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Kaunas County Archives, Kaunas, Lithuania**ARCHIVES IN DIGITAL ERA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

*Objectives of the article: 1) to reveal certain aspects of relationship between archives, archivists and modern technologies; 2) to draw attention to certain Digital Era benefits and threats in order to encourage discussion about Archives' ambiguous situation in the face of the Digital Era; 3) to present personal understanding about Archive and archivist mission within the context of Digital Era.*

*Approximately for fifteen last years various IT instruments are being used in the archives and records field. However, perhaps still hardly could somebody tell for sure in what extent are archives successful in their efforts to extract maximum benefits from Digital Era advantages. Maybe it is the very time to stop, look around and make evaluation of the completed part of the path in this direction; to evaluate current situation and decide what priority directions should be proceeded in the future. Are we sure that our efforts to deal with the Digital Era challenges result in archives' services improvement or just only in increase of the problems and costs related with documents' authenticity assurance, information preservation, re- use of public sector information, etc.?*

*In spite of all Digital Era advantages we, archivists, should deeply and clearly comprehend responsibility for preserving our memory, our history. Once we agree that namely this is perhaps the main priority of archives on the whole then it will be easier for us to maintain a healthy attitude towards Digital Era provided opportunities which are, undoubtedly, wide range, impressive and in many cases helpful. On the other hand, we are facing a challenge what direction should be developed archive as a subject as well as human resources of our archivists community: either towards deeper professional understanding of the archival documents as such and documents' management or towards effective handling of information technologies?*

*So, on one hand, in spite of Digital Era benefits and opportunities we shouldn't loose our core priority – preservation of documents, authentic information, etc. On the other hand, Digital Era provide unique opportunity and effective instruments for Archive's as a such transition from passive entity into active and society friendly subject capable to offer more wide spectrum of public services in order to deal successfully with the challenges of our dynamic contemporary society. With the help of high technologies Archive can become a good and convenient place to spend meaningfully the whole day for everybody in spite of their age, social status, etc. This perhaps might be the main archives' challenge within the context of Digital Era.*

**Key words:** archives, Digital Era, modern technologies, challenges, preservation of documents, authentic information.

**The main objectives of the article are:**

1) to reveal certain aspects of relationship between archives and modern technologies; 2) to draw attention to certain Digital Era benefits and threats; 3) to present personal understanding about archive as a subject in modern technologies (Digital Era) context; 4) to encourage discussion about archives' ambiguous situation in the face of the digital era; 5) to share Kaunas County Archives' vision of the subject.

**Relationship between archives and modern technologies. Digital Era benefits and threats.**

What concerns relationship between archives and modern technologies, for the begining let's remind ourselves few well known facts. As we know, model requirements for the management of electronic records (MoReq) were perhaps first developed by the Commission in cooperation with the DLM Forum in 2001, and subsequently expanded and updated in 2008 with funding from the EU's IDA/IDABC programmes [3, p. 3]. With some reservations this event may be considered as a meaningful starting point for archives' future development in the Digital Era context as well as for archives' attempts to deal with the Digital Era opportunities.

Yet (Still) in 2003 the EU Council of Ministers adopted resolution concerning archives in the EU Member states. Inter alia, this resolution emphasized that further developement of archives' field demands information technologies implementation [2, p. 37]. As we know, next step was done in February 2005 when report on archives in the enlarged EU was adopted. Five priorities have been identified in that report and three of them were related to modern IT ("strengthening of European interdisciplinary cooperation in the field of electronic documents/records and archives", "establishment and maintenance of European archives' and records' internet portal" and "EU and national legal regulation related to archives and access of documents") [2, p. 38]. In November 2005 the Council of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on increased cooperation in the field of archives in Europe [3, p. 3]. The Recommendation asked for the creation of a European Archives Group (EAG) comprising experts

designated by the Member States and the EU institutions to ensure cooperation and coordination on general matters relating to archives. The Council furthermore recommended a number of priority measures that the EAG should follow– up.

In 2008 the EAG submitted a Progress Report to the Council on the implementation of the 2005 recommendation. In the report the EAG noted that digital recordkeeping is changing the relations between archives services and record creators as well as the role that archives and archivists fulfil in public administration and society. The 2008 Progress Report identified five challenges for archives in the future. The EAG focused on especially three of these challenges, all related to the role and position of archives in the digital era:

archives and the Directive on the re– use of public sector information;

the question of online versus on– site access to archives;

the consequences of digital record keeping for administration and society and the changing role of archives.

The Report didn't give any ready– made recipes but revealed a number of problems, challenges and concluded that archives services should examine their role in more detail and assess the significance of existing archival concepts, procedures and processes [3, p. 5– 6]. It means that nearly for fifteen (at least for ten) years various IT instruments are used in the archives and records field, but still hardly somebody might tell for sure in what extent are archives successful trying to extract maximum advantages from IT potential. At first it seemed very cool and attractive to use Ities in order to get rid of tons of paper, to make communication between persons and institutions much more easier, quicker, documents' circulation – faster, records management – more convenient, archive's services – more qualified and closer to customers. And so on.

So, approximately for fifteen years various IT instruments are being used in the archives and records field, but:

1) Perhaps, still hardly somebody might tell for sure in what extent are archives successful trying to extract

maximum advantages from IT potential. At first it seemed very cool and attractive to use IT's in order to get rid of tons of paper, to make communication between persons and institutions much more easier and quicker, documents' circulation – faster, records management – more convenient, archive's services – more qualified and closer to customers.

Archives worldwide are proceeding in creating and managing electronic documents, digitizing existing documents created in traditional mediums (formats) – that is, paper, parchment, audio and visual tapes as well as creating digital born big data documents and information systems. Maybe it is time already to stop, look around and make evaluation of the completed part of the path in this direction; to evaluate current situation and what priority directions should be proceeded.

2) For example, has somebody calculated our expenditures of digitization, digital and electronic documents preservation and ensuring as well as maintaining access to these documents during these several years?

3) Has somebody evaluated results in comparison with archives' services' quality improvement?

4) Do we know the price of creating and maintaining one paper document in comparison with electronic or digital one?

5) We know that creation and management of various kinds of documents requires not only certain financial and human resources but adequate infrastructure as well. What should be costs evaluation within the context of different kinds documents infrastructure costs? So, has somebody evaluated the costs of digitization, digital and electronic documents preservation, their authenticity assurance as well as maintaining access to these documents in the long run perspective?

6) Are we sure that our efforts to deal with the Digital Era challenges result in archives' services improvement or just only in increase of the problems and costs related with documents' authenticity assurance, information preservation, re-use of Public sector information, etc.?

Maybe it seems very cool to get rid of paper, to create virtual documents in virtual space and preserve them in virtual archives "in clouds" but who can tell what lies ahead of this and what consequences such an approach is already arousing and will arouse in the long run perspective?

We should recognize that we do not know how long our Digital Era technologic infrastructure will work properly and how it will look for example, after fifty years. Within such a context we shouldn't ignore voices of those, who are dealing with IT's from the very beginning and are already warning us about possible problems. Let's remember few well known Google vice-president Vint Cerf's quotations. Inter alia, he says: "Piles of digitized material – from blogs, tweets, pictures and videos, to official documents such as court rulings and emails – may be lost forever because the programs needed to view them will become defunct." Another quotation: "When you think about the quantity of documentation from our daily lives that is captured in digital form, like our interactions by email, people tweets, and all of the world wide web, it's clear that we stand to lose an awful lot of our history [...] We don't want our digital lives to fade away. If we want to preserve them, we need to make sure that the digital objects we create today can still be rendered far into the future" [1]. And so on.

In our daily activities we, archivists, are doing much attempting to get rid of paper and promote electronic documents. We are doing much attempting to preserve

archival documents, to digitize them and grant access to them on-line. At the first glance it looks very very cool – all the more that prevailing majority of nowadays archive's customers belong to modern society which actually is "Google Society". Such a society which daily "prays for Google Almighty" and this is their preference number one. Nowadays "Google Society" members prefer to get all the archives' services without going out of their homes and offices. Now and here. Modern customers of information – legal as well as physical bodies – usually are treating archives like some kind of supermarket – that is, place, where they expect to get everything they need. Totally everything and at once, by pressing a single button. We do not have intention to decide either it is good or not – actually, sometimes it is good and sometimes – not so much. Nevertheless we, archivists, should deeply and clearly comprehend responsibility for preserving our memory, our history. Once we agree that namely this is perhaps the main priority of archives on the whole then it will be easier for us to maintain a healthy attitude towards Digital Era provided opportunities which are, undoubtedly, wide range, impressive and in many cases helpful.

**Conclusion 1.** Recognizing that Digital Era provided opportunities for the archives' field are wide range, impressive and in many cases helpful we, archivists, should never forget our personal and institutional responsibility for preserving memory and its authenticity. That's why Digital Era instruments shouldn't be seen and treated as a panacea from all diseases. Nevertheless, it should be respected as very helpful auxiliary instrument. But neither main nor the only one.

**Conclusion 2.** Recognizing that archivists and archives bear unique and extreme responsibility for genuine memory preservation we should:

2.1. In the field of documents management (we should) apply electronic medium only for the shortest term documents;

2.2. Documents' digitization in many cases is very helpful for improving services for the archives' and documents' customers. Nevertheless, while and after digitizing we should preserve both versions of the document: digitized and authentic one.

So, we consider right understanding of real customers' needs and reevaluation of archives' functions and activities as one of the main challenges for Kaunas County Archives.

**Digital Era opportunities for changing of archive's nature.** So, in spite of Digital Era benefits and opportunities we shouldn't lose our core priority – preservation of documents, authentic information and so on. Meeting this as well as various other challenges and executing our daily duties we, archivists, should do all the best to develop archive into a place friendly for wide spectrum of customers in spite of their age, social status and so on. For this Digital Era opportunities and benefits might be very helpful. With the help of high technologies archive might become a good and convenient place to spend meaningfully the whole day for everybody. We support point of view that once we are concerned to ensure appropriate high quality archival services by adapting them to the changes of the dynamically changing environment we should provide archives' services qualitatively new content and forms. For this we are promoting idea of Kaunas County Archives Media Center as the best probably instrument for realizing the concept of qualitatively new and modern approach towards relationship between archives and society. Traditionally archive is first of all a memory institution. Very

often we face stereotype that archive is just a warehouse where paper is kept. Having realized the concept of the Media Centre we will have archive not only as a passive memory institution but at the same time active and friendly place, centre of culture and education for all public groups: from traditional customers – that is, single researchers, – up to organized groups of interest and families with children, disabled persons and so on. So, we treat Digital Era opportunities and benefits to be a very helpful instrument for archive's transition from passive one into active one. We are of the opinion that in Kaunas County Archives case this can be realized via impelementing idea about Kaunas County Archive Media Center. According to our vision Media Center should consist of reading rooms, Digitization center, Conference hall, Restoration center, Library, exhibition hall, educational spaces, Public relation center, etc. – all equipped with high technologies and interactive tools, – so, that archive might become a good and convenient place to spend meaningfully whole day for all and everybody. To be center of culture and education for all public groups.

**Conclusion 3.** Digital Era provide effective instruments for Archive's as such transition from passive into active and society friendly subject capable to offer more wide spectrum of public services in order to deal successfully with the challenges of our dynamic contemporary society. This perhaps might be the main archive's challenge within the context of Digital Era. Nowadays "Google Society" prefers to get all the archives' services without going out of their homes and offices. Still we believe and hope that the time will come when archive will become attractive place for the prevailing majority of our modern society. Once we understand a certain challenge and accept it – then the "mission" of archives and archivists' becomes possible.

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The only thing – not to loose common sense and to be courageous. Courageous to change ourselves, our own mind as well as the mind and attitude of our customers. And for this we should start first of all from ourselves.

Nevertheless, the question is – how much we, archivists ourselves, are interested in our openness. Either there should be certain limitations or not. If yes – to what extent. But these questions – already separate topic for special discussion.

Priority challenge – to turn Digital Era benefits and advantages into effective instrument for the change of archives' nature from passive towards active one.

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### АРХІВИ У ЦИФРОВУ ЕПОХУ: ВИКЛИКИ І МОЖЛИВОСТІ

*У статті аналізуються окремі аспекти взаємовідносин між архівами, архівістами та сучасними технологіями; визначаються певні переваги та загрози цифрової епохи з метою стимулювання обговорення становища та перспектив розвитку архівів; презентується особисте бачення місії архівів та архівістів у інформаційному суспільстві.*

*Упродовж останніх п'ятнадцяти років різноманітні інформаційні технології широко використовуються в архівній галузі та у сфері управління документами. Тим не менш, сьогодні все ще складно визначити, наскільки успішними є архіви у своїх спробах отримати максимальну вигоду з переваг цифрової епохи. Можливо, саме зараз прийшов час зупинитися, озирнутися навколо, оцінити пройдений шлях та ситуацію, що склалася, і намітити перспективи та пріоритетні напрямки подальшого розвитку. Важливо дати відповідь на питання: чи зусилля архівістів подолати виклики цифрової ери призведуть до покращення діяльності архівних служб, чи вони тільки збільшать проблеми і витрати, пов'язані із забезпеченням достовірності документів, збереженням та використанням інформації державного сектору?*

*Незважаючи на переваги цифрової епохи, архівісти повинні глибоко і чітко усвідомити свою відповідальність за збереження історичної пам'яті. Чим швидше архівісти дійдуть згоди, що саме це є головним пріоритетом у діяльності архівів, тим легше для них буде підтримання об'єктивного ставлення до можливостей, які надає цифрова епоха, і які, безумовно, є широкими, вражаючими та у багатьох відношеннях корисними. З іншого боку, ми стоїмо перед викликом, в якому напрямі слід розвиватися архівам, а також загальному архівній спільноті: у напрямку поглибленого професійного розуміння сутності архівних документів та процесів управління документацією, чи ефективного застосування інформаційних технологій?*

*Отже, з одного боку, незважаючи на переваги та можливості цифрової доби, ми не повинні втратити наш основний пріоритет – збереження документів, достовірної інформації. З іншого боку, цифрова ера надає такі унікальні можливості та ефективні інструменти для архівів, як перехід від стану пасивного об'єкта до активного суб'єкта, здатного запропонувати більш широкий спектр суспільних послуг задля успішного подолання викликів сучасного суспільства, що динамічно розвивається. За допомогою високих технологій архів може стати відповідним та зручним місцем для змістовного проведення часу кожним, незважаючи на вік, соціальний статус тощо. Це, вірогідно, становить основний виклик архівам у контексті цифрової епохи.*

**Ключові слова:** архіви, цифрова епоха, сучасні технології, виклики, збереження документів, достовірна інформація.