate and organized “mémorial perdue”—memory tainted and lost. As Terry Cook wrote: “Archivists have become . . . very active builders of their own ‘houses of memory.’ And so, each day, they should examine their own politics of memory in the archive-creating and memory-formation process.” This entails, I believe, knowledge and understanding of the sometimes shaded (and shady) history of archival institutions and of the changing archivists’ role in society. I am thinking of the recent revelations of the Nazi-German archival system by Torsten Musial and Wolfgang Ernst, or the just begun disclosure of the atrocities and agonies of the archival system of the Soviet Union. But under “normal” conditions, archivists practice a politics of memory, too, as Robert McIntosh recently wrote, not only by the records they create, acquire, and destroy, but in the value judgments embedded in every decision by which some records are given a greater profile than others. Archivists, McIntosh concludes, should question the context in which they


39 Cook, “What is Past is Prologue,” 46.


and the archives in their custody are functioning and have functioned, the same questions they have regarding the original context in which records were created.

Understanding archivalization and archiving in their social and cultural contexts will enable us to make statements about efficient and effective records and archives management. That is of special importance in our information society. We must also pass on this understanding to future users of archives and make them understand in turn why the archives were formed in a certain way and not only what happened.42

**Think as an Archivist**

And with all this, the new archivist must be instilled and inspired! That is the challenge to us as archival educators. “It is indeed an exciting time to be an archival educator, but one that requires a great deal of dedication, persistence and vision.”43 We must, as Tom Nesmith, Carol Couture, Angelika Menne-Haritz, James O’Toole, and others have emphasized, teach the new archivist to think as a professional rather than to learn how to practice a craft.44 Teaching an archival student how to think as an archivist is more important than to teach practical knowledge, all the more so since that practical knowledge will soon be outdated. For archival education, this means shifting the focus from skills and knowledge to understanding and attitudes. One way to achieve this is to bring students into close contact with research in archival science—even making research a component of education. SAA’s guidelines for the MAS curriculum consider “major research activities that produce scholarly papers” an integral part of course work, and the guidelines stress that “students should conclude their studies with a thesis or a comparable original research project.”45

By involvement in archivistics research, students will learn to ask “why,” rather than “what.” Research will teach them that practice and methodology are means to an end, and subject to change. “Research,” Barbara Craig writes,

---


45 See note 32.
“cultivates a habit of examining received notions for their continuing pertinence and relevance.” Such a habit is essential for the new archivist, who will be much better equipped to deal with the constant change in his or her environment, affecting changes in records creation, preservation, communication, and use. New archivists will be agents of change themselves. As Richard Kesner wrote, “Perhaps the most critical success factor of all, the archivist must become an agent/prophet of change within his/her organization.” Research should be a component of archival education, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Education needs research, and research needs education. I agree with what Angelika Menne-Haritz said at the 1992 ICA Congress in Montreal: “The archival profession needs the kind of training programs that enable graduates to be innovators. . . . The ability to conduct scientific archival research is proof of efficient training and professional identification.”

**Research**

After Angelika Menne-Haritz had given her keynote speech on archival education at that Montreal Congress, Ann Pederson presented the findings of her international survey of archival education and research, adding “Suggestions for Research and Writing” which, in fact, constituted a draft research agenda. Such research agendas have been an essential part of recent archival literature. Richard Cox listed eleven research agendas in North American archival journals published between 1970 and 1991. Have the planned agendas ever been converted into actions? Cox and O’Toole are dubious. Luciana Duranti is more optimistic; she rejoices in the impact of electronic records research on our overall understanding of the archival enterprise, admitting “research agendas become longer every time a project is completed.” Apart from archivistics *agenda* and *acta*, there is archivistics

---

46 Craig, “Serving the Truth,” 110.


agente: current archivistics research. The 1999 Pittsburgh Working Meeting of Graduate Archival Educators provided a forum to study the current research and research interests of some North American archival educators. In the Appendix to this article, I present an overview of current research interests, trying also to assess in which fields an international or comparative approach might be useful.

Tabularium

The Dutch Archives School, the State Archives Service, and the University of Amsterdam commissioned me to set up a Netherlands research agenda for social and cultural archivistics, both international and comparative by scope, envisaged within the new archivistics paradigm, and imbued with the records continuum thinking. Not only students and graduates, but practicing archivists as well will be guided by that research agenda. As I explained earlier, students have to do research in their final year at the university, leading to a masters’ thesis. They may continue their research after graduation, resulting ultimately in a Ph.D. dissertation. In The Netherlands, one can receive a Ph.D. without residence at the university. Many people do the research for and the writing of the Ph.D. dissertation many years after graduation, in their spare time or during a sabbatical from work. On the other hand, there exist in The Netherlands graduate schools where young doctoral students work, learn, do some teaching, and write their dissertations. They are paid a small salary by the university, whereas the “spare time” Ph.D. students do not get any allowance from the university, but are paid by their employer or, occasionally, by external funding.

A combination of these two systems is the Tabularium program, named after the great Roman archival repository overlooking the Forum. This program, launched in 1998 by the Dutch Archives School and the University of Amsterdam, involves small research teams of post-graduate students and experienced archivists, the latter being seconded by their employers for a few months, the former being funded by the Archives School and other sponsors. We envision that in some cases research topics will be simultaneously addressed in both the Tabularium and in the university or in class, although with an understandably different emphasis and scope. Students already involved in post-graduate research may continue the research after graduation in a Tabularium group.

Neither these research teams nor individual research will be limited to theoretical and fundamental work. Archivists become scholars in recognizing patterns in archiving; they acquire great knowledge of various legal and social systems in different periods.53 Although this scholarship belongs to the discipline

of the archivist and not so much to archivistics (“There is more to archivology than archival science,” according to Luciana Duranti),\(^{54}\) I would like to give the archivist-scholars a place in the research teams, provided that they move beyond a phenomenological description and on to the understanding that theoretical concepts form the basis of the research. In other words if the archivistics discourse and \textit{action research} are more than facile “how” and “what” questions, but also ask “why”,\(^{55}\) and provided the results are fit for extrapolation (“modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical conditions”),\(^{56}\) it all belongs to the research domain of archivistics.

**The Profession and Research**

Will the profession of archival practitioners be interested in archivistics research? I admit that archival educators have to work at \textit{making} them interested, in getting them to realize that many if not all so-called managerial or practical questions can be solved more fundamentally when one allows for some theoretical and methodological reflection. Practitioners can be theorists too, only they do not realize the fact. As Luciana Duranti has written “When they dwell on a new idea and develop and test it in the context of archival understanding, they are theorists in action.”\(^{57}\) We educators and researchers have to make our professional colleagues aware of “The endless cycle of idea and action, endless invention, endless experiment” (Chorus I from “The Rock” by T. S. Eliot).

Recently in The Netherlands, the Culture Council and the Council for Science and Technology Policy jointly stressed in a memorandum to government that archives, museums, and other cultural heritage institutions cannot function properly without research. The two councils pleaded for extra funding for multi-institutional research and for joint research programs of universities and cultural heritage institutions. The strong position adopted by these councils helps us in stimulating archival leadership to propose and commission research, to be carried out in the Tabularium program by their own staff together with colleagues from elsewhere and by post-graduates. The Dutch National Archives has already acknowledged not only that archivistics research

---


is a prerequisite for fulfilling its ambition to be the leading Dutch archival institution, but also that seconding staff members for participation in the Tabularium program can serve as a tool of staff development.

Research creates the theoretical framework for analysis and diagnosis of the practical work, for its improvement and evaluation, as Barbara Craig asserted.\(^5\) At the same time we have to make clear that the profession can and should inspire the research, that it can and should contribute to the research, be it only to contribute to the quality of the university education and training of new professionals. Thus, we prevent “building a wall” between research and profession, between the two cultures.\(^6\) It is our duty as archival educators to preach to our colleagues working in the field that they may win the battle in providing day-to-day service for their patrons, but that, as Don Riggs from the University of Michigan argued, without a research base, they’ll lose the war in saving the profession.\(^6\) Archivistics research can indeed save the profession, because research is the instrument for experimenting, inventing, changing, and improving.

Appendix

Current Archivistics Research Interests of North American Archival Educators

In The Netherlands I developed, or rather I am developing (because it is an ongoing and never-ending process), a social and cultural comparative archivistics research agenda.\(^6\) To check and to test, to expand and to prune the research agenda, we regularly organize meetings with archivists, archival administrators, and funding authorities. Is the research agenda valid and viable, would the agenda be feasible in comparative archival science? To answer that question, I compared the research agenda with the research interests of the participants in the 1999 Pittsburgh Working Meeting of Graduate Archival Educators. From that conference’s website and some of the participants’ individual and institutional websites I identified 105 topics of research of forty participants.\(^6\)


\(^6\) <http://www.org.uva.nl/bai/home/eketelaar/research.html>.

\(^6\) <http://www2.sis.pitt.edu/~gaeconf/>. 
1. Foundations

Twelve individuals expressed interest in fifteen topics of research of the foundations of archivistics. Research on norms and values of the profession includes research of the politics of memory, a concern of Tom Nesmith, Terry Cook, Richard Cox, and myself, and archival ethics, one of Heather MacNeil’s specialties, and James O’Toole’s cultural meanings of the record-making and the record-keeping process. Shortly, I hope, we will have the book edited by Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz, *Archival Truth and Historical Consequences. The Construction of Social Memory*. In 2000–2001, the University of Michigan is hosting a one-year multidisciplinary seminar “Archives, Documentation and the Institutions of Social Memory,” which involves a number of North American and international scholars. The program shows that this is a research domain that lends itself perfectly to an international, multidisciplinary, and comparative approach. Its exploration and exploitation are, however, still in the “gold rush” phase. It is time that we try to do some mapping and reasonable delimitation of efforts.

Archival terminology is a topic that deserves more attention from archival educators and researchers. Terminological efforts must be linked to the other concern, the history of archival enterprise and the archivistics discourse. Terry Cook, Barbara Craig, Philip Eppard, Peter Gottlieb, Jeff Jakeman, and Luciana Duranti and I share a great interest in the history of the profession and of society’s concern with records and archives. The time may not yet be ripe for truly international group research in this field, but I suggest that we try to devise some sort of protocol or checklist that might guide comparative research efforts.

![Figure 1](image_url)
2. Cross-sectoral Concerns

Among the cross-sectoral concerns which cross through all domains of the record continuum, are archivalization and the records continuum thinking itself. A number of archival educators are interested in what precedes the creation of records, what I have named archivalization: Tom Nesmith, Chris Halonen (who mentions social informatics), Margaret Hedstrom and David Wallace in their NHPRC project on recordkeeping in collaborative environments, Eun Park, Kalpana Shankar, and Elizabeth Yakel. The records continuum is naturally the research domain of Sue McKemmish and her colleagues in the Monash Records Continuum Research Group.

Terry Cook has indicated his surprise that a profession that so values “context” in its work so rarely contextualizes that work. Of the variables in society that have an impact on archiving, the technological and legal constraints receive more attention than other factors. The Pittsburgh project was an outstanding example, and there is much research going on dealing with questions such as accountability. But let us not forget the other societal variables. As Steven Lubar remarked, “Archives reflect and reinforce the power relationships of the institution that organizes them; they represent not just a technological solution, but also an organizational solution. They document and carry out not only knowledge and technique, but also culture and power.”

Much research on quality standards and metadata is going on: Wendy Duff, Anne Gilliland-Swetland, Margaret Hedstrom, Harold Thiele and others, as well as the international InterPARES project.

In this paper, I have underlined the change of the archivistics paradigm as a result of the advent of electronic records. Electronic records as such involve many researchers and research groups i.e., seven out of forty participants in the Pittsburgh meeting of archival educators. But others devote special attention to electronic records too, in their research on different aspects of recordkeeping, maintenance, and use. So, for example, of the seven preservation research projects or topics, six deal specifically with electronic records.

3. Recordness and Archival Nature

The research by Luciana Duranti and Terry Eastwood on new records forms fits into the research on recordness and the archival nature of records. All the research on metadata and the records continuum is dealing with recordness and archival nature, too.

4. Capture and Storage

Bernadette Callery is interested in records in transition from paper to electronic formats; I myself direct a number of Ph.D. research projects on different aspects of the history of recordkeeping systems. I would subsume them under “Capture and Storage” as Nancy McGovern’s research of the ways in which recordkeepers can be involved in system design and implementation, but this has, I believe, also a strong archivalization flavor. Angelika Menne-Haritz is doing much research on business processes in public administration.

5. Appraisal

Appraisal is a well-recognized research domain, although we need more theory to supplement the methodological and strategic studies available. I have read Jane Turner’s UBC thesis on the theory of appraisal and selection, and I am sure we are all looking forward to Terry Cook’s book on macroappraisal theory. Barbara Craig is interested in appraisal, as are Jennifer Marshall and Angelika Menne-Haritz. Do archivists need a companion to Gary Taylor’s *Cultural Selection* about appraisal and selection as expression of culture and as instruments of power? Don’t we need to have comparative studies of macroappraisal strategies in different countries?

6. Preservation

Preservation in the digital environment is a concern shared by many, including Sally Buchanan, Anne Gilliland-Swatland, Margaret Hedstrom, Luciana Duranti, Terry Eastwood, and the InterPARES project.

7. Use

Use, including reference service, merits great importance both in the research interests of archival educators and in recent North American literature. Archival science research may, however, benefit more from fundamental and applied research in allied sciences like psychology, cognitive science, communication science, law, cultural studies, history, and library and information science, to name but a few.

Margaret Hedstrom mentions knowledge networking and reuse of digital information. The use of records in education, at K-12 and other levels, interests several researchers. One of Charles Conaway’s interests is the interaction between information and the senior population.

---

Information needs can be formulated in terms of memory and accountability—the connection between the two deserves more research. “Most organizations do not keep records of their failed projects and do not make any formal effort to understand what went wrong or attempt to learn from their failed projects,” according to two scholars who studied abandoned information systems development projects. So what, then, is the value of archival memory and archival conscience in relationship with the non-archival information which organizations use?

8. Arrangement and description

Knowledge organization and information retrieval (to rephrase the European archival concept of arrangement and description) is a research interest that ranks second to ‘use’. It shares with use the paradigmatic change to a user-centered perspective. I refer to the research by Denise Anthony, Margaret Hedstrom, Angelika Menne-Haritz, Harold Thiele, Helen Tibbo, Christinger Tomer, Tywanna Whorley, and others.

9. Management of archival systems and programs

As Ann Pederson phrased the question, what makes a successful archival program? To find the answers, we have to do research on the organization, management, marketing, human and financial resources, buildings, and equipment. I am pursuing research on the effectiveness of national archival systems. Sally Buchanan is interested in preservation management strategies, Susan Davis researches concepts of leadership, Peter Gottlieb is concerned with strategic planning, Charles Conaway is examining information systems evaluation at different levels. Richard Cox advocated research on archival education and training a decade ago and his research agenda for archival education contains numerous suggestions.

---


