Area of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences
Professional field: 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Book Studies, Library Studies and Bibliography)
Dissertation title: "Electronic Archiving - Challenges for the Archival System in Bulgaria"
Author of the dissertation work: Orlin Lyubenov Iliev
Research supervisor: Prof. ScD Tsvetanka Hristova Pancheva
Author of opinion: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eli Popova

O P I N I O N

Introduction of the PhD student and details for the doctorate

Orlin Iliev finished his secondary education in 2001 in the city of Vidin, at the Technical College of Mechanical Engineering. In the period 2001-2005 he obtained a bachelor degree in History at the Faculty of Law and History of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" – Blagoevgrad. The doctoral candidate completed two master programs at the Faculty of Law and History of the same university: a master degree in Law, speciality Law (2008-2012) and a master degree in History in the master program Archives and Museums, Preservation of Cultural Heritage in the Information Society (2013-2014).

The acquired professional skills and deep interests of the PhD student are in the fields of history, archival studies, library and information sciences, museums, law and computer systems. Orlin Iliev constantly improves his knowledge and participates in a number of upgrading trainings. He has completed a course on Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit, developed by the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA) in 2020; he completed a course for postgraduate studies on issues related to European projects on archives and archives in modern society at the 5th Autumn Archive School established by the International Institute of Archival Studies in Trieste and Maribor (IIAS) in 2011. He has developed skills in digitisaion of archival and administrative documents using following scanners: Bookeye 3, I2S CopiBook and Epson V850 Pro. He works with different software programs: 1) basic (Word, Excel, Power point) and 2) specialized (Photoshop 7, Silver Fast, Corel draw, etc.), with graphic tablets, design and audio-video editing.

His career has been marked by rapid growth in the system of the Archives State Agency from Junior Specialist in the Department "Documents for Bulgarian Archives in Foreign Repositories" (2006-2007), through several successive steps to Chief Expert (2007), chief expert (2011) to Head of the Digitization Department at the Directorate of Digitization, Restoration,

Conservation and Microfilming (DRCM) 2014 until today. His responsibilities include participation in the development of methodological documents, analyses, strategies, plans, instructions and opinions in the field of digitization of archival documents; organization, coordination and participation in adding data into the digital archive in the Information System of State Archives (ISSA) through quality control of digital objects and digitization of archival documents; maintaining accountability and documenting the activities of building a digital archive.

In the period 2015-2022, Orlin Iliev provides invaluable support in the training of students from the Department of Library Science, Scientific Information and Cultural Policy, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University in the discipline "Introduction to Digitalization".

Since 2019, he is a PhD student at the Department of Library Science, Scientific Information and Cultural Policy, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". He was enrolled by order RD 20-213/22.01.2019 in a full-time doctoral program, transformed into a part-time program by order RD 20-214/22.01.2019 and was disenrolled by decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy, held on 03.07.2023. (Protocol No. 8) and by the order of the Rector of Sofia University RD-20-746-220323.

Overview of the dissertation

The theme of the dissertation is topical, very well argued by the PhD student and significant, because the archives "provide documentary information for the administration of the state, the development of science and culture and the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of citizens" (ZNAF, Art. 2).

The dissertation consists of a total of 208 pages. The main text is structured in four chapters, relatively balanced in volume. Chapters two and four are derived from chapters one and three and are very important subtopics that need to be discussed independently, comprehensively and thoroughly.

The used literature is presented in several sections: unpublished (3 items) and published sources, which contain: a relatively complete list of normative, strategic, instructional and methodical documents related to the functioning and development of the archive system (57 items); 77 author's publications, 74 of which in Bulgarian and 3 in a foreign language. 35 electronic sources were added to the bibliography. The total number of used documents is 173.

There are seven appendices containing data that are an important supplement to the main part of the work: Table with comparative data by reported indicators; Graphic presentation of the

chronological cross-section of automation in archives; Table of acronyms used in Bulgarian; Table of acronyms used in English; Table of terms and technological definitions; Definitions of the levels of e-services in ASA; A general assessment of the attitudes of archivists.

Main parts of the dissertation

The introduction outlines a broad framework of the topic. Ambitious, broad and challenging goals and objectives are identified and carefully formulated. The object and subject of the research, the methods and methodology used are described. A variety of appropriate scientific tools have been applied in the research to realize the scientific and research objectives, such as problem-analytical approach, extensive and substantive document analysis, empirical methods and those based on mathematical techniques. Mathematical taxonomy and mathematical statistics are used to interpret the large amount of data collected. The methodology includes a comparative analysis of the Bulgarian practice in its various manifestations with analogous foreign examples. The structure and content of the dissertation work are briefly and precisely described in the introductory part, as they are related to the stated goals and objectives.

The first chapter "The Archives in Bulgaria – History and Modern Development" is devoted to an analytical and multi-layered presentation of the history of the archival work from its establishment to its modern development, with a general chronological scope from the end of the 19th century to the present day. The PhD student uses an abundance of normative, legislative and other official documents to present the complex and difficult path through which the archival institution in Bulgaria has passed. Organizational structures, management bodies, structural changes, the development of the conceptual apparatus have been studied, in constant parallel with the state of contemporary practice of other national archives and related organizations, international organizations, recommendations and documents – no aspect has been omitted, no circumstance or important point has been neglected.

In sections 2 to 4 of the first chapter, the PhD student traces the relationship between archives and information and communication technologies. The development of the topic is structured according to a timeline, but also through the problem-conceptual approach, which makes it possible to highlight and explain the qualitative steps in the development of the archives to their current state. Here, the dissertation takes on an increasingly technological orientation. The text is saturated with data and statistics. It traces the dynamics in the development of archival processes and information systems that are introduced in archival activities. A comprehensive and

highly professional overview is given of the most important details of four information products created within the defined chronological framework of five decades. Tables, data, diagrams and graphs are included to enhance the effect of the depth of presentation and understanding of the essence of ideas and processes.

The second chapter "Electronic Governance and the Place of the Archive Institution in It" is developed from a national and European perspective. It deals with the factors of good governance, the establishment and functioning of e-government, as well as important issues for the state, such as sustainability and minimization of public spending, utilization of unused resources, formation of a shared environment based on cloud technologies. In the implementation of these policies, a significant role has been given to the integration of our country with European institutions and the implementation of interoperability.

The analysis of the current state of the labor market and the problems in the short and long term is very interesting, in-depth and international in scope. Impressive are the references to a large number of reliable and authoritative sources of the UN, Eurostat, to regional and global indices that support the conclusions and outlined perspectives and challenges.

The PhD student defines **the third chapter** of his dissertation as "the most important topic of the research – e-Archiving". The aim is clearly and precisely formulated: "to identify the main prerequisites and the ultimate necessity of its creation in Bulgaria, <...> to propose new hypotheses and future forecasts for its development". Starting from the importance of e-archiving for effective e-governance, the author of the work develops a complete picture of the projects and efforts to create a common strategy for the transition from paper to electronic document management as part of the digital transformation. Opinions of various authors are presented, relevant international, foreign and Bulgarian examples are retrieved, the differences in dynamics and sustainability of document types are analyzed. The doctoral candidate applies examples from the practice of European countries, Australia, the USA and South Korea, from the Bulgarian domestic archival studies. The stages of the implementation of the technological model for the introduction of the new system are presented with understanding and evaluation, according to ISSA, the problem of integration with external information systems and registers is touched upon. The focus is on the users.

The topic of online access is in line with the new concepts that characterize the memory institutions of the late 20th century with their focus on users and their needs. The example of a

user survey conducted in Norway and the presentation of its findings suggest a comparison not only with the Bulgarian archives (mentioned by the PhD student), but also with similar surveys and observations in memory institutions – museums and libraries.

It is quite natural and necessary that the section on the new professional competence of the archivist is included in the course of the discussion of the topic. The issue is set in the context of the educational policy and the development of the labor market.

The technological model of the Electronic Archiving System (EAS) is presented as an ambitious project and a top priority for archives. Its development and its inclusion in the modern presence of archives, linked to all types of authorities - judicial, legislative and executive - are examined.

The fourth chapter follows the logic of the development of the topic and is devoted to "E-Services in State Archives as a Consequence of Digitalization and E-Archiving". It is followed by a historical overview of the process, a series of key normative documents and a detailed presentation of the services provided by the information system of the archives, the structuring of the system and the introduction of different levels. User attitudes are an extremely interesting component of the process and are separated in a section of their own. Empirical data and comparative examples from European practice are presented to clarify accessibility. The visible reduction of physical visits to the reading rooms of the archives, illustrated in tables and statistics, shows the effective functioning of the introduced information systems in the Bulgarian archives. The process was stimulated by the pandemic years. Summarizing the results of the analyses, the provided statistical data, and the archival policy in general, the PhD student links the processes in the archives with the national policy and the priorities of the "Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria".

The conclusion outlines the possibilities of the PhD student to look at the general picture, to draw correct scientific conclusions from a multi-layered study based on theoretical publications, document analysis, comparative approach and scientific problem analysis. It emphasizes his understanding of the necessity of the introduction of international standards and the role of standardization in the studied processes and activities, the search for complex technological solutions, the application of a systematic approach to ensure high quality of the decisions taken.

Summarizing his efforts in completing the research, the PhD student emphasizes that he has attempted to provide on each research topic "basic evidence, theoretical and practical

explanations and/or provided statistics and examples, although they cannot be of course comprehensive" This acknowledgement is consistent with the demonstrated research skills, the demonstrated ability to handle a wide range of scientific tools and the deep knowledge of the research field.

The scientific apparatus of the study is well developed, with many footnotes that significantly enrich and complement the main text. A large number of sources of statistical information, regional and global indices have been used ("The Digital Economy and Society Index" (DESI), the United Nations' Global e-Government Development Index (EGDI), the Global Digital Innovation Index, the Global Startup Ecosystem Index, the International Institute for Management Development's World Competitiveness Rankings, the Global Talent Competitiveness Index, the Global Network Readiness Index (GNRI) and the Global Data Barometer).

The abstract is prepared according to the requirements. In its first part, the relevance of the chosen topic and the significance of the issue are explained. The object and the subject, the goals and the objectives of the research are specified. The main thesis and research hypotheses are outlined, the methodology used in the study is explained. The limitations in the scope of the study are also described in the abstract. The second part describes the structure and content of the dissertation. The scope of the work is discussed in detail, each part of the scientific reference apparatus: appendices and the bibliography are presented in detail. The third part lists the contributions of the dissertation and the publications of the doctoral student related to the dissertation theme. The publications of a PhD student show that he has a sustained and deep interest in the topic of the dissertation. A list of 7 independent works in the field of the subject are presented - 2 publications in an anniversary collection and in a professional journal, 5 conference papers, published in print or online.

Theoretical and applied contributions:

The dissertation presents a comprehensive analysis of the development of the archival system in Bulgaria in a general chronological framework from the end of the 19th century until today. The highlights and challenges in national and international perspective are discussed.

The PhD student demonstrates an absolute mastery of the subject, deep knowledge and an enviable ability to analyze documents and opinions, supported by an expressed personal opinion on the commented periods, events and issues. He demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the

technological tools, a good knowledge of international practice and ability to make comparisons and comparative analysis with relevant examples from foreign experience.

The PhD student highlights significant deficiencies in the normative framework and the reference definitions of supporting concepts, e.g. "electronic archive" and "electronic document definition", expresses his position and attitude to the state and perspective of the processes, influences the factors without which strategic plans are not feasible, e.g. funding.

An in-depth study of the processes of technological modernization of the archive system was conducted, the strengths and weaknesses of the introduction of a new model of management and access to electronic documents and its impact on the organization of document flow in the central and territorial administration were analyzed.

Practices in the field of digitization, e-archiving and access to cultural and historical heritage stored in the archives have been studied, summarized and thoroughly analyzed. A problem-oriented analysis of a large number of Bulgarian and foreign normative, strategic, international and internal institutional documents is made. In the evidence sections, Bulgarian and foreign statistics, graphs and tables are provided to illustrate the conclusions drawn, positions expressed and interrelated actions analyzed.

In each section and after each presentation of different opinions, definitions and discussions, the PhD student takes a position - he believes that as a researcher he has to give a reasoned opinion. I positively evaluate this manifestation of an active attitude towards the current, complex and marked by many problematic and unsustainable parameters environment.

For the first time, the interdependence between e-archiving and the change in the paradigm of the archival institution and the archival profession is highlighted.

The good knowledge of foreign practices is impressive, not only at the European level, but also with directions to Australia, USA, South Korea, etc. I would like to emphasize that this is a really deeply studied world experience, because only such a level of knowledge of foreign practice can explain the skillful handling of data, statistics and numerous relevant examples, the constant presence of samples, comparisons and comparative analyses in all sections and subsections of the work. It is easier to present the foreign practice in one general section. It is much more difficult to weave this practice, in the form of theoretical works, opinions, regulations, studies, and research papers, into relevant texts throughout the dissertation.

The work style is clear, concise, with precise professional language, with attention to the use of terminology and correctness in the interpretation of facts.

Comments and recommendations:

After the internal defense, the dissertation has been carefully edited and the comments made have been taken into account. This makes the work even more valuable, and I recommend to be published a monograph based on it.

The work must be checked for technical and grammatical errors.

In conclusion, the proposed dissertation fully meets the requirements and standards for dissertation research. A large amount of work has been invested, and valuable studies of archives have been made, pointing out important directions in their modern development. I sincerely congratulate the PhD student and his research supervisor for the high results achieved. I give my categorically positive assessment of the dissertation and vote with full conviction for the award of the scientific and educational degree "doctor" to Orlin Iliev.

31.03.2024   Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eli Popova,

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy,

Department of Library Science, Scientific Information and Cultural Policy