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THE MINISTRY OF HERITAGE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITY The Italian Experience

Izvleček:

Ministrstvo za kulturno dediščino in aktivnosti - Italijanska izkušnja

Dvojna narava arhivov, ki je nastala v trenutku italijanske združitve, je povzročila težave pri odločitvi, kateremu ministrstvu naj arhivi pripadajo, Ministrstvu za notranje zadeve ali Ministrstvu za izobraževanje. Po sprejeti odločitvi so bili arhivi dodeljeni Ministrstvu za notranje zadeve in s tem je bila dana večja pomembnost njihovi pravni vrednosti, ne pa njihovi kulturni vrednosti. Leta 1974 je bilo ustanovljeno Ministrstvo za kulturno dediščino in aktivnosti, v katerega so bili vključeni tudi arhivi. Novo ministrstvo je imelo in še vedno ima zelo kompleksno in centralizirano strukturo. Ta sistem je vedno imel svoje prednosti: enotnost, prisotnost in doslednost vodstva na celotnem ozemlju, če pogledamo, kako majhen pomen imajo arhivi v primerjavi z drugimi kulturnimi dobrinami. Dejstvo, da je arhivska mreža sestavljena iz 100 državnih arhivov in 19 arhivskih superintendenc, daje arhivski upravi več moči: neposredna izmenjava tako znanstvenega kot tehnološkega znanja, več discipline pri storitvah za uporabnike, lažje upravljanje s kadri in finančnimi viri. Ta izbira pa ima tudi nekaj slabosti: celoten sistem je bolj okorel, v upravnih procesih je veliko birokracije, omejena je avtonomnost na lokalni ravni. Nedavna institucija Regijskih oddelkov za kulturne dobrine in okolje skuša združiti potrebo po centralizirani organizaciji z večjo fleksibilnostjo različnih regijskih institucij.

Ključne besede:

arhivska zakonodaja, arhivska mreža, Italija.

Abstract:

The Ministry of Heritage and Cultural Activity - The Italian Experience

The double nature of the archives created at the moment of the Italian unification produced a problem about which ministry they should belong to, Home Office or Department for Education and Skills. The decision was reached and the archives were assigned to the Home Office, giving more importance to their legal value, better than their cultural value. In 1974 the Ministry for Heritage and Cultural Activities was established, and the archives merged into it. The new ministry had and still has a complex and centralized structure. This system has always been granting some undeniable benefits: uniformity, presence and consistency of management on the whole territory; taking into consideration the small relevance Archives have when compared with other cultural goods. The fact of being a structure of 100 State Archives and 19 Archival Superintendencies, gives more strength to the Archival Administration; direct sharing of new knowledge both scientific and technologic; more discipline in the services offered to users, easiness in the handing of the personnel and financial resources from one Institute to another. This choice has also some weaknesses: more rigidity of the whole system, more bureaucracy in the administrative processes, a limitation of the autonomy at a local level. The recent institution of the Regional Departments for cultural goods and environment is trying to merge the need of a centralized organization together with a better flexibility for the different regional institutions.

Key words:

archival legislation, archival network, Italy.

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I have been teaching for many years in the School of Archival Science, Paleography and Diplomatics at the State Archives of Trieste, and I have been following the development of the Italian archival structure even from a didactic point of view. Teaching this subject, hard and apparently arid, is sometimes difficult when students lack legislative knowledge (and they often do), but the need for explaining brings also to better understanding.

Before the Italian unification, which took part in the second half of the 19th century, different pre-unification states gave different institutional arrangement to the archives, some of them giving it to the Department for Education and Skills, others to the Home Office. It is a usual problem with the archives, which, like a two-faced Janus, have a double “face”, i.e. a legal and a cultural value. And this characteristic makes archives the only cultural good not to be created for cultural purposes, and this is the reason for this double choice for one ministry or the other, depending on which aspect is taken into consideration.

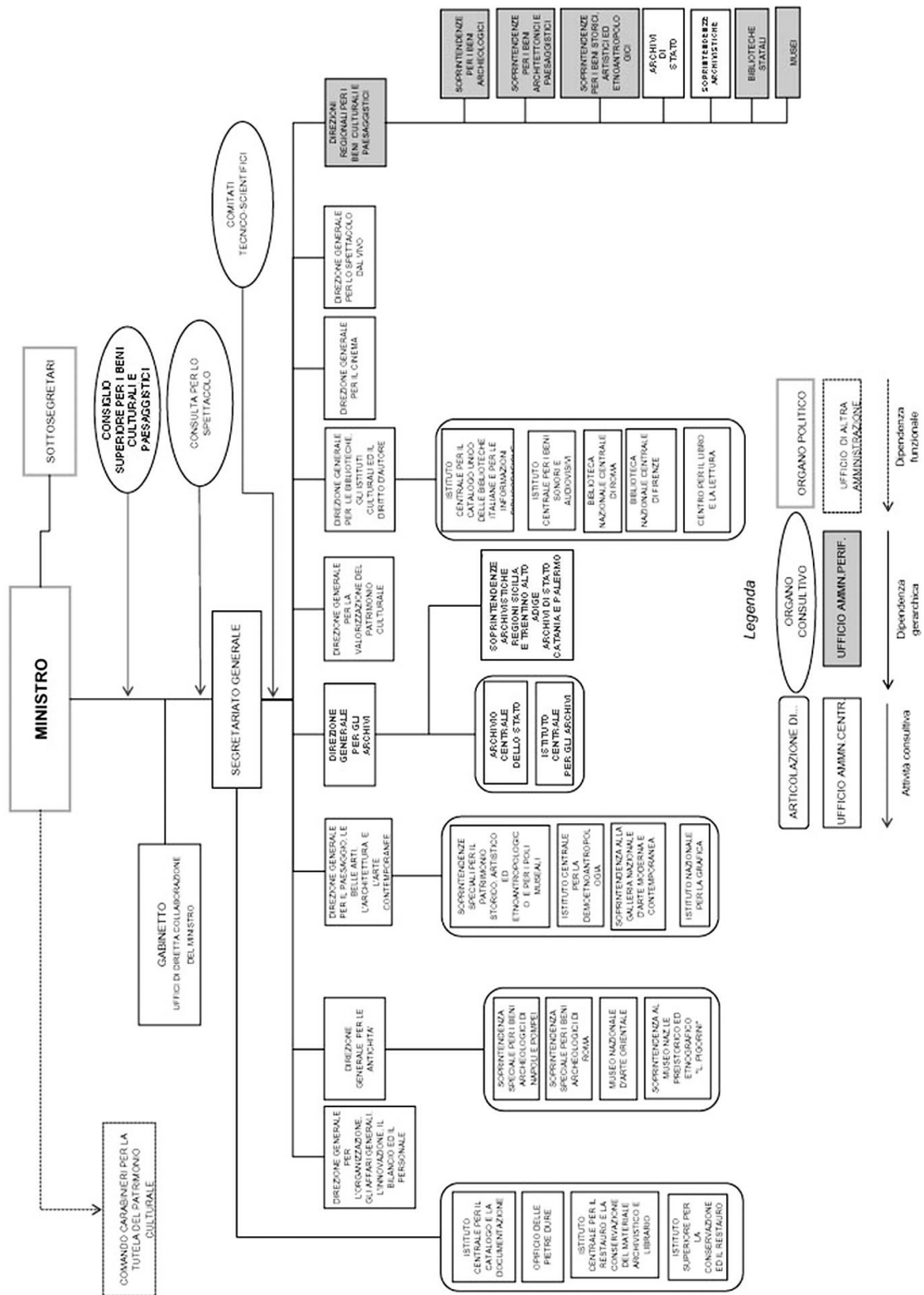
Therefore, at the moment of the Italian Unification it was necessary to make a definitive choice, and after long thinking it was decided to place the archives under the Home Office, and the other cultural goods, i.e. libraries and museums, under the Department for Education and Skills.

A specific law on archives, dating in 1963, was a big update when taking into consideration those years, but having nonetheless a great handicap of not providing any sanctions. In 1974 the Ministry for Cultural Heritage was established, in which also the archives at last could find their place, although the law still remained that of 1963. Many other laws were adopted in the following years, in a disarranged way, and since they apparently had no relations with archives, nonetheless had big consequences for them. This is the case of the establishment of Regions, the law on privacy, on access, and various laws about digital documentation. The need for making order brought to the Law of 1999 and the following Code for cultural goods. After this, a general reorganization of the ministry was made in 2007 and 2009.

The original idea of the Ministry for Cultural Heritage was to realize a slim and agile structure, more “cultural” than bureaucratic, but the implementation did not fit the original project, as can be seen in the following scheme which represents the present situation, as complicated as the original one. Bureaucracy does not forgive indeed, and always tends to create complicated administrative organizations. Compared to the original idea, many administrative bodies have been deleted, like the Council that was at the beginning made by 99 members, and could not work in such a way.

If this scheme could scare us because of its complexity, we must take into consideration that:

- the need is organizing the cultural goods of a country like Italy, which has extraordinary richness and diversity of such goods;
- these goods are present in a very rich way and on a wide territory;
- cultural goods are for Italy a great tourist appeal and a source of richness;
- the ministry takes care not only for the goods, but also for the *activities*, and in this way it also covers cinemas, theatres, circuses, festivals, and above all sport, particularly football.



The Italian structure has always been a centralized and hierarchical one, and such a system has always been granting some undeniable and important **benefits**:

- *uniformity, presence and consistency* of management on the whole territory;
- taking into consideration the small relevance Archives have when compared with other cultural goods, the fact of being a structure of 100 State Archives and 19 Archival Superintendencies gives *more strength to the Archival Administration*;
- *direct* sharing of new knowledge both scientific and technologic;
- more discipline in *services offered to users*;
- easiness in *handling of personnel and financial resources* from one Institute to another.

Such a choice also has some **weaknesses**:

- more *rigidity* of the whole system;
- more *bureaucracy* in administrative processes;
- a *limitation of the autonomy* at a local level.

After decentralization, which followed the establishing of the Regions, a compromise was arranged with the establishing of the *Regional Directions For Cultural Heritage*, being another step between the Central Departments and the single local units. These departments should coordinate at a regional level, but they are usually given to architects, non-experts of archival matters, and so archives are somehow “forgotten” even though, just for this reason, more “free”.

THE ARCHIVAL ADMINISTRATION

Let us now go more in detail with the archival administration.

The top of the structure is the *General Direction for Archives*, whose functions and tasks connect to the guardianship on archives, except for the regional competences. In particular, the Director General:

- gives opinion, for the competent section, on annual and multiannual projects;
- authorizes all the actions on cultural goods as per section 21, paragraph 1 of the Code;
- authorizes the loaning of archival goods for exhibitions in the national or foreign territory;
- elaborates programs concerning studies, researches and scientific initiatives;
- is responsible for the reproduction and restoration of archival goods, preservation of digital memory, relationships with the international institutions in the field;
- approves preservation and disposal plans of the state administration units;
- assigns financial contributions for interventions on supervised archives;
- takes care of common actions with the Home Office in the field of classified documents in private and public archives and defines the ways of their consultation;

- as per section 48, paragraph 6 of the Code, and in order to attend the ad hoc tax breaks, declares the cultural or scientific interest of exhibitions of archival goods and of all other cultural initiative connected to archival goods;
- gives opinion on the administration in the interdepartmental determinations about paying taxes by handover of archival goods;
- coordinates the activities of the Schools of Archival Science, Paleography and Diplomatics at the State archives;
- makes provisions for the sanctions provided by the Code for any violation of the dispositions in the field of archival goods;
- adopts the measures in the field of forced attainment of archival goods for pre-emption, buying, export and import as provided by sections 60, 70, 95 and 98 of the Code;
- adopts the decisions of the central administration in the field of circulation of archival goods in the international area;
- decides, for the competent sections, on the administrative appeals provided for the sections 16, 69 and 128 of the Code;
- in the digital field, coordinates and supervises the State Central Archive and the Central Institute for Archives;
- works out and coordinates the archival methods related to the activities of arrangement and inventorying, coordinates the digital archival systems on the state territory, studies and applies the systems for permanent preservation.

The General Direction for Archives *is divided in nine managerial offices* at a non-general level, including the offices of Sicily Trentino Alto-Adige regions, the Central Institute for Archives and the State Central Archive.

In succession, the most relevant aspects.

SERVICE I - GENERAL AFFAIRS

The Service takes care of:

- *general affairs*; legal reports, annual balance and statistics, the administrative and pecuniary sanctions provided for the Code;
- digital administration, *digital register*, the archive and records management;
- the assignment of the consignee office; *accounting and balance*; annual and multiannual planning, together with other Services and following proposals from the Regional Directions; management of financial resources and of the national and EU special resources;
- the acquisition and management of archival *centers*; planning of implementations of the centers; the application of *technologies* of archival buildings and preservation of archival heritage;
- the *personnel*.

SERVICE II - GUARDIANSHIP AND PRESERVATION OF ARCHIVAL HERITAGE

The service helps the Director General in:

- planning guidelines for the *guardianship and preservation* of the national archival heritage and authorizations for the loaning of archival goods for exhibitions on the national or foreign territory;
- planning the *technical and scientific* goals of the activities of the State Archives and the Archival Superintendency;
- controlling the *auctions and non-property assets* of the archival administration;
- planning guidelines and audits in the field of *security and safety* of archival heritage;
- coordinating the activities of the *study rooms and the Schools of Archival Science, Paleography and Diplomatics at the State Archives*; the functioning of *restoring laboratories* at the State Archives;
- the approval of the *filing plans' systems* of the public archives and the *preservation and disposal plans* of the Central Administration Archives;
- giving *financial contributions for actions on the supervised archives*;
- the cooperation with the ad hoc Home Office institutions for *identifying the classified documentation* in private and public archives defining the ways of their consultation;
- the digital description systems of archival heritage for *managing purposes*;
- giving *legal advice on regional legislation about archives*;
- taking care of activities of *recovering illegally exported archival material*;
- coordinating with the Central Institute for Restoring and Preserving archival and book heritage and technical-scientific planning of *archival centres*.

SERVICE III - STUDIES AND RESEARCHES

The Service takes care of:

- the *training* in the field of archives together with Universities, the Regions and the Local Governments also by the organisation of training courses and the participation at common research programs;
- the adoption of *standards* in the field of digital reproduction of archival heritage and preservation of paper and digital archives;
- promoting the application of methodologies and standards also by initiatives in the field of *training*;
- the *reproduction and preservation* of archival heritage, and the preservation of digital memory;
- coordinating the *National Archival System*;
- coordinating with the Direction General for the *valorisation of the cultural heritage*;
- coordinating *digital archival systems* on the national territory, and studying and applying systems for permanent preservation of digital archives;

- the *scientific research agreements with* cultural institutions;
- the publishing of *State Archives issues* and the “*Review of the State Archives*”, the digital issues of the Direction General Library, book acquisitions;
- *the web site of the Direction General* and the coordination of the single State Archives web sites; the international relationships and the coordination with the Secretariat General in the field of *international agreements*;
- planning programs relating to studies, researches and scientific initiatives, and implementing them.

THE CENTRAL INSTITUTE FOR ARCHIVES

The Central Institute for Archives is a research and study institution developing plans concerning the archival description, the standardization of the description criteria, the development and coordination of the digital systems; coordinates and implements the knowledge and the application of description and technological standards. In order to support the users with a full and well-integrated description of the documentation stored in the State Archives, the Institute has settled a national digital system named SIAS, based on the description of preservation institutions, documentation fonds, archives creators and research instruments. Some of the ongoing activities: the Italian history portal, the working group for the guidelines on digitalization, the online culture portal, the cooperation to Michael, and so on.

STATE CENTRAL ARCHIVES

The State Central Archives preserves and valorizes from the cultural point of view the documents having historical importance having no more administrative relevance produced by the state central institutions (Presidency of the Ministers Council, Ministries, Advisory and Jurisdictional Bodies), except for the documentation of the Presidency of the Republic, the Parliament, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Defense which preserve their own documentation by themselves. The State Central Archives is in Italy the same as the French Archives National, the National Archives in Washington, the German Bundes Archiv, the Public Record Office in London. Because of its institutional nature, the State Central Archives is the focal point for researches on the history of our Country, as witnessed by thousands of publications, which took advantage of the archival fonds stored in the library.

AT A LOCAL LEVEL

- **17 Regional Directions for the cultural and landscape goods** with tasks of taking care of cooperation with the Local Governments, coordinating and supervising, preparing agreements with the Regions, implementing projects and studies (saved the scientific autonomy of the Archives).
- **100 State Archives** having place in the Provinces' main towns, having tasks of preserving the fonds produced by the central and local pre-Unification administrations, and the historical archives, i.e. older than forty years, produced by the relative after-Unification offices; some of them also host the Schools of Archival Science, Paleography and Diplomatics and laboratories for photocopying and restoring.

- **34 State Archives Sections**, having place in the Provinces' non-main towns, holding fonds with a particular value, and relying on the Province State Archives.
- **19 Archival Superintendencies**, one per each Region, supervising the non-state archives in their ward, and issuing the declaration of "relevant cultural interest" for private archives.

The Archival Superintendencies and the State Archives, not having any hierarchical relationship between them since they take care of different kinds of archives (state and non-state), rely on the Direction General for Archives, but also, as per their regional coordination activities, on the Regional Directions for Cultural and Landscape Goods. The quite tangled situation, shown in the scheme below, should mediate the need of a centralized administration and the need of decentralization. The whole system is in fact still looking for its own stable equilibrium, and hopefully, as soon as it will be found, this will possibly be the right compromise to assure coordination and scientific and administrative uniformity, saved the need of a flexibility connected to the local demands.

