

Archivi & Computer: data processing applications in business archives

by Fabio Del Giudice

The 2007 issue of *Archivi & Computer* is dedicated to the theme of data processing applications in business archives. In accordance with the most recent layout of the magazine, we put together in one issue some of the most significant experiences and experiments regarding economic archives in Italy.

Between 2005 and 2006, Mariella Guercio and I, along with other members of the editorial staff, shared our thoughts on the condition of business archives in Italy. We especially focused on their recent history, on current organizational and managerial trends and the general uncertainty that these changes have brought. What are the possibilities for preserving and valorizing this portion of such relevant historical sources?¹.

We concluded that the moment has come to thoroughly investigate the spread of data processing systems and applications more or less known within the reference archives community. From there, we decided to publish a special issue of *Archivi & Computer*.

In September 2006, a formal invitation to contribute to the special issue was sent to a large number of people, including: colleagues, archivists, representatives of organizations, foundations and associations, as well as leaders of initiatives known in the specific field. Our goal was to collect contributions and information in order to :

- collect a large number of qualified testimonies about what the central organizations in historical archives are doing,
- gather news about the use of software of archival description that has been adopted,
- point out the possible presence and evolution of systems and instruments for records management (current archives, preservation/classification frames, record acquisition and record management),
- describe automation processes and the spread of digital solutions applied to both historical and current records,
- gain greater insight into the use of the Net in business archives to dispense general information about an archive, either to make guides, inventories and other products of archival description (which are replacing the equivalent traditional systems) more user-friendly, or as a direct offer of primary sources on the web as a consequence of the digitalization of original records,
- learn more about the implementation and evolution of the first projects of dematerialization and the problems pertinent to the sequence of migration from original formats to those adopted for long term consultation and preservation,
- study archival outsourcing, in particular that related to information archives storage and other experiences of record management service externalization. We hoped that

¹ See F. DEL GIUDICE, *Gli archivi d'impresa in Italia: storia, evoluzione, prospettive*, in «Archivi & Computer», 2005, 2, pages 47-52.

these and other problems could be analyzed from the point of view of both their historical development and their critical and evolutionary aspects, taking into account the difficulties and obstacles in bringing them to reality.²

Each of the ten articles in this special issue represents original contributions on the nature of a constantly changing situation.

Authors, Francesca Appiani and Francesca Lagostina of the Museo Alessi describe how, in the evolution of a corporate museum, the need gradually emerged to link and manage a series of information related to the single object and its history in a single IT setting. Initially, this is a management question; however ultimately it will surely prove to be useful to the specific history of the artifact (a designed product or other object). From this followed the study and the creation of a physical structure able to establish a link among the various projects: the production aspects, the creation of catalogues and the museum's management of each object. The case of the Alessi museum represents a successful example of integration of cultural and preservation skills with internal IT and management solutions.

Roberto Baglioni and Sara Piccolo, on behalf of La Fondiaria Assicurazioni, briefly trace the historical and institutional profile of the insurance company from its origins in 1879 up to now. They give an account of the census and reordering of the records of the group, and explain how this path is organically integrated into a special program to safeguard and valorize the company's archival heritage. The authors describe for the first time the planning and creation of a software application that provides for both the management of the corporate museum material and the historical-artistic documentation.

Stefano Batilocchi, Sergio Cardarelli and Daniela Colonna describe IT development and the use of digital applications in the Historical Archives of the Banca d'Italia. They point out that, for a long time, the Banca d'Italia was a leader in the experimentation and adoption of technological solutions for records management (microfilming and pre-Windows systems). In recent years, the choices of the past have proven themselves and therefore recommended in a challenging new technological and organizational context, requiring a radical digital transformation and IT options that provide strongly personalized solutions. These choices together will gradually lead to a more sophisticated use of the web as an access channel to available resources, which include a description of the archives and of the primary digitalized sources that the Banca d'Italia has been producing for many years with a laboratory of highly specialized reproduction.

² In this preliminary survey we contacted and involved Francesca Pino and Guido Montanari of IntesaSanpaolo, Cecilia Poggetti of Hyperborea, Giuseppe Paletta and Antonella Bilotto of the Centro per la cultura d'impresa in Milan, Anna Cantaluppi of Compagnia di San Paolo, Alessandro Lombardo of Fondazione Ansaldo, Giorgetta Bonfiglio-Dosio, Giovanni Luigi Fontana, of the Associazione italiana per la tutela del patrimonio industriale (AIPAI) (Italian Association for the safeguard of the industrial heritage), Sergio Cardarelli of the Historical Archives of the Banca d'Italia, Carolina Lussana of Fondazione Dalmine, Tommaso Fanfani of Fondazione Piaggio, Eugenio Pacchioli of Fondazione Olivetti, Giampietro Morreale of Unicredit, Gaetano Calabrese of Catania University, Gigliola Fioravanti and Franco Liberati of Centro di fotoriproduzione, legatoria e restauro degli Archivi di Stato, Gian Maria Zaccone of Italgas, Maurizio Di Russo of Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, Antonio Ratti of the gruppo Generali, Roberto Baglioni and Sara Piccolo of Fondiaria-Sai, Daniela Brignone of Birra Peroni, Viviana Rocco of Pirelli, Lucia Nardi of ENI, Giandomenico Peluso of "Imprese e storia", Maria Grazia Cadoni of Banco di Sardegna, Leonardo Musci of Consorzio Baicr, Maria Teresa Sillano and Silvia Lolli of Banca Popolare di Milano, Conny Damiani and Grazia Tatò of ANAI, Gabriella Serratrice of Regione Piemonte, Mario De Luca Picione of IntesaSanpaolo, Francesca Appiani of Museo Alessi, Claudio Riello and Chiara Ottaviano of Telecom, Vittore Armani and Gianluca Perondi of Fondazione Mondadori, Amedeo Lepore of Bari University, Giuseppe Felloni of Genova University, Alessandra Giovenco of the British School in Rome and Giovanni Bruno of Regesta. We involved also some foreign colleagues of the European Association for Banking and Financial History: Edwen Green of HSBC group, Melanie Aspey of Rothschild, Roger Nougaret of the Credit Agricole, Maria Teresa Tortella of the Banca di Spagna, Hans Naess of Riksarkiv and Lesley Richmond of Business Archives Council.

Elisabetta Bettio is a free-lance archivist with considerable expertise gained in some of the most significant archival institutes of Tuscany. Her article focuses on her personal work experience in situations where the quality of the application used in description is put to the test in focal points of the archivist's traditional work. She explores questions of approach to the special nature of records in a business archives, the management of visual images, the delicate phases of data migration among different versions of a program and lastly, the ability of a program to cope with various virtual representations of the archives and reordered data.

Giovanni Bruno (Regesta) covers the setting up of the IT management system of Enel historical archives from its beginning in 1977, the years of the first important projects for applications of information technologies to archival work in Italy. Since he numerous territorial historical archives of the various sections of Enel differ considerably in their organization, Bruno describes the different functional needs posed by these organizational conditions which led to the planning and creation of instruments that allow not only an integration of documentation ordered according to a variety of criteria for each archives, but also modes of common access to inventory instruments based on a variety of arrangements. The creation of an 'archival toolbox' aims to achieve integration of the databases as well as transversal access to documentation preserved in different places. From these principles emerged first, the project of integration of the images databases as well as the Enelikon website; followed by the evolution in Enel's digital archives aimed at the fruition and the reutilization of informative and documentary repositories of diverse provenance.

Barbara Costa and Guido Montanari concentrate on the IT contribution to the Historical Archives of the Banca Intesa. In 1998 the choice was made, followed by personalization of an integrated IT system to manage all the activities and the data stocked up during the first 15 years of the bank's activity. The authors describe the system's architecture including the creation of the new group IntesaSanpaolo, and discuss the repercussions that the delicate integration process had on the management of the historical documentation. The IT system was a fundamental support in this difficult period of transition, thanks also to some important functions of Records Management and to the more technical files of the recognitions and of the informative records schedule. They chose to concentrate the data of the various banks in just one new informative system, dividing them according to the different provenance and, since 2004, all the inventories can be freely consulted on line in the Banca Intesa website.

Mario De Luca Picione of IntesaSanpaolo and Susanna Orefice of Memoria analyze the initiatives and activities of the Historical Archives of the Istituto Mobiliare Italiano and on the IT filing/ of loans. In particular they account for the recent initiatives of safeguarding and valorization of IMI Archives with the publication of a special guide and the continuation of the task of inventory. The filing operation required the setting up of a specific IT program that could handle the wide spectrum of cases from many types of funds, whose technical characteristics and descriptive outlines are fully illustrated and commented in the article.

Fabio Del Giudice and Franco Liberati's article deals with the evolution of the IT applications in the historical archives of the Banca di Roma and with the more recent realizations in the digitalization of the photographic heritage. In the first part of the article they describe the long path that goes from the first applications of the IT in the activities of description and inventory, to the first use of the microfilms that is followed by the direct digitalization of the documentary material. Moreover, they speak about the delicate phase of the choice of the system for the management of the archival descriptions, its personalization and the more recent evolution in a system of record management that includes other important functions of the activity of a historical archives.

The digitalization of a first part of the photographic material is analyzed according to its aspects of planning and methodological general lines and according to the individuation and

use of the administrative and managerial metadata, in the comment and finally in the experimental creation of more recent formats that can be used for both the filing and the consultation of the digital images.

Amedeo Lepore of Bari University published in advance the initial part of a study regarding archives, electronic sources and business history. This is a relevant revision and enrichment of a recent report he presented during the conference “Archivi d’impresa: stato dell’arte e controversie” that took place in Spoleto on 11th November 2006 promoted by the Società Italiana degli Storici dell’Economia (Italian Society of Economics Historians) in collaboration with the Istituto per la Cultura e la Storia d’Impresa “Franco Momigliano” (“Franco Momigliano” Institute for Business Culture and History). The essay is divided in three parts: the first one, theoretical, concerns the methods of the historians to approach the electronic sources for business archives in the boundless territory of the Web. The second part regards business history and the use of the electronic sources that requires a selection, an evaluation, an interpretation and an exegesis of the records and of the digital resources absolutely new. Finally, the third part concerns the beginning of the researches on the web and includes a first classification of the electronic sources for business archives and history based on a hierarchical structure through the elaboration of some data that will be followed by a proper cataloguing of the websites.

The article by Chiara Mani of the Piaggio Foundation concerns the IT applications in Piaggio historical archives. In the first part the author describes briefly the assets and the principal characteristics of the record nucleus that formed the archives and concentrates on the facts that brought to its creation. Then, she speaks about the first activities of IT archival description with the use of a first software and the beginning of the digitalization of the designs and the prototypes whose reproductions were then used for some important celebrations on the occasion of the 60 years of the Vespa. She goes on speaking about the continuation of the scanning activity that brought to the creation of a digital fond concerning also the materials of the paper and iconographic fond. More recently, the archives is converting the archival descriptions from the first application to a special software for the archives. In the new setting it will be possible to link various information, visualize the hierarchic structure of the different fonds, make the data accessible on Internet promoting the interaction between the corporate museum and the archives, and, finally, realize the publication of the inventory and of the analytic guide to Piaggio historical archives.

Up to a few years ago the general situation of business archives (and of all the economic operators on the whole) and archivists showed signals of changes and vivacity. However, I believe that this optimism should be drastically reconsidered, given recent trends. The agencies that have consistently created structures for the preservation and the valorization of historical records are too few in comparison with the large number of existing public and private organizations (large banks, some industries and insurance companies, foundations linked to the territory). Also the archivists working in the existing organizations are numerically insufficient and organizations increasingly resort to the outsourcing of important functions. Secondly, I have to speak about the difficulty I had in involving a wider number of colleagues in assuming responsibility for referring on their experience in the field of IT applications. With respect to the number of the contacts and the extent of the survey proposed some important figures of the archival field failed to participate. Some archivists did not participate because of other pressing engagements in valorization activities, others for the impossibility of writing an article because of their ordinary activity and others, finally, because they do not attach importance to their knowledge in this field. This survey has also highlighted, also for those structures that did not send a written contribution, that the computerization in business archives coincided frequently with the usage of general software

adapted to the needs of records description and management. On another point of view, where the archival structures consolidated their presence in the respective social and corporate organizations, there was the need of finding ad hoc solutions with the personalization of the systems used and, less frequently, setting up a market survey of the IT solutions for historical archives.

Another consideration regards the poor level of integration of IT solutions of the historical archives with those used in other fields of corporate records management. Nevertheless, IT solutions tend to include and integrate the managerial needs of both structures, especially where there is a corporate museum.

The problem of the different level of diffusion and consolidation of IT solutions for the management of historical archives is directly linked to the level of general integration of the archives internally and externally to the corporate organization. Full awareness of the importance and function of the historical archives derives not only from the person/organization that generates or manages it, but also from of the social and cultural roots that an institute has developed with the territory, Where such awareness thrives, innovative and brave choices in IT applications are frequently made, choices that are destined to meet the approval of the archives users. The choice, the planning and the adoption of systems of record description and management require a high degree of professional specialization and a strong desire to better the performance so as not to waste precious time and resources.

All these considerations lead me to conclude that the best solutions can be found prevalently in organizations with the requirements I have outlined; that is, the training and professional motivation of personnel, continuity of administrative action, availability of resources and adequate corporate organization that is coherent with its mission. These are essential elements to achieve the most functional objectives, according to the new needs of the records research and management.