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Adaptation of international archival standards in Hungary

Pre-automation period

Before the 1990s the arrangement and description of holdings in Hungarian public archives was regulated by a relatively high level of national standardization. Registration and description of the holdings and creation of finding aids were carried out in paper form. Application of computers in archival work spread only in 1990s.

The roots of standardization lie back to the 1950s when a centralized network of public archives was created following the Soviet model. Before that only the National Archives could be regarded as a professional archival institution. It was a real workshop of historical and archival science from the turn of the century onwards, but it was not the hub of a network of institutions. The archives of counties and towns were embedded in the administrative organization of the municipalities. The "Chief Archivists" of county and city municipalities were mainly and principally administrative officials with special historical education and interest, their main mandate was to serve out the interests of the parent organization. Local adaptation and application of principles and methods of Archivistics depended largely on personal ambitions and inclinations. In these circumstances standardization was naturally out of question.

In 1950 all the public archives were declared to be state organs and their merge into regional state archives was decided. Until 1953 a network of 21 territorial state archives (one in most of the 19 counties and in the capital city, two in one county in some special cases) came into being. Their mandate already included collection and preservation of all types of records created in the field of their territorial jurisdiction which didn't belong to the competence of the central National Archives or the Military Archives. That means they were no longer municipal archives, they became puplic archives with overall territorial competence subordinated to a new central organ, the National Center of Archives (LOK). They became – and their successor institutions are still – the "backbone of the Hungarian archival system". All other local public archives ceased to exist.

Massive centralization meant the beginning of a development process as a result of which territorial archives became real institutions with a considerable level of archival professionalization. All the activities followed central directives. The Fond system was adapted, arrangement, basic registration and description of the holdings were carried out following the guides issued by LOK. The published fond lists and basic inventories followed strictly prescribed structures.

The reform of the Hungarian state socialism at the end of 1960s implied decentralization, growing role and competency of local power structures. A consequence of this tendency in the archival sector was that the centralized

organization was put an end. Territorial archives became institutions subordinate to the councils of the counties and the capital city in 1968. A basic expectation of the new parent organizations to archives was to be instrumental in the cultivation of local identity, research and popularization of local and regional history. Most of the county archives became real workshops of history in this period, and this process went hand in hand with the further emergence of archival professionalism. The publication of source editions, readers on local and county history, yearbooks and monographs grew simultaneously with publication of fond lists and other types of finding aids.

The Archival Directorate (from 1977 Archival Section) of the ministry responsible for culture retained considerable role in safeguarding standardization in methodology. Prescriptions relating to all basic fields of archival work were included in the "Rules of Archival Administration" (1971) and instructions issued by the Archival Section. Each territorial archives were obliged to apply the unified fond typology so that the users could meet the same structure of fonds and subfonds all over the country. Each fond had to be classified in "main fond groups" the basis of which classification was the type of the creator combined with chronological periods. 33 main groups were in use (for example: I. Higher organs of state power, II. Higher organs of public administration etc. ...). The internal structure of the main groups (division into groups, sub-groups and distribution of fond numbers) were regulated in detailes. The idea was that the records of same type of agencies should have been located in the fond structure in the same way. The system established for the territorial archives in 1962 is still the basis of fond structures even nowadays through continuous adaptation and development.

Types, structures and content of registers and finding aids were also regulated in detail (e.g. fond-registers, fond-lists, basic inventories, describing inventories, repertories, container lists, extended container lists). The fond lists published first in the 1960s–1970s contained already the elements which have been considered essential for international exchange of descriptive information later in ISAD/G: reference code, title, date(s), extent of the unit of description. (Creator hasn't been a separate element but it's included in the title; level of description has been expressed by typography.) This being so the preparedness of Hungarian archival community to adjust to the first wave of international standardization of archival description should have been in principle quite far-gone.

First steps of adaptation of international standards

The ICA organized Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards (ICA/DDS) in 1990 and the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD/G) was published in 1994 as the first milestone of international standardization in archival world. This phenomenon didn't generate widespread reaction and interest in the Hungarian archival community and searching for way of adaptation remained insular for a few years. The causes are multiple, just a few main factors are highlighted in the following.

After the fall of the Communist Regime archival service lacked the new and stable legal basis for years. The enactment of the Act on "Public Records, Public Archives and the Protection of Private Archives" (in short Archives Act) was drawn out until the summer of 1995. In the first half of 1990s the separation of the properties and finances of the state and of the local and county self-governments engendered uncertainity concerning the legal status of the records preserved by the archival institutions and their maitenance. They were forced to tackle with the consequences of the speedy transformation of the economy, acquisition of records of bankrupted state companies consumed huge share of their capacities. Involvement in the process of compensation (of those, or their posterity, who had been killed, inprisoned, persecuted during the regimes of dictatorship between 1939–1989, and of those, whose properties were confiscated by the state) was an enormous challange for the whole archival service from 1991.

In this period of transition the central professional guidance and coordination weakened to a substantional degree. The conditions of a centralized and coordinated reaction to the first wave of international archival standardization didn't come into being. International standardization was motivated mainly by the challenge of informatics, but in the Hungarian archival service didn't take effect any comprehensive nationwide concept in this field before the end of the 1990s. Supply with computer technics and the way of its application was largly up to the individual institutions. An official summary on the situation of Hungarian archives in the Information Society compiled in 2000 stated: "The resistence of the archival professional community [against computer technics] has already ceased, but [...] the majority of archivists regard the computer even nowadays just as a sort of intelligent typewriter which makes the quick reproduction, amendment and printing of texts easier."[1] So "paper-based thinking" about archival description continued to dominate.

The basic principle of the Archives Act 1995 was the consistent differentiation between public and private records and between public archives and open private archives. The minister responsible for culture had the authority of direct rule only over the National Archives. A few branches of the central government had their own special state archives (military, water management and environmental protection). The territorial archives worked henceforth under the rule and maintenance of the capital city and county municipalities, but they continued to fulfill the role of general territorial public archives as earlier. The records of towns and villages have been also preserved in these archives. Although in principle all the local authorithies are entitled to found their own archives, only four towns have used this possibility until now[2]. The open private archives

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1   Gergő Bendegúz Cseh – Lajos Körmendy – István Németh – Péter Rádi – Csaba Reisz T. – Zoltán Szőke: A levéltárak helye az információs társadalomban, a levéltári anyag informatikai feldolgozása. [Die Stellung der Archive in der Informatikgesellschaft, die EDV-Erschließung der Archivmaterialien] In: Levéltári Szemle, 51. (2001) 1. S. 17.
2   The towns with own municipal archives: Győr (Raab), Tatabánya, Székesfehérvár (Stuhlweißenburg), Vác (Waitzen).

(these are mainly ecclesiastical or party archives) have to fulfill the compulsory professional requirements and only in this case are they entitled for budgetary support. The small archives (university, ecclesiastical etc.), the fate of which had been especially harsh during the decades of socialism, have developed a lot during the last two decades.

In the system introduced by the Archives Act the compulsory professional requirements are regulated by the decree of the minister responsible for culture. The fulfillment of these is supervised by the Archival Inspectorate. Within this framework the institutions organize their work with a great level of independence according to the claims and wishes of their maintainers. Coordination and standardization is provided partly by the methodological guides and recommendations issued by the National Archives with the agreement of the minister. These are usually prepared with the contribution of the Archival Collegium which was established in 1998 as a body monitoring archival affairs and giving opinions and proposals. The membership of the Collegium is composed of nominees of the professional associations and persons appointed by the minister.

The ministerial decree on the professional requirements has been issued only in 2002, and it is still in force[3]. The prescriptions on registration and description of holdings, the structure and data elements of the compulsory registration tools have been defined regardless of the already existing and wide-spread ICA-Standards. (The compulsory types of finding aids for registration are: fond register, container list, extended container list. Finding aids for information of the users: fond list, guide, fond description, descriptive inventory, repertory.) "Beyond these" (!)[4] other types of finding aids can be created taking into consideration international standards and recommendations of ICA. This wording showed the situation that the Hungarian professional community already was aware of the existence and importance of the international standards but still regarded them as something "luxury" beyond the core of the basic archival tasks.

The first version of ISAD(G) released in 1994 has been translated into Hungarian already in 1995[5]. A translation of ISAAR/CPF launched at the XV. International Congress on Archives in Vienna was published as a "working paper" in 2005[6]. The translators had to cope with the gap between the language of the standards and the established terminology of the Hungarian archivistics in both cases.

The first project aiming at real adaptation was carried out in Budapest City Archives where the development of a new archival information software based on ISAD(G) began from 1996. The Registrum software – an in-house development – was introduced in 1999/2000. Its capabilities were planned for description and management of all relevant data elements compatible with ISAD(G) on fond-level

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3 10/2002. (IV. 13) NKÖM. (The revision of this decree is planned for 2014.)

4 Ebd. 43. § (5).

5 ISAD(G): Az első nemzetközi levéltári szabvány [ISAD(G): der erste internationale Standard für die Archive]. In. Levéltári Szemle 45. (1995) 2. S. 53–74.

6 A második nemzetközi szabvány: az ISAAR (CPF) [Der zweite internationale Standard für die Archive: ISAAR(CPF)]. In. Levéltári Szemle 55. (2005) 3. S. 32–70.

and above and on sub-fond and series level. More detailed information on the content and inner structure of these units of description was embedded in the connected container lists. The aspiration of the developers was an extensive exploitation of all the descriptive elements of the standard. To achieve the service of possibly detailed and structured information numerous sub-elements were added to the descriptive elements. For example the Administrative/Biographical History element of the Context Area has been divided into the following sub-elements: Foundation/Birth, Predecessors; Role and competence; Organization and hierarchy; Cessation and successor(s). Experimentation with the new way of description was carried out by the archivists through compilation of sample descriptions but creation of so detailed fond- and sub-fond descriptions remained exceptional in practice. Registrum was in use as archival information software in Budapest City Archives until 2013.

The ministerial decree of 2002 on the professional requirements ordered the cataloguing and description of the basic data of fonds and sub-fonds by using a uniform software for all public archives. The development of this software was defined as the task of the National Archives. The introduction of the uniform software E-Archivum took place in 2005. The structure of its Fond Register module has been compatible with ISAD(G). The standardized elements were: reference code, title, date(s), level of description and extent.

During the 2000s computers became everyday working tools for practically all archivists and they increasingly used them for building of databases. Mass of in-house developed databases arouse in many institutions with valuable content, but the implementations were isolated. The data structures were incompatible with each other in most cases even if the same types of records were processed. Growing demand for one-click search on a common portal emerged, but it became obvious that integration of the data produced in individual institutions would require a lot of manual preparatory work. In 2008 an Ad Hoc Committe commissioned by the Archival Collegium carried out a complete survey and analysis of the databases created by all archival institutions. The conlusion of the survey was that effective national standardization is a burning necessity not only in the field of general archival description but even in the field of special types of records which are typical objects of mass database-building and digitization. As the Hungarian archival community wasn't yet regarded to be prepared to manage EAD and EAC as routine data exchange formats, the commission proposed the application of Dublin Core in case of simple structure (not multi-level) databases as a transitory step.

Turn to international standards

The ministry responsible for culture launched a "Service Provider Archives"-project in 2009 in the framework of which the creation of a common internet platform, the Hungarian Archives Portal (www.archivportal.hu), was decided. The main functions of the common portal were defined as the following: 1) To provide up-to-date information on archives for professionals, for users and for the general public (e.g.

research rules and possibilities, legal framework, new publications, exhibitions, conferences, projects, professional guidelines and standards etc.); 2) To provide a joint database integrating the various individual archival data and digitized archival records (maps, documents, files, etc.) of the collaborative institutions[7].

An integral part of this project was the production of a "standard" translation of the ICA description standards – ISAD(G), ISAAR/CPF, ISDF and ISDIAH – based on contolled and unified Hungarian terminology and publication of these translations on Hungarian Archives Portal[8].

During the process of the preparation of the joint archival database – which integrates mainly the individual databases describing individual files and documents produced by the collaborating institutions – we had to cope with all the typical difficulties of the products of the "pre-standardization period". This meant that the preparatory work included a thorough field-by-field analysis of all the individual databases. There was no chance to use any tool for automatic conversion and validation of the locally produced data. Another important service of the Portal has been the joint fond and subfond-register which was the first integrated on-line publication of the basic data on the holdings of 20 archival institutions. The preparatory work of it helped to disclose deficiencies in standardization of these basic finding aids, as the existing prescriptions worked out for paper-based environment fell short in building databases.

Implications of these experiences played some role in motivating the Archival Collegium when it decided to commission a Comittee of Archival Standards as a permanent working committee in 2011. The main tasks of the committee are the monitoring of international standardization, translation of international standards and submission of proposals for adaptation, preparation of national standards. The composition of the committee ensured the representation of all the important types of archival institutions (central, territorial, municipal, university and church archives).

The committe laid down the main objectives of the short term programm as the following:

- Hungarian Standard of Archival Description/General (ISAD/G adaptation);
- Standards of description of special types of records which are typical objects of mass digitization and building of databases: birth/death/marriage registers, maps, plans, minutes of corporate bodies, medieval charters, photos;
- Standard of fond and subfond titles;
- Standard of ISDIAH-conform description of archival institutions and list of institution codes.

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7 István Kenyeres – András Sipos: Hungarian Archives Portal – a collaborative solution for publication of digitized archival content and databases. In: Archive im Web – Erfahrungen, Herausforderungen, Visionen/Archives on the Web – Experiences, Challenges, Visions. Hrsg. von Thomas Aigner, Stefanie Hohenbruck, Thomas Just und Joachim Kemper. St. Pölten, 2011. S. 72–81.
8 http://mlp.archivportal.hu/id-600-leveltari_szabvanyok.html.

The last two objectives havn't been carried out yet because of a basic reorganization of the archival structure in 2012 which meant that the county archives merged into the National Archives and became its territorial "member institutions". This situation means of course a new framework for the standardization process.

The first step of the preparation of the Hungarian Standard of General Archival Description was the analysis of the inherited and existing practice. The outcome was that content and data structure of the most basic types of finding aids prescribed in the Professional Requirements of 2002 – the fond register and the extended container list – could be made ISAD(G)-conform through minor modifications.

As most wide-spread non-ISAD(G)-conform elements of current regulation and practice were indentified the following:

- Mixing of description of context and content.
- Lack of separate descriptive element on the creator (usually included in the title).
- Lack of separate descriptive elements on the conditions governing access and reproduction (usually incuded in the description of "usability" which is used in the sense "how to research").
- Container lists are regarded as the most "informative" types of finding aids (that means the deep-level units of description are subordinated to the physical units).

The committee has adopted a methodology to form the standard which aims at the overall standardization of the elements of description which means the definitive prescription which elements are obligatory, recommended, optional or not usable at different levels of description used in the Hungarian practice from the top (fond main groups) to the sub-fond level (Table 1). Guidance on the usage of all the elements at different levels is provided. Among the data themselves only the most essential should be standardized strictly: reference code, title, date(s), level of description. Beyond that the usage of personal names, geographical names and religion of persons are urgent to regulate.

The draft of the Hungarian Standard of General Archival Description is prepared by the committee and the different versions of it have been discussed and revised by the Archival Collegium and at other professional meetings. The final debate and approval is somewhat intermitted by the recent reorganization of the archival system.

As far as description of specific types of records is concerned the committee took a stand on full standardization of elements of description with extensive and detailed guidance on the form and content of data. The defined data structures separate the description of the archival units (in ISAD/G-conform form which may fit in the structure of multilevel description) and the description of their content regarding the specialities of the document types.

Table 1

	Main Fonds Group	Fonds–Group1	Fonds Group2	Fonds–Group3	Fond–Group4	Fonds	Group of Sub-Fonds	Sub-Fonds
3.1.1 *Identity Statement Area*								
3.1.1 Reference code	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB
3.1.2 Title	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB
3.1.3 Date(s)	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB
3.1.4 Level of description	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB
3.1.5 Extent and medium	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB
3.2. *Context area*								
3.2.1 Name of creator(s)	N	REC	O	O	O	OB	O	O
3.2.2 Adminstrative/Biographical History	N	REC	O	O	O	OB	O	O
3.2.3 Archival history	N	REC	O	O	O	REC	O	O
3.2.4 Acquisition	N	REC	O	O	O	REC	O	REC
3.3 *Content and structure area*								
3.3.1 Scope and content	O	O	O	O	O	OB	O	OB
3.3.2 Appraisal, destruction, scheduling	N	O	O	O	O	OB	O	OB
3.3.3 Accruals	N	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
3.3.4 System of arrangement	O	REC	O	O	O	OB	O	OB
3.4 *Conditions of access and use area*								
3.4.1 Access conditions	N	O	O	O	O	OB	O	OB
3.4.2 Reproductions conditions	N	N	N	N	N	O	N	O
3.4.3 Language(s) and script	N	N	N	N	N	O	N	O
3.4.4 Physical characteristics and technical requirements	N	N	N	N	N	O	N	O
3.4.5 Finding aids	O	O	O	O	O	OB	O	OB
3.5 *Allied material area*								
3.5.1 Existence and location of originals	N	N	N	N	N	O	N	O
3.5.2 Existence and location of copies	N	N	N	N	N	O	N	O
3.5.3 Related units of description	N	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
3.5.4 Publications	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
3.6 *Notes area*								
3.6.1 Notes	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
3.7 *Description control area*								
3.7.1 Author(s) of description	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB
3.7.2 Rules and conventions	REC	REC	REC	REC	REC	REC	REC	REC
3.7.3 Date(s) of description	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB	OB

OB = Obligatory
REC = Recommended
O   = Optional
N   = Not usable

Examples for description of specific types of records:

Standard of description of birth, death and marriage registries, overview of data structure:

1. Descriptive elements of archival units:
   - 1.1 Archives/repository
   - 1.2 Reference code of fond/collection
   - **1.3 Identifiers of the register**[9]
   - 1.4 Type of document (source of description, e.g. original, microfilm etc.)
2. Descriptive elements of the content
   - **2.1 Case (birth, baptism, etc.)**
   - **2.2 Date of the case**
   - 2.3 Other entry identifier
3. Personal data elements
   - 3.1 Status in the case
   - **3.2 Name**
   - 3.3 Gender
   - 3.4 Age
   - 3.5 Date of birth
   - 3.6 Place of birth
   - 3.7 Social status/Occupation
   - 3.8 Adress
   - 3.9 Religion
   - 3.10 Family status
   - 3.11 Other personal data
4. Other date(s)
5. Other places
6. Note(s)
7. Related entities
8. Standards and rules

Standard of description maps, overview of data structure:
1. Descriptive elements of archival units
   - **1.1 Archives/repository**
   - **1.2 Reference code of fond/collection**
   - **1.3 Title**
     - **1.3.1 Original title**
     - **1.3.2 Supplied title**
   - **1.4 Date(s)**
   - 1.5 Author(s) and contributors
     - **1.5.1 Author(s)**
     - 1.5.2 Contributor(s)

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9 Compulsory elements with bold.

1.6 **Type and extent of document** (source of description)
1.7   Medium
1.8   Publishing and related data
1.9   Printing and related data
1.10 Notes
1.11 Related entities

2. Descriptive elements of content
    2.1   Content
        – Geographical and administrative units
        – Toponyms
        – Type of the map
        – Thesaurus
    2.2   Cartographical data elements
        – **Scale**
        – Additional map
        – etc.
    2.3   Physical characteristics, condition
    2.4   Notes
    2.5   Relations with external entities

3. Creator and data of the description

4. Standards and rules

National standards of three types of records have already been approved and published by the National Archives with the agreement of the Ministry: birth, death and marriage registries; maps; minutes of meetings and sessions[10].

The recent reorganization of the archival system, the affiliation of the county archives to the National Archives of Hungary may open new possibilities for creation of an integrated national database system.

In 2009 KopintDatorg Zrt. (now called Nemzeti Infokommunikációs Szolgáltató Zrt., National Infocommunication Services PLC), National Archives of Hungary and Budapest City Archives created a consortium for the realisation of the Electronic Archives project. The project, run on EU funding, aims to provide long-term preservation to the digital born or digitised documents. The e-archives system has to provide integrated registration and metadata management of traditional paper-based documents as well as of digital documents. For this aim the scopeArchiv software has been introduced as the basic software of the Archival Information System which complies with international archival standards. The project came to an end in September 2013. The affiliated county archives will also join this system. So one may expect that international descriptive standards will infiltrate the everyday work of the majority of Hungarian archivists in the near future.

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10 http://mnl.gov.hu/bal_menusor/szakembereknek/ajanlasok.html or http://mlp.archivportal.hu/id-600-leveltari_szabvanyok.html.