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## IS THE PUBLIC PRINCIPLE A NEW PARADIGM OF ARCHIVAL SCIENCE?

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**Key words:** archival theory; public principle of archives; principle of provenance; principle of territorial provenance; principle of territorial pertinence; principle of respecting historical holdings; principle of common heritage; principle of functional pertinence; principle of subject pertinence

### Streszczenie

Współczesna teoria archiwalna jest systemem zasad podporządkowanych zasadzie naczelnej, paradygmatowi, którym jest zasada publiczności archiwów. Obecnie zasada publiczności archiwów oznacza, że każdy człowiek ma dostęp do wszystkich archiwów na świecie. Zrozumiałość archiwaliów jest zapewniona przez zasadę proveniencji; zachowanie nienaruszonego zespołu gwarantuje przejrzystość i stabilność uporządkowania zasobu. Inne zasady rządzą rozmieszczeniem zasobu archiwalnego: zasada terytorialności (też jako: zasada proveniencji lub pertynencji terytorialnej); zasada poszanowania historycznie ukształtowanego zasobu archiwalnego; zasada wspólnego dziedzictwa archiwalnego; jak również zasada pertynencji funkcjonalnej. Nie

bez znaczenia dla szybkości dostępu ma współistnienie kilku dróg dostępu do zasobu; tak więc poza proweniencją mamy pertynencję rzeczową, która nie jest sposobem na porządkowanie archiwaliów, ale sporządzania opisu informacyjnego.

In these times in which we live, we often witness the announcement of a change of paradigm in science, in general, or in its particular disciplines. Sometimes it is just a matter of fashion, but generally speaking, what we observe corresponds to the actual transformation of social life known as: the advent of the post-industrial era; the building of an information society; or entering, after Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Modern Age, another, yet unshaped, great era of humanity called Postmodernism. This is neither the time nor place for a discussion of these issues, which cause so much excitement and controversy. However, we need reference these phenomena and disputes to understand why recently, in archival science, there has also been a revaluation, the announcement of paradigm shift<sup>1</sup>. A shift of the fundamental principle which has been the core of our entire thinking about archives and with which it must comply.

We can reference to two articles, which foreshadowed such a paradigm change. In the first of these articles Angelika Menne-Harritz concluded that the access function in archives is increasingly taking a significant lead over all other archival functions, which should conform to that objective. Acqui-

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<sup>1</sup> W. Chorążyczewski, *Archiwista przyszłości – edukator i autopromotor w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, [in:] *Archiwa w nowoczesnym społeczeństwie. Pamiętnik V Powszechnego Zjazdu Archiwistów Polskich, Olsztyn, 6–8 września 2007 r.*, ed. J. Poraziński, K. Strykowski, Warszawa 2008, p. 45–53; idem, *Metodologia archiwistyki. Archiwistyka między nauką a refleksją*, [in:] *Toruńskie konfrontacje archiwalne*, vol. 1: *Archiwistyka na uniwersytetach, archiwistyka w archiwach*, ed. W. Chorążyczewski, A. Rosa, Toruń 2009, p. 191–201; W. Chorążyczewski, A. Rosa, *Digitisation policy or memory policy? Digitisation – new tool for constructing historical memory and popularisation of archival holdings and archives*, [in:] *Communication of memory in archives, libraries and museums: the interaction of science, policy and practice*, Vilnius 2008; A. Górak, *Salvare scrinium. Kilka pytań o przyszłość archiwów historycznych*, „Archiwista Polski” 2005, no 4, p. 17–23; D. Magier, *Regionalna rola archiwum państwowego w epoce postindustrialnej*, [in:] *Toruńskie konfrontacje archiwalne*, vol. 1, p. 213–224; A. Rosa, *Archiwa między historią i pamięcią. Antropologizowanie archiwistyki*, [w:] *Archiwa – Kancelarie – Zbiory*, ed. W. Chorążyczewski, R. Degen, K. Syta, vol. 2, Toruń 2008, p. 99–127; eadem, *O korzyściach z refleksji antropologicznej w archiwistyce – funkcja edukacyjna archiwów*, [in:] *Toruńskie konfrontacje archiwalne*, vol. 1, p. 203–211.

sition, arrangement and preservation should be reformed to serve the idea of primacy of access to archival records. Access, which may be defined as the dissemination of information about records as well as information contained in them, is also widely understood as a service offered by archives to the emergent global knowledge society. Access should be available to every user, not only to researchers and people or institutions seeking legal evidences<sup>2</sup>.

The second paper, discussing the archival paradigm shift, was written by Mark A. Greene, and is ostensibly about something completely different than the first one. The author asks: who do the archives serve? The former paradigm, which was called a paradigm of *recordskeeping*, proclaimed that archival records, as statements of past legal actions and business transactions, exist only for the purposes of their creators, who may seek in them for data. Consideration was not given to scientific or cultural goals. They were secondary. Recordskeepers saw in records only their evidence value. The modern archivist, for whom the archival paradigm is most important, looks at the records in a different manner. He sees them as carriers of information, not necessarily of legal value, but always with the potential to be used for a variety of cultural purposes, mostly building social memory and identity (ex. recorded oral history or ephemeral materials). As a result of the shape of present-day society, the future must belong to the archival paradigm. When it comes to meeting information needs, the archivist is at the service of society at large, of its every group and each individual (especially marginalized groups). Archival records not only have evidential value, but also reflect the depth and richness of human experiences<sup>3</sup>.

Are Angelika Menne-Harritz and Mark A. Greene talking about two different things? Yes and no. Yes, because Menne-Harritz refers to the shift of archival functions, as the activity area of archivists, while Greene refers to the shift of these functions understood as the goal of archivists activities and hence the shift of their role in society. At the same time, they are not talking about different things. They both noticed that the information carried in the records is public property and may serve the public good.

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<sup>2</sup> A. Menne-Harritz, *Dostęp do archiwów, czyli przeformułowanie archiwalnego paradygmatu*, „Archeion” 2002, vol. 104, 2002, p. 68–95 (article printed for the first time in „Archival Science” 2001, vol. 1, p. 57 – 82).

<sup>3</sup> M. A. Greene, *The Power of Meaning: The Archival Mission in the Postmodern Age*, „The American Archivist” 2002, vol. 65, no. 1, p. 42–55.

When we look at the archival paradigm from this point of view, we find that there already is a name for it in archival science – the public principle of archives. Nowadays the public principle of archives means that every person can access every archive and record in the world. But the origins of this principle reach back to the French Revolution<sup>4</sup>. It was then that the principle of providing every citizen with access to records was formulated for the very first time<sup>5</sup>. Over the next two centuries the circle of those considered worthy of enjoying public access expanded. The first persons to be given access were outstanding scholars, then scholars in general and, later on, participants in the world's economy and culture. Now, thanks to the announced, earlier archival paradigm shift, public access relates to every human being<sup>6</sup>. There has also emerged an equality of rights for purposes of access to records. As well as access for scientific purposes, access for cultural purposes (for example, the unscientific way in which we build our own social memory and identity) or even purely recreational purposes (nowadays we meet ordinary people in archives, often retirees who are doing genealogical research for pleasure or who are interested in different milieus of history) are considered valid. Will this be all? Recently, in connection with the reformulation of the archival paradigm, we have also been able to notice a quality change. When it comes to archives, public means public service. Archives should transform themselves, from passive institutions waiting for clients to come within their walls, beyond being prepared to provide user services without exceptions, into proactive institutions. The task of archives is now to make the public believe that if only a user were to come to the institution, he would be welcomed as a long-awaited, longed-for guest<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See: E.B. Старостин, Т. И. Хорхордина, *Архивы и революция*, Москва 2007.

<sup>5</sup> B. Ryszewski, *Archiwistyka. Przedmiot – zakres – podział (studia nad problemem)*, Warszawa–Poznań–Toruń 1972, p. 19. For the original version of publication of the decret issued by Convent on June 25th 1794 see: E.B. Старостин, Т. И. Хорхордина, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> See: B. Jensen, Ch. S.H. Jensen, *The Archives' Perception of the Users – the Users' Perception of the Archives*, „Comma” 2005, no. 3; M. Holmgren, *The Swedish Principle of Public Access to Official Documents – in Relation to Archival Theory and Electronic Data Processing*, [in:] *The Principle of Provenance. Report from the First Stockholm Conference on Archival Theory and the Principle of Provenance, 2–3 September 1993*, Stockholm 1994, p. 65–72.

<sup>7</sup> W. Chorążyczewski, A. Rosa, *Zasada publiczności nowym paradygmatem archiwistyki?*, „Archiwista Polski” 2010, no. 3, p. 23–42.

However, if we consider the public principle of archives as a theoretical expression of the archival paradigm, then the entirety of archival theory which is, after all, a system of general statements, must be subordinated to it. In order to host the public, certain conditions must be met, which, in fact, are determined by other principles of archival theory. These conditions are as follows: the physical or information proximity of archival records, and clearness of those records; and, secondly, the transparency and geographical stability of record storage.

The public principle of archives, as a paradigm, states that the whole system of principles should aim at ensuring the widest possible access to archives. Whereas, there will be no full access without a full understanding of archival records. Therefore the public aspect of records means respect for their provenance; providing access with information about context, in relation to their origins and those of other records, preserving the integral collection arranged in a self-referential manner. Thus, we allow reinterpretation of the principle of provenance as a guarantor of the universal accessibility and intelligibility of archival records. The indivisibility of archival fond, resulting from the principle of provenance, may occur at a physical or information level. There is no doubt that the informational indivisibility of archival fond is the highest goal of archival arrangement. There is no good reason to ignore the physical indivisibility of the fond, as it is a factor that facilitates access to records. Currently, due to the digitization of management procedures, the physical indivisibility becomes an illusion. Offices are in various stages of this process: paper, paper-virtual, virtual-paper, virtual. Because there is always a continuation of the management processes, the paper and virtual documents always give mutual explanation. However, we cannot talk about keeping the records physically intact. When it comes to archival fonds, the ones that we have currently as well as those to be, their informational indivisibility takes on even greater significance, being the core of the principle of provenance. Put another way, each archival object has to be described by its original provenance, never mind in which archive and evidential unit it is presently preserved.

The principle of territoriality (also as: the principle of territorial provenance or pertinence), stating that the documents should be kept within their territory of creation (records of the authority of particular territory) has an evident informational dimension. Thanks to this principle, citizens know that when they want to look for records of the municipality in which they live, or records concerning that municipality's inhabitants, they must go to

or write to the public archive which corresponds with the administrative unit in which the inhabitant whom they are researching lived and worked, or in which that person's village is located. At least that is the assumption. Stabilization of state borders and internal administrative divisions, in conjunction with the principle of territoriality, guarantees transparency and sustainability of archival holdings.

However, the transformation of territorial divisions and population structures in localities has generated many problems for archives and archival science, which, being a science, should be a system of consistent general statements. For the past two centuries, numerous conflict situations have taught us a lot<sup>8</sup>. We already know, perfectly well, that it is unacceptable to divide archival units, when they contain singular documents relating to various territories. A single document is often unintelligible outside its immediate context, which is a secretary unit (volume or fascicle). We also understand that we should not divide fonds. The territorial pertinence refers to the whole archival fond. Based on the assumption of some moral joint ownership, we have developed the principle of common heritage<sup>9</sup>. Fonds, even though physically stored in one country, are also subject to the „moral” ownership of another. We tend to proclaim that the principle of respecting historical holdings is in force, but, we also understand it in a second way, as not moving fonds to different archives after subsequent reforms to the archival network.

An indivisibility of archival units and fonds, and a relative indivisibility (at least far-reaching protection) of archival holdings, help to perpetuate the comprehensibility of records. But what about the requirements of proximity, transparency and stability? A solution has been arising for a long time now. Many disputes from the past, when physical access has been the basic form of the access to records, have become obsolete thanks to modern information technologies. Archives must finally realize that, apart from being the actual repositories of archival holdings, they are equally managers of information

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<sup>8</sup> See: C. Biernat, *Spór archiwalny polsko-gdańsko-niemiecki w okresie międzywojennym 1919–1939*, Warszawa 1969; Z. Chmielewski, *Polska myśl archiwalna w XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa–Szczecin 1994; I. Mamczak-Gadkowska, *Archiwa państwowe w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Poznań 2006; B. Ryszewski, *Rozproszenie archiwaliów polskich i starania o ich rewindykację w okresie międzywojennym*, [in:] *Od obcego panowania do niepodległego państwa. Materiały sesji naukowej zorganizowanej na 70-lecie odbudowy Państwa Polskiego*, ed. M. Wojciechowski, Toruń 1991.

<sup>9</sup> W. Stępnia, *Sukcesja państw dotycząca archiwaliów*, Warszawa–Łódź 1989.

about records regarding localities which are within their competences. This means that archives should be, equally, centres of information about records created within the area, but also about records concerning it. Ultimately, it might also become a place for storing copies of the records which could, or should, be part of its holdings. When it comes to a single archive, viewing it as a public archive, the acquisition of its actual archival holdings and information about its ideal holdings are the two, equally important, spheres of action. This means that the principle of territoriality is being transferred into the sphere of archival information. And, it is key to accessing records; underlining the connections between each archival object, the territory of its origin and the territory to which it relates<sup>10</sup>.

However, in certain administrative circumstances, the records are being moved. The general explanation for the necessity of such circumstances is within the principle of functional pertinence. This principle states that a transfer of competence (functions) can (should) be followed by a transmission of documentation. The taking over of some or all of the responsibilities of one institution by another is common. Just as common and obvious is the transmission of records which correspond to the new responsibilities, the so called „inheritance of records”<sup>11</sup>. The presence of the inherited records within archival fonds does not affect, in any way, the requirement of intelligibility of records, because the context of their creation is being preserved. Knowledge of the form of government which created the records, needed to find desired records, is also included in the transfer of competence between institutions.

If we recognize the public principle of archives as the paradigm of archival science, a kind of constitution, that is to say the Basic Law, being the foundation on which to form other laws – understood here as archival principles – we must take a look at the times in which it was formulated. It was formulated at the end of the eighteenth century. How were the records organized? Did the order of records support the search for information by wider public? If so, then in what way? Archivists living in those times had one solution; to organize records by subject. This system included the content of records as well as

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<sup>10</sup> W. Chorążyczewski, *Terytorialność archiwaliów i jej aspekt informacyjny*, [in:] *Dom otwarty/dom zamknięty? Lekcje pogranicza. Europa środkowo-wschodnia (XX/XXI w.)*, ed. B. Górczyńska-Przybyłowicz, S. Jankowiak, I. Skórzyńska, K. Strykowski, A. Wachowiak, Poznań 2014, p. 77–94.

<sup>11</sup> R. Przelaskowski, *Program prac wewnętrznych w archiwach nowożytnych*, Warszawa 1935.

the needs of new users. But, it was not a significant change. Before and after the French Revolution, subject schemes were being used. They were strong in tradition and supported by the rationalist age of Enlightenment. Archival records were organised according to subject schemes, which were always deductions based on assumptions *a priori*. This principle is called subject pertinence. It was a principle which covered the entire holdings of archives, irrespective of the autonomy of particular creators (the office, authority, institution, person, family, etc.).

The years 1838–1841, during which the principle of *respect des fonds* arose, were crucial. During this time respect for the autonomy of a fond was introduced; the first step towards enabling the finding of information in archival holdings through an understanding of the provenance of those holdings. But, this was only the first step. The principle of *respect des fonds* was not a breakthrough in terms of the thinking of archivists. They remained deductive, *a priori*. The archival fond was supposed to be arranged according to subject scheme. Subject pertinence was considered to be of secondary importance for locating information. Subject scheme of records was still the key to searching for information.

The real breakthrough came with the principle of provenance, which broke from the rational *a priori* deduction and adopted, as the only legitimate inductive thinking, taking reality as a basis for study. With no bias or no prior assumptions, the records themselves will tell how they are to be arranged<sup>12</sup>.

Does this mean that the subject scheme was a complete anathema? Pretty soon the archivists noticed that it can be helpful, useful for finding information, but only as an additional way of accessing the records. Since then, the concept of substantial indexing has been developed within archival thinking and practice. Subject pertinence (understood as attributing substantive descriptions to records) has become a significant way to fulfil the archival paradigm of an Information Society – rapid access to archival information for each member of our society; a society, most of which is not yet prepared to search by the provenance of a fond, or to undertake a professional (academic) analysis and synthesis of the search results.

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<sup>12</sup> J. Prażak, *Tak zwana wolna zasada proveniencji (z powodu wydania podręcznika teorii archiwalnej Brennekego)*, „Archeion” 1957, vol. 27; W. Chorażyczewski, *Zasada proveniencji w polskiej myśli archiwalnej do 1939 roku*, [in:] *Toruńskie konfrontacje archiwalne*, vol. 2: *Teoria archiwalna wczoraj – dziś – jutro*, ed. W. Chorażyczewski, A. Rosa, Toruń 2011, p. 101–137.



And so we finish our considerations, aiming to reflect contemporary archival theory as a coherent system of principles subordinated to the superior principle, or the paradigm, which is the public principle of archives. The understanding of records is guaranteed by the principle of provenance, while their keeping a fond intact guarantees transparency and stability of the distribution. The other principles govern the location of archival holdings: the principle of territoriality; the principle of respecting historical holdings; and the principle of common heritage; as well as the concept of functional pertinence. Not without significance for the speed of access is the existence of several methods of accessing collections; and so we have, besides provenance, subject pertinence, which is not a system of arranging archival records but of ordering the description of the information. In this way, the whole and abundant heritage of archival theory, worked out by our predecessors living in 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, is still relevant; inspiring us in 21st century. But, there is one condition. We must read in depth our predecessors' works, reach the core of their ideas and adapt them to new situations.

*Translated from Polish by Paulina Ławniczak*

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## Summary

### Is the public principle a new paradigm of archival science?

Contemporary archival theory is a coherent system of principles subordinated to the superior principle, or the paradigm, which is the public principle of archives. Nowadays the public principle of archives means that every person can access every archive and record in the world. The understanding of records is guaranteed by the principle of provenance, while their keeping a fond intact guarantees transparency and stability of the distribution. The other principles govern the location of archival holdings: the principle of territoriality (also as: the principle of territorial provenance or pertinence); the principle of respecting historical holdings; and the principle of common heritage; as well as the concept of functional pertinence. Not without significance for the speed of access is the existence of several methods of accessing collections; and so we have, besides provenance, subject pertinence, which is not a system of arranging archival records but of ordering the description of the information.

