

THE VALORIZATION OF CULTURAL GOODS IN ARCHIVES, LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS

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The author talks about valorization of the archives and states that talking about valorizing means talking about the role of the archivists. The archivists are in fact those who let the users take full advantage of very particular kind of cultural goods. The article discusses different ways of presenting valorized goods.

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Grazia Tatò: Vrednotenje kulturnih dobrin v arhivih, knjižnicah in muzejih. Tehnični in vsebinski problemi klasičnega in elektronskega arhiviranja. Zbornik referatov z dopolnilnega izobraževanja, Maribor 8/2009, str. 170–186.

Izvirnik v angleščini, izvleček v angleščini in slovenščini, povzetek v slovenščini.

Avtorica piše o valorizaciji arhivskega gradiva in poudarja, da govoriti o valorizaciji pomeni govoriti tudi o vlogi arhivistov. Ti so dejansko tisti, ki omogočajo uporabnikom izkoristiti vse prednosti te posebne kulturne dobrine. Članek predstavi tudi različne načine, kako uspešno predstaviti valorizirane kulturne dobrine.

Ključne besede: valorizacija, kulturne dobrine, arhivi, knjižnice, muzeji, iskalni pripomočki, razstave, posvetovanja, publikacije

When talking about the valorization of cultural goods, we must first of all realize that we are dealing with a non-unambiguous field, but with very different contexts, and that we must understand the connections between them. These connections are very complex, and they can be completely understood only after long and deep studies.

When valorizing cultural goods, the first thing to do is to clarify *which* of the cultural goods we are talking about. It is different valorizing libraries better than pictures, or archaeological goods, or architectural goods, etc. And when we deal with archives, troubles arise excessively. The complexity of these problems also provoke a kind of a superiority complex of archivists in comparison with librarians, felt like they are dealing with an easier job. On the contrary, the more I work and the more I feel other people's difficulties and a strong link between different cultural fields.

To make a banal example, good archival work begins in the library to find out what has already been written about the papers and their creator, and often gets back to the library to issue an inventory, or a study!

Moreover, to make an archaeological, artistic or architectural research we will need archival and bibliographical researches, and vice versa.

The core of this entire tangle is the creator, who produces documents but also issues, draws, paints or writes! And so our ISAAR card becomes the core of every

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research and the focal point from which all the cards of the other cultural goods take their origin, each one of them following their own rules and description standards.

Following this intuition, the Italian Ministry for Cultural Goods and Activities is currently setting up a »Culture Portal« in Italy, a growing network of public and private institutions linking all the creators and users of culture in Italy.¹ Museums, archives, libraries and other cultural institutions can share databases or news in text, audio, video or picture format. In details, *Culturitalia* manages a database cataloguing information given by its partners by meaning of metadata, the original data remaining on the web site of the supplier, where the user is taken via a link for a more complete consultation. The index is classified by a *thesaurus* projected to manage heterogeneous information coming from the catalogue and inventory systems differing between themselves. In this way, all the data remain in the hands of the creators, which manage their production, validation, managing and maintenance. In this way, the participation in a wide international circuit of sharing contents is granted.

We now have to focus on that famous specification of archives that makes them different because of their double nature of two-faced Janus whose both two faces must be studied, managed and protected: the cultural one, but also the juridical and administrative one. It is in fact well known that the archives are the only cultural good that is not born as a cultural good, but for bureaucratic, certifying, operative, etc. purposes. A complicated good, which is harder to use, requires more time, more knowledge, more patience, and more intermediation than the others.

This is why talking about *how* to valorize the documentary cultural good means first of all talking about archivists.² These professionals are the essential link between the document and the retriever, being either an academically dressed university teacher or an ordinary citizen looking for her/his great-grandparents. The archivist who arranged the fonds, restored the original order, indexed and inventoried, and the archivist who welcomes and suggests the user on how to proceed her/his retrieval in the study hall, are the two sides of the same coin, the same way of valorizing the archives, which without these two professionals would stand silent, inaccessible and in practice unusable.

In this point of view, I think valorizing is first of all making usable. You cannot simply invent or learn this kind of work by simply working at it. Of course, it demands a solid and well-constructed scientific and cultural training and a special attitude to facing the changes and the differences and the attitude to ranging from parchments to digital files with the same archival consistency. But this is one of the most fascinating aspects of this work, the fact that it is never iterative, but always new and renewed. From the point of view of *how?*, then, we can say that making guides, censuses, inventories, databases, is the first and a better way of valorizing, the first condition to be established for the other to follow.

Between these last, I would like to dwell on *the exhibitions, the meetings, the paper and online publications, and the charter of commitments.*

The *papers exhibitions*, then. A strong opportunity of promoting, trying to catch the attention of the audience, by means of a topic, on the archives as a cultural good and on the opportunities of retrieval that it can offer. Setting up

¹ Cf.: [http:// www.culturitalia.it](http://www.culturitalia.it).

² Cf. Grazia Tatò, *The Valorisation of Archival Goods, on »Atlanti«*, vol. 18 (2008) Trieste 2008, pp. 195-215.

papers exhibition is not so easy, and, once more, the document proves itself difficult to be managed and given to an audience.

First of all, one should make a choice of the »nicest« documents, the most legible and charming ones. It is really not that meaningful to exhibit a slovenly and unreadable document, even if its content is interesting; and if one thinks it is really worth exhibiting, it should be accompanied by a card explaining its content. The one or two pages long documents should be preferred, since an exhibition is not a proper place to read a longer document, and the documents should be self-ending and with no need for a link to their file to be understood. In case of a register or a book, one should choose the »right« page, since visitors can not leaf through the book. It is always fundamental to create a clear, reasonable, self-showing and non-equivocal course, and to arrange synthetic cards where the fond, the series, the classification, the retrieval signature and the dates should be given. In fact, it happens frequently that a user comes back asking for the document he saw at the exhibition, wanting to make a retrieval starting from that document, but without a precise reference everything gets more and more difficult.

Publishing a catalogue is also fundamental, because the whole work is done absolutely ephemeral and vanishes! The catalogue is what remains at the moment the exhibition is closed, and will be a useful tool for future in-depth examinations.

The tendency is mounting exhibitions where different kinds of cultural goods are exhibited. Documents together with paintings, books, models, photographs, medals, newspapers, and so on, often attached to the archival files.

The participation of the State Archives of Trieste in the celebration of 1918 was very particular, because a very particular kind of »documents« were exhibited.

It was a set of jewellery, which are not the »attachments« but are themselves the »documents«! These jewels are a part of the judicial deposits that were under custody at the Justice Court of Trieste; whose management and custody was then crossed over to the ad hoc Imperial Kingly Office set up by the Sovereign Will dated June 28th, 1850.

To this Office, settled at the Court of Justice, also flowed all the judicial deposits from the other judiciaries in Trieste.

The director, the cashier and the surveyor had to overview the incoming and outgoing of the deposits, both cash, jewellery, bonds and savings accounts.

In the criminal and civil law, the judicial deposit is a guarantee for a credit, but also a protection of the holders' rights, and can also be about police investigations, impounding, legal expenses, and bails.

After 30 years from the beginning of the deposit, and in absence of any claim, the deposits were sold in a pole, and the money given to the State administration.

After the passage from the Austrian to the Italian administration, the whole procedure was put on »stand by«, and then the custody was made by the Revenue Office.

After the reorganization of ministries, from January 1st, 2001 the Finance Ministry settled the Fiscal Agencies, which were not entitled to keep governmental properties, and so the whole deposit was given to the State Archives of Trieste.

For the exhibition, the jewellery, together with some of the documents, went out of the Archives in little bags that had them in custody, and at disposal to the

visitors to testify the workmanship, the shapes and the fashions belonging to the past times, but that are still nowadays suggested again because of their actuality. The whole setting counts a total amount of 9460 items, including binoculars, glasses, wallets, etc.

Exhibitions are often supported by *meetings* that, of course, can also be self-sufficient.

With regard to the archives, there are two typologies of such events: the archival meetings, as the *International Archival*, organized in Trieste and those about historical, social, economic, architectural etc. matters, exhibiting the concerning documentary sources. I must confess I do not like very much the archivists playing historians, or historians playing archivists, because I am sure that professionalism should always be honored. However, these conferences can be a meeting-point for both the professional roles, offering to the archivists a better knowledge of the historic-institutional context and to the historians' tangible suggestions for their retrievals.

In this instance too the preparation of the documents is the topic moment to check the existing situation, think about it and then restart with a complete knowledge of the results already achieved. The IIAS has always been issuing the proceedings before the meeting. This choice has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, the text is immediately circulating, also among those who could not attend the meeting, and it is easier to follow the lectures and think about being ready to intervene in the debate. On the other hand the meeting is fixed in a text that will miss the very moment of the debate. From another point of view, the proceedings issued after the meeting might be very late in issuing and sometimes some lectures are missing. The choice must consider the sort of the meeting, choosing the first solution in case of ongoing topics and the other solution in case of topics needing a certain time to be settled.

Another important topic is the *issuing* of finding aids such as inventories, censuses, guides, handbooks, dictionaries, essays, etc.

With regards to this, one should tell apart paper issuing from web issuing. The trend is issuing on the web, because of fewer expenses, more speed, possibility of updating and easiness in the retrieval of specific matters. This is the general situation, but in case of archives some particular problems arise.

Is it really true, for example, that the user's retrieval is easier?

One obtains an immediate and overmuch answer however, for example using *Google*, but the answer is often wrong and incomplete. It is not the same answer one could get after a professional archival retrieval, but only something »caught« here and there.

Let us compare the differences between a printed guide and a guide on the web. If a printed guide gives a possibility of making a complete retrieval, becoming aware of the archival and historic-institutional context and offers the user the support of an archivist, it is updateable only with another issue, needs a long time and finances to be made and must be read only in the proper places. A guide on the web is always updateable and immediately distributable, needs low expenses, is easily reachable, but gives answers limited to the written text only, with no global view, a risk of incomplete answers, and leaves the user alone and with no archival help in the retrieval.

It is quite evident that the benefits are bigger, but they have to be carefully valued. The retrieval in the study hall cannot be substituted, unless on the web also the picture of every single document can be obtained; but this is surely a time consuming and costly thing that needs too much human and economic resources. It can be made only for very particular, interesting archival fonds to be viewed by users belonging to the widest geographical area. In this way one can avoid the risk linked to a constant consultation of the material and also long and costly journeys. This is the case of the »*Franceschino Cadastre*« fond in the State Archives of Trieste, concerning other countries too, such as Croatia and Slovenia. A demo can be consulted at the URL: www.archivi.beniculturali.it.

When talking about valorization, it is also useful to talk also about the *charter of commitments*.

It comes into being from the need of establishing principles and rules for the relationships between administrations and citizens.

It is an out-and-out pact with the users, a communication and information tool allowing them to know the services given by the administration, the ways to give, and the standards, to verify that the commitments are fulfilled, and to grade the services also by complaints.

The adoption of a charter of commitments in the Italian Ministry for Cultural Goods and Activities is one of the initiatives to valorize the cultural heritage and to adequate the organization of the activities of the administration to the expectations of users.

The charter is updated periodically to consolidate the achieved quality levels and to monitor the positive changes obtained by the carrying out of improvement projects that can also originate from a periodical monitoring of the users' opinions. Its drawing up is inspired by the fundamental principles of the Directive of the Head of Government of January 27th, 1994:

- *equality and impartiality*

All the services are given on a basis of equality, and the same treatment is granted to all the citizens, with no distinction of nationality, sex, language, religion, political opinion, and the archives will remove inefficiencies and will promote initiative to facilitate the access and the use to disabled persons, foreigners, and to socially and culturally disadvantaged people; the instruments and the activities of information, communication, documentation, scientific assistance to the research, education and didactics are in every case based on the principles of objectivity, justice and impartiality;

- *continuity*

The administration grants continuity and regularity in supplying the service; in any case of difficulties or obstacles it undertakes to inform pre-emptively the users and to adopt all the necessary solutions to reduce the inconveniences;

- *participation*

The archives promotes the information on the activities made and takes into account the suggestions given by the users, both as individuals or associated;

- *efficiency and effectiveness*

The director and the staff pursue the goal of constant improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the services, adopting the technological, organizational and procedural solutions more suitable to the goal.

Below, the guidelines for the drawing up of the charter of commitments for the services in the archives made by the Italian Ministry for Cultural Goods and Activities in 2005.

Guidelines for the Archives

Characteristics of the service	Committed Level of the Service
Access	
Regularity and Continuity	
Opening hours	<i>From...to...</i>
	<i>Opening/closing days (holidays, week days of rest)</i>
Reception	
Information and guidance:	<i>Indicate every useful information, and particularly:</i>
- Information desk	<i>Localization</i>
- Free of charge information material	<i>Typology of the material</i>
- On line information	<i>Web address</i>
- Signals	<i>Maps, indications</i>
Disadvantaged people access	
Fruition	
Range	
Availability of the material	
- Communication of unavailable series or fonds	
- Receptiveness	<i>Number of places and plugs for laptops</i>
- Archival units at disposal daily	<i>Number of units</i>
- Archival units at disposal for every request	<i>Number of units</i>
- Daily drawings from the deposits	<i>Number and timing</i>
- Booking service	<i>Telephone number and time schedule</i>
- Waiting times in case of continuous drawings from the deposits	<i>Waiting time from the beginning of the drawing</i>
Effectiveness of the mediation	
Assistance of personnel expert in the research	<i>Time percent</i>
Availability of research tools:	
- Fonds/series with finding aids	<i>Indicate which</i>
- Availability of access to the web	

Characteristics of the service	Committed Level of the Service
Reproduction (as allowed by the law on copyright)	
Regularity and Continuity	
Time schedule of the requests	<i>Indicate time schedule</i>
Time schedule of the reclaim	<i>Indicate time schedule</i>
Time schedule of the cash desk	<i>Indicate time schedule</i>
Range	
Availability of the instruments	<i>Every useful information (e.g.: waiting list)</i>
Possibility of:	
- photocopies	
- microfilms	
- digital copies	
- photographs	
- other	
Booking in the distance	<i>Kind of (telephone, online, fax, letter...)</i>
Waiting time for every kind of booking	
Accordance	
Accordance to the original	Percent of complains
Research in the distance	
Range	
Quality information	References
Research tools to be used in the distance	Kind of
Online accessibility	Web address
Effectiveness of the mediation	
Responsible	Name and address
Answering timing	Number days

One more remark about the appraisal.

To valorize the documentation it is necessary to make delicate, complicated and irreversible work of appraisal. Many archival administrations are working to a *preservation plan* to be set against the traditional *scheduling*. The difference between these concepts is fundamental: on the one hand the stress is on what *must* be preserved, on the other hand the stress was on what *can* be thrown away, the preservation plan leads to look for the documentation to fill any possible voids, the scheduling leads to eliminate in a critical way what is complete.

Finally, a last remark about *the reasons why* to lead or should lead the archivists to valorize their archives.

As we said, it is difficult to manage archives as a cultural good, also for an expert researcher, and they are often completely unknown to an occasional user. Many of us happened to be asked, in a non-professional context, the fateful questions: *What do you exactly do? What is an Archive? What do you preserve?*, followed by the usual: *Oh, then everything is digitalized, isn't it indeed?*, and of course getting disheartened!

Therefore, looking upon the fact that we have to take care of cultural heritage incomparable for possibilities of research and to open the eyes on the true political, social, economic, demographic, artistic, etc. history, in order to have books that do not only repeat other books (with no check about!), I think it is our duty to *valorize*, and not only preserve and protect. In fact, without valorization preservation becomes a sterile action, and the protection is effective only if done together with valorization that will give consciousness to the archives' owners and to the scholars of the archival heritage.

Modern archivists do not want and cannot be just mere watchmen of a closed up safe, but qualified and dynamic cultural operators in a rigorous, open-minded and vital scientific field.

POVZETEK

VREDNOTENJE KULTURNIH DOBRIN V ARHIVIH, KNJIŽNICAH IN MUZEJIH

Govoriti o vrednotenju arhivskega gradiva pomeni govoriti o vlogi arhivistov. Arhivisti so v bistvu tisti, ki omogočajo uporabnikom izkoristiti vse prednosti te posebne kulturne dobrine. Vse se začne z delom teh strokovnjakov, delom, ki bo uporabnikom omogočilo, da bodo imeli na razpolago vse potrebne iskalne pripomočke (inventarje, indekse, vodiče itd.) brez katerih je arhiv nedostopen. Druga naloga arhivistov je, da so posredniki med arhivom in uporabniki, še posebej med tistimi, ki niso večji raziskovanja. Ta naloga, ki je težka že v čitalnici, postane še bolj zapletena, ko so uporabniki pred spletno stranjo in raziskujejo sami. Prav tako pa morajo arhivisti skrbeti še za razstavljanje. Razstave morajo biti prijetne in razumljive tudi na znanstvenem nivoju. Problemi se pojavijo pri izdajanju katalogov in arhivskih publikacij na splošno. In nenazadnje, nalogo vrednotenja arhivskega gradiva dopolnjujejo tudi brošure, listine o obvezi ter korektno vodenje in oglaševanje.