



PAM Pokrajinski
arhiv
Maribor

Moderna
arhivistika

Časopis arhivske teorije in prakse
Journal of Archival Theory and Practice

ISSN 2591-0884

<https://doi.org/10.54356/MA>

Letnik 6 (2023), št. 1 / Year 6 (2023), No. 1

Maribor, 2023

Prejeto / Received: 16. 05. 2023

1.04 Strokovni članek

1.04 Professional article

<https://doi.org/10.54356/MA/2023/IYHZ7566>

PROCESSING OF SMALLER ARCHIVAL FONDS: PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

Jasna POŽGAN, Ph. D.

senior archivist, State Archives for Međimurje, Štrigova, Croatia
jasna.pozgan@dram.hr

Ivana POSEDI

senior archivist, State Archives in Varaždin, Croatia
ivana.posed@gmail.com

Abstract:

The paper deals with the topic of processing smaller archival fonds and the challenges that arise when processing smaller archive fonds in practice in archival institutions. In smaller archival institutions, there are quite a few smaller archive fonds, the processing of which requires specific skills and knowledge. The paper deals with the difficulties encountered when processing such fonds.

Keywords:

archival records, archival fonds, processing, arrangement, creator

Izvlaček:

Obdelava manjših arhivskih fondov - praksa in izzivi

Prispevek obravnava problematiko obdelave manjših arhivskih fondov, ki zahteva posebna znanja in spretnosti, ter izzive, ki se pojavljajo pri obdelavi manjšega arhivskega fonda v praksi.

Ključne besede:

arhivsko gradivo, arhivski fond, obdelava, urejanje, ustvarjalec

1 Introduction

The topic dealt with in this paper has rarely been a topic of academic interest in professional literature. Among the few works that have dealt with the problem of processing smaller archival fonds are the works of M. Lučić (Archival appraisal and processing of personal archival fonds of writers, *Informatica museologica*, 2007) and I. Posedi (Arrangement of very small fonds in the State Archives in Varaždin, *Archival Collection Center of Koprivnica, Gazette of the Archives and Archival Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2015). The reason for this probably lies in the fact that smaller fonds are less often processed archivally in detail, because researchers can easily review the entire material of such fonds. Furthermore, in practice fonds that are larger are

often more interesting to researchers, and as such they take precedence over smaller fonds. In addition, the practice is to organize larger fonds that are more interesting to researchers and are more often sought by researchers.

2 Processing of small archival fonds - theory and practice

In the archival profession, we distinguish between the meanings of terms such as archival fonds and collection. An archival fonds is defined as a set of records, regardless of their form or record carrier, organically created and used by an individual, family or legal entity in the performance of their activities, and a collection as an artificial grouping of documents gathered on the basis of some common features (content or carrier), regardless of their provenance (General international norm for the description of archival material ISAD (G), Second edition, Zagreb, 2001).

Among the basic tasks in the archival profession are the collection of records, preservation of records, record keeping of materials, processing (arrangement) and use of records.

In view of the above fact, it is not necessary to explain the term *processing archival records* of a fonds ingreating detail, taking into account the assumption that employees from archival and non-archival institutions know what this term represents, i.e. what business and work processes are meant by it. Therefore, in this case there is no need for more precise explanations.

Over the past 40-50 years, the issue of processing and organizing archival records has been a subject of academic interest to a greater or lesser extent, more often or less often, which can be seen through a closer investigation of available sources and literature.¹

The subject of processing smaller archival fonds has rarely been a subject of scientific interest, and so far two papers have been published on the subject, as noted in the previous subheading.

The paper of M. Lučić deals with the issue of appraisal and processing of personal archival fonds of writers from the aspect of the archival profession in relation to the libraries and museums. The paper highlights the principle of material provenance as one of the fundamental principles of the archival profession, as well as suggestions derived from the author's experience on how to process personal archival fonds of writers, noting that the processing of this type of material requires more of one's own initiative and knowledge than the processing of administrative fonds with associated classification systems and that on the other hand it provides greater freedom and possible creativity.

The paper by I. Posedi deals with the issue of archival records from creators who worked for very short periods of time, that is, archival fonds in the field of public administration (local people's committees), economy and education (schools). The paper highlighted the problem of whether to form new archival fonds named after their creators, which can usually be classified as small archival fonds according to criteria such as the amount of material, or perhaps a better solution would be to classify such material into collections or collective fonds of their creators. Of course, if such fonds are classified as material collections according to the criterion of the amount of material, their recognition and visibility for future users who will search for such material is questionable. We believe

¹ This includes magazines such as *Arhivski vjesnik*, *Arhivska prakse*, *Moderna arhivistika*, proceedings of archival consultations and conferences, *Atlanti*, etc.

that all those working with archival records have had the opportunity to come into contact with the aforementioned questions in their work environment.

As for the author of this paper, who deals with the processing of smaller archival fonds, there are several questions that arise during such situations in everyday work, such as staffing opportunities in the institution, the amount of material in the archival fonds, because it is not the same whether the fonds contains material up to five running meters or more, whether the archivist is employed in a larger archival institution where there is a clear and elaborate division of work responsibilities, or perhaps employed in a smaller institution where, due to reduced personnel capacities, he is forced to perform several types of work such as processing materials, working with users, participation in the supervisory activities of the institution (external service) and the like.

In ideal circumstances, the processing of smaller archival fonds would include experience in organizing, knowledge of the record-keeping or classification systems of a certain creator, knowledge of a foreign language if the creator corresponded with creators from other territorial units, i.e., countries existing today (Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia), knowledge of specific scripts (Gothic, Cyrillic, Arabic...) as well as a good knowledge of the context regarding the time and territorial jurisdiction of the creator as well as broader socio-political and economic circumstances.

In addition to the above, the processing and arrangement of such smaller archival fonds also requires a certain meticulousness and dedication, especially when researching data on the activities of the creators of archival records, i.e., the context of their creation.

The processing of smaller groups of records, that is, smaller archival fonds, requires a precise and clear assessment of the benefits of the processed fonds for future users of records (researchers, publicists, students, other citizens...). Among other things, it is necessary to take into account a number of factors; these may include the formation of series within the fonds, possible subseries, their description in the information aid (summary inventory, analytical inventory), and division of the archival records of the fonds if they contain material from various creators (which can and does often happen in the everyday working life of an archivist). A further important factor to take into consideration is the selection of material, including a detailed check of the retention periods of the material, especially if the fonds are incompletely or even fragmentarily preserved, which can be a frequent occurrence, especially with creators' fonds falling under a small territorial jurisdiction; this can happen, for example, in public or primary schools, agricultural cooperatives, etc. In such cases, the experience of an archivist who works on the processing of such smaller fonds is especially important. As such, relying on experience, he can independently and impartially, in compliance with legislation and professional guidelines, determine which series or, for example, a document belongs to permanent records, and which does not.

In relation to larger archival fonds of creators that operated for longer periods of time and were authoritative on larger territorial entities (ministries, counties, military administrations, districts, municipalities...) the processing of smaller archival fonds may seem to be an easier work process considering the fact that these are usually creators with smaller territorial jurisdictions and thus a smaller amount of records, although that does not have to be the rule. From one's own experiences, as well as experiences that are exchanged among the archival community, that is, that it can be learned during professional training, work on the processing of smaller fonds can also be a challenge, primarily if one takes into account the fact that the creator of the fonds worked through several state communities during his activity and knowledge of a certain foreign language, historical context (time, place) etc. is a prerequisite.

Of course, all this implies ideal circumstances in which the archivist does the work of processing and arranging without any distractions. Despite those, the archivist must still follow professional guidelines such as international standards for the description of archival material, as well as strive to balance the requirements for preserving permanent and representative archival material as well as the selection of unnecessary material with limited retention periods.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the previous experience of the authors in the processing of smaller archival fonds, which to the average lay observer seem to be an undemanding and simple job:

- a. it is necessary to know the context (time, place) in which the fonds was created,
- b. knowledge of the creator's role in a wider context (political, economic, social circumstances),
- c. knowledge and reconstruction of the classification system according to which the fonds is organized,
- d. predict the meaning and benefit of the processed records for future users,
- e. to study the connection of archival records of a smaller fond with the same creators, i.e., horizontal connection, as well as their connection with creators on a higher hierarchical level, such as for example public administration fonds in the period 1945-1952 (local people's committees) or fonds from the field of education (schools) or, for example, fonds of artisan associations in the period from the end of the 19th century to 1949 (artisan guilds/associations of artisans),
- f. carry out a precise appraisal of the series of the fonds as well as the material within the series during processing and, if possible, preserve as many documents as possible,
- g. consider the completeness or incompleteness of the fonds' records, the time span in which the records were created.

When creating the summary / analytical inventories, if one wants to create a high-quality inventory, processing the creator's history represents an additional challenge. If data in records has not been preserved and additional research is required. Therefore, if the creator was at a lower hierarchical level, arranging smaller collections requires much more research into the literature and other collections. In the case of public administration, the problem is territorial jurisdiction, in the case of schools, changes in the names of schools, in the case of personal fonds, personal data such as place and date of birth, education, employment, and in the case of family fonds, family ties.

3 Conclusion

The processing of smaller archival fonds represents a certain challenge regarding the context of the creation of such fonds, their completeness, the amount of material, as well as several other factors on which the processing process depends. Of course, the processing of smaller, perhaps undemanding fonds for some, requires certain skills and knowledge, such as knowledge of the broader context in which the fonds was created, classification systems according to which the fonds is organized, knowledge of a foreign language, etc. Also, when establishing a certain internal order in a smaller fonds that may not have a prescribed classification system, it may also depend on the archivist's initiative and allow him a certain creativity. From past experiences, it can be concluded that the processing of smaller fonds can also represent a certain step forward in everyday

work. In any case, as undemanding as organizing such fonds may seem, processing such fonds is a challenge for every archivist.

4 Sources and literature

- Lončar, M. (2015).** Arhivsko nazivlje u teoriji i praksi. *Arhivski vjesnik*, 58, 9-23. Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv
- Lučić, M. (2007).** Arhivističko vrednovanje i obrada osobnih arhivskih fondova književnika. *Informatica museologica*, 38 (3-4), 108-112. Zagreb: Muzejski dokumentacijski centar
- Posedi, I. (2015).** Sređivanje vrlo malih fondova u Državnom arhivu u Varaždinu, Arhivskom sabirnom centru Koprivnica. *Glasnik arhiva i Arhivističkog udruženja Bosne i Hercegovine*, 45, 45-56. Sarajevo: Arhivističko udruženje Bosne i Hercegovine
- Opća međunarodna norma za opis arhivskog gradiva ISAD (G).* (2001). Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv. Drugo izdanje

POVZETEK

OBDELAVA MANJŠIH ARHIVSKIH FONDOV - PRAKSA IN IZZIVI

Dr. Jasna POŽGAN

Višja arhivistka, Državni arhiv za Međimurje, Štrigova, Hrvaška
jasna.pozgan@dram.hr

Ivana POSEDI

Višja arhivistka, Državni arhiv v Varaždinu, Varaždin, Hrvaška
ivana.posedi@gmail.com

Obdelava arhivskega gradiva v arhivski ustanovi je ena od rednih strokovnih nalog, kot so tudi zbiranje arhivskega gradiva, vodenje evidenc o arhivskem gradivu, zagotavljanje gradiva za uporabo, priprava gradiva za objavo itd. Obdelava arhivskih fondov, še posebej manjših, je odvisna od številnih dejavnikov, kot so kadrovske zmogljivosti arhivske ustanove, kompleksnost posameznih arhivskih fondov, pomen ustvarjalca arhivskega gradiva za širšo skupnost v določenem času, fizično stanje arhivskih fondov, provenienca arhivskih fondov itd. Kot je znano iz prakse, lahko med pomembne kriterije za izbor arhivskega gradiva izpostavimo funkcijo in pomembnost njegovega ustvarjalca, npr. ali je sodil k javnopravnim organom (javni upravi, sodstvu, izobraževanju, kulturi itd.), ali je šlo za pravno osebo s področja gospodarstva (podjetja, društva itd.), politično stranko, civilnodružbeno združenje itd. Poleg tega je pri izboru potrebno upoštevati tudi količino arhivskega gradiva, npr. ali fond vsebuje do približno 5 oz. 6 tekočih metrov gradiva, kar pomeni, da ne spada med povprečno velike arhivske fonde z več kot 10 tekočimi metri gradiva. Kar zadeva manjše arhivske fonde, ki vključujejo gradivo do približno 5–7 tekočih metrov in katerih ustvarjalci so imeli določen vpliv na širšo skupnost, je potrebno upoštevati dejavnike, kot so horizontalna povezava z istimi ustvarjalci na določenem območju, obseg njihove teritorialne pristojnosti, tudi provenienčno gradivo, ustvarjeno med opravljanjem njihove dejavnosti. Vse to lahko predstavlja določen izziv pri obdelavi gradiva, na primer pri rokodelskih združenjih, ki so nastala konec 19. stoletja in delovala v medvojnem obdobju do njihove ukinitve leta 1949. Poleg zgoraj omenjenih dejavnikov je pri obdelavi manjših fondov potrebno

upoštevati tudi celovitost ohranjenega gradiva, tj. ali fond vsebuje vse potrebne enote, prav tako fizično stanje gradiva, tj. ali je potrebno predvideti določene postopke za zaščito gradiva, kot sta obnova in konzervacija.

Čeprav se obdelava manjših arhivskih fondov na prvi pogled lahko zdi relativno preprosta naloga v okviru vsakodnevnega dela, pa lahko predstavlja tudi velik izziv, saj zahteva dobro poznavanje zgodovinskih okoliščin, v katerih je ustvarjalec gradiva deloval, in njegove družbene vloge v ožjem ter širšem smislu, še posebej pa dobro znanje določenih jezikov, če je gradivo nastalo v določenem časovnem obdobju (avstro-ogrsko monarhija, madžarska okupacija 1941–1945).