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THE ROLE OF ARCHIVES IN THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE STATE AND SOCIETY - TASKS, ACTIVITIES, EXPECTED RESULTS

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Abstract:

The recently prepared Strategy for the development of national archives for the years 2021-2030, describes the methods and activities by which Polish national archives will try to influence the digital transformation of the state and the society. Two main courses of action were set up: the progress of computerization of processes of documenting public administration's activities and the increase of digital competences of the society.

The constant development of the Archive of Electronic Documents (ADE) system is to ensure - in addition to securing electronic documents - the preservation of the context of creating given documentation, its availability, information, logical integrity and the possibility of making it available to the public in the long term.

Keywords:

archives, digital technology, electronic document, history

Izvleček:

Vloga arhivov pri digitalni transformaciji države in družbe – naloge, aktivnosti, pričakovani rezultati

Nedavno sprejeta Strategija za razvoj državnih arhivov za leta 2021–2030 opisuje metode in aktivnosti, s katerimi bodo poljski državni arhivi vplivali na digitalno transformacijo države in družbe. Strategija se usmerja v dve glavni področji: napredek informatizacije procesov dokumentiranja dejavnosti javne uprave in povečanje digitalne pismenosti družbe.

Stalen razvoj Arhiva elektronskih dokumentov (ADE) bo omogočal, poleg varovanja elektronskih dokumentov, tudi ohranjanje konteksta nastanka dokumentacije, njeno dostopnost, informativnost, logično celovitost ter možnost javnega dostopa.

Ključne besede:

arhivi, digitalna tehnologija, elektronski dokument, zgodovina

1. Strategy for the development of national archives for the years 2021-2030

1.1 Goals and tasks

Digital transformation is defined as a change-making digital technology infiltrating more and more aspects of life, and affecting the achievement of the appropriate level of technological advancement. For an organization, it is a transformation resulting in a new model of functioning of a given institution, on the basis of digital technologies.

In October 2021, the 'Strategy for the development of National Archives for the years 2021-2030' was announced. The document consists of two main parts, comprising six chapters. The first part (chapters 1-4) describes the factors that shape the needs and determine the possibilities of introducing necessary changes into the Polish National Archives and discusses internal (the current situation of the National Archives) and external (technological, social and infrastructural conditions) factors. The analysis of the current situation of the National Archives and their surroundings became the basis for setting the main goals and tasks of the proposed Strategy, then it was used to verify the possibility of introducing specific changes to achieve these goals. The second part (chapters 5-6), in addition to the mission, vision, values, and reference to the National Archives brand, comprises the presentation of strategic areas and the structure of strategic goals with a definition of planned activities (Strategia, p. 11).

1.2 Strategic goals

The document repeats the mission of the National Archives, as defined some time ago, that is '*to permanently preserve the testimonies of the past and ensure universal access to them in order to support the development of the state and civil society*' (Strategia, p. 56). The vision written in the document presents the National Archives as an organization with a structure of a network, striving for sustainable development, as an institution caring about the past, but embedded in the present and future-oriented. The Strategy also defines three overarching strategic goals:

1. Archival Heritage. National archival resource as a highly recognizable, widely accessible, and important part of cultural heritage and cultural property,
2. Competent Staff as the foundation for the functioning and development of the National Archives and their positive image,
3. Modern Office. National Archives as an efficient, modern office, and a strong organization operating in the network (Strategia, p. 57).

1.2.1 Operational goals

The third of the above-mentioned strategic goals is of key importance for discussing the role of the archives in the digital transformation of the state and society, though, of course, it can only function in connection with the other two.

Four operational goals will be pursued within the framework of strategic objective 3:

Operational goal 3.1. Archives in space. Space in the Archives. Improvement and development of the infrastructure of the National Archives.

Actions:

1. construction of new or modernization of the existing headquarters for selected National Archives, taking into consideration the requirements of ecological and passive house construction;
2. construction or extension and maintenance of storage areas in selected National Archives along with equipping them with modern storage environment control systems, fire protection and security systems;
3. realisation of modernization or organizational activities ensuring access to the archives and their collections for users with special needs;
4. creation of a network of modern archival competence centres (ACK) as centres for professional advice, development of knowledge and qualification improvement for the National Archives and other institutions that keep archival collections, in the field of archival conservation and salvage, digitization of archival materials, handling electronic documents and their archiving, documentation management;
5. modernization or equipment of National Archives educational zones, in accordance with the requirements of openness and a positive cultural footprint.

Operational goal 3.2. Digital transformation of the National Archives network as a guarantee of its efficiency and development

Activities:

1. construction and implementation of the Integrated System of Archival Information, equipped with functionalities covering the management of archival activity areas of archives, also in connection with e-services;
2. creation of the system of archiving the domain.gov.pl;
3. development and modernization of the WAN network in the locations of the National Archives;
4. launching an integrated system for the management of the National Archives network, comprising, among others, planning and reporting activity, e-services, financial management, public contracts, human resources management;
5. development and implementation of uniform standards and procedures in the archival network regarding network security, electronic signature, identity management and authentication;
6. launching the intranet for the network of National Archives;
7. launching the Archival Education Web Portal (PEAr) as a platform for educational activities of the National Archives;
8. development and modernization of the integrated library system of the National Archives;
9. building a private cloud of the National Archives;
10. implementation of the EZD RP system in the National Archives and its integration with the Electronic Documents Archive (ADE) system.

Operational goal 3.3. Development of modern legal conditions for the functioning of the National Archives.

Activities:

1. enactment of a new archival law;
2. preparation of assumptions and drafting executive acts to this law.

Operational goal 3.4. Optimisation of the model of management and communication as a guarantee of the development of the National Archives as offices and organizations with a network structure.

Activities:

1. implementation of project management in the National Archives;
2. increasing the effectiveness of archives as public administration offices in terms of the internal organizational structure, development of public services, pursuit of high standards of providing access to collections and customer service;
3. optimization of the National Archives network structure;
4. strengthening of the social communication processes (internal and external) of the National Archives network by establishing appropriate structures, development of effective principles and methods, implementation of tools and techniques for efficient and transparent communication.

2. Archive of electronic documents (ADE)

2.1 Archive of electronic documents system

One of the elements of modern computerization of offices is electronic document management, which is a breakthrough in terms of the documentation of activities and circulation of documents in institutions. Along with the development of computerization of offices, the National Archives were also obliged to take over, secure, analyze and make available archival materials in electronic form. In order to ensure the proper fulfilment of this obligation, it is necessary to create and develop appropriate tools for its implementation, allowing for long-term storage of electronic documents, but also enabling the preservation of the context of electronic documentation creation and ensuring its availability as well as information and logical integrity.

To satisfy these needs, the ICT system ADE was created. The system is intended to enable appropriate application of the procedure of safe transfer of properly organised electronic documents to national archives, and their subsequent safe sharing. With the help of this system, institutions submit the documentation in the electronic form to the National Archives, which in turn can take it over, properly secure, keep, and make available. When elaborating an IT system for the management of archival electronic documents created by public administration, great emphasis was placed on the security of data, both of its transmission, storage and sharing. Electronic documents will be stored in one place, the respective archives will only manage the documents according to the principle of territorial affiliation. In addition, the transferring institution may keep copies of all transferred data, if of course it is willing and has technical possibilities (Marosz, 2008).

2.1.1 Specific objectives of the project

Specific objectives of the project under which the ADE was created were defined as follows:

1. Enabling the transfer of archival materials in electronic form to national archives by their creators, followed by their verification and acquisition by the national archives.
2. Improvement and ensuring interoperability of the process of receiving archival materials from subjects obliged to transfer them to the archive.
3. Dynamic growth of qualifications and knowledge of transferring archival materials in electronic form to national archives.
4. Ensuring irrefutability, integrity, availability and security of information and archival materials in electronic form acquired by national archives as well as the place for their indefinite storage.
5. Providing universal and easy access to information about resources gathered in the system (Raport, p. 5).

Currently, the State Archives supervise the correct handling of archival materials in over 10 thousand subjects, which are the creators of archival materials transferred to the ADE system. In the coming years, more institutions will be obliged to transfer archival materials in electronic form. Therefore, the ADE system will ultimately store that part of the electronic documentation that is classified as archival material (i.e. has the value of a historical source), created in the public sector or outside it (Strategia, pp. 31-32).

3. Computerization of the archival activity

3.1 Archives

Dynamic development of IT technologies requires constant development and modernization of the currently functioning IT solutions, which obliges the archives to constantly update and develop the ADE system in terms of programming and continuous investments in hardware. The National Archives also participate in the planning work of a uniform system of Electronic Documentation Management (EZD), intended for general use in public administration units. The currently finalized system is to become a uniform tool for document management in these institutions in the coming years. This will enable comprehensive management of the created documentation. However, the implementation of the system for the National Archives will mean – in the long run – a significant increase in the inflow of electronic documents requiring perpetual storage and protection. Therefore, a thoughtful and wide-ranging progress in the computerization of the activity of the archives is a priority (Strategia, p. 32).

3.2 Users

On the other hand, universal access to the Internet, especially among the young generation, and the constant development of digital skills of archive users, result in the increase of both interest and expectations related to the access to archival materials in digital form. The access to digital resources of the National Archives was extended through the creation of the website <https://www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl>, where digital copies of materials from the resources of national archives and other archives are systematically placed. The increasing number of available archival materials affects the scope of their use by the users of the national archives resource for various purposes:

scientific, genealogical, educational, journalistic, proprietary, official and others. In response to the growing level of digital competences of their users, the archives should provide them with more and more opportunities, which, thanks to their intuitiveness, would encourage the users to take advantage of the prepared offer. Through such initiatives and activities, the National Archives may contribute to the further growth of digital competences and skills of their users. However, the increase in digital competences of the society will cause an even more significant challenge for the archives to act towards their transformation and development into open archives, oriented primarily towards the needs of various groups of users of the archival resource.

3.3 Cultural heritage

National archival resource is an important element of cultural heritage. Archival materials often constitute the only source of information, and also an indisputable evidence of the activities of the institutions responsible for the functioning of the state and the organization of the society. Therefore, they are indispensable for building mutual relations, references and trust between the state and society, and within society. This shows how important it is to ensure proper protection of the archival resource. The primary condition for such protection is the development and modernization of the archives' infrastructure, ensuring the security of traditional (paper) resources, as well as electronic documentation and digital materials.

4. Result of the implementation of the strategy and the main directions of the changes

In the sphere of culture and national heritage, the last few decades have been a time of organizational transformation resulting from the technological transformation, which had its sources in the computerization of the state and public services, and especially in the computerization of the areas important for archival activities. Therefore, the ultimate strategic goal in the perspective of 2030, and also the result of the implementation of the Strategy, should be a significant improvement of quality in the four most important areas of the functioning of national archives:

1. protection and preservation of archival materials,
2. shaping and collecting the national archival resource,
3. development and sharing of the national archival resource and building lasting relationships with the social environment and institutions of the cultural heritage sector,
4. providing public services and realisation of public tasks by national archives as the units of government administration (Strategia, pp. 65-66).

In the 2021-2030 perspective, the Strategy lists the main directions of the changes:

1. In the area of the protection and preservation of archival materials, the necessary changes are those that will ensure permanent preservation and protection of the national historical archival heritage in its original (authentic) form, regardless of the recording medium or the context of its creation.
2. In the area of shaping and collecting national archival resource, changes are necessary that will ensure high information value and completeness of the materials intended for permanent preservation.

3. In the area of the development and sharing archival resources and building lasting relationships with the social environment and institutions of the cultural heritage sector, changes are necessary that will ensure universal access to the resources of the National Archives, adapted to the needs, abilities and skills of users, in accordance with the law and ethics of the archivist profession, as well as the use of the resource in the interests of the society, the state and citizens.
4. In the area of providing public services and realisation of public tasks, as government administration units, changes are necessary that will ensure that the National Archives will become modern, efficiently managed institutions. The development of the National Archives as strong units and a strong organization, efficiently operating in the network, is to be based on the implementation of the project management model, realised by trained, competent archival staff with the support of experts experienced in project management in public administration (Strategia, pp. 66-67).
5. National Archives are institutions that realise the interests of the society and the state. Responsible and focused on the expectations of citizens, they meet the information needs of the society, basing on rational, emotional and social factors. They maintain consistent, transparent communication with the groups of receivers of their activities (internal and external clients). In these relations, they focus on the activities that engage and build relationships with clients as the ambassadors of the National Archives brand. Thus, they strengthen the positive image of the National Archives as modern institutions and experts in the field of archives (as the Archive of the Archives) (Strategia, pp. 66-67).

5. Conclusions

At the beginning of 2022, it is difficult to determine the final results of the 'Strategy for the development of National Archives for the years 2021-2030', as this is only the beginning of its functioning. However, it is possible today to discuss which results are expected and to evaluate the actions taken to make these results as complete as possible.

The creation of the Archive of Electronic Documents results from and is associated with the progress of computerization of the processes of the documentation of public administration activity. It is a response to the faster and faster computerization of office work, implemented through the use of the systems of electronic management of documentation, the result of which is the creation of an increasing number of electronic documents, also as compared with paper documents. Rapid progress in computerization of office work and the widespread use of IT systems in document management and archiving make it necessary for the National Archives to constantly adapt and modernize legal and technological tools in the field of shaping the electronic (digital) part of the archival resource. This requires, first of all, the creation of instruments for the supervision of the documentation of lasting historical value, created and kept in digital form, and the taking over of archival materials.

In individual dimension, the development of digital skills of various groups of archive users increases the interest and expectations related to the access to digital archives. In social dimension, universal access to the digital resources of the National Archives will have an impact on learning about the history of the country, the region, the community and the family.

It will also contribute to the increase of social activity and building social bonds at various levels. National Archives should develop their e-services in such a way that they are transparent and easy for people with various levels of digital competences, and that with their intuitiveness they encourage people to use them. In this way, archives also contribute to increasing the digital competences of their users.

The increase in digital competences of the society means that an even more significant challenge for the National Archives will be the implementation of effective measures aimed at their development in the formula of open archives, oriented towards the needs of varied user groups, also in the on-line formula.

In the social dimension, popularisation of the access to digital archives will not only have an impact on the development of an active attitude towards digital technologies but will also contribute to a better and easier understanding of historical processes, also in the context of the history of regions and local communities.

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SUMMARY

VLOGA ARHIVOV PRI DIGITALNI TRANSFORMACIJI DRŽAVE IN DRUŽBE – NALOGE, AKTIVNOSTI, PRIČAKOVANI REZULTATI

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V začetku leta 2022 je težko določiti končne rezultate Strategije za razvoj državnega arhiva med letoma 2021 in 2030, saj je šele v začetni fazi. Možno pa je razmišljati o tem, kateri rezultati so pričakovani, in oceniti, katere dejavnosti je potrebno vzpostaviti, da bodo doseženi.

Vzpostavitev Arhiva elektronskih dokumentov izvira iz napredka informatizacije dokumentacijskih procesov javnih služb. Je odgovor na vedno hitrejšo informatizacijo pisarniškega poslovanja, ki se uvaja s sistemi upravljanja z elektronskimi dokumenti. Le-ti omogočajo nastajanje večjega števila dokumentov v primerjavi z dokumenti na papirju. Zaradi hitrega napredka in široke rabe IT-sistemov pri upravljanju z dokumenti in arhiviranju mora državni arhiv neprenehoma prilagajati in posodabljati pravna in tehnološka orodja na področju elektronskega arhivskega gradiva. To v prvi vrsti zahteva

pripravo sredstev za nadzor nad dokumentacijo, ki ima trajno zgodovinsko vrednost in nastaja ter se hrani v digitalni obliki, in način prevzema tega gradiva v arhiv.

Razvoj digitalnih možnosti različnih skupin uporabnikov poveča pri posameznikih interes in določena pričakovanja glede dostopa do digitalnih virov. Na nivoju družbe pa bo imel univerzalen dostop do digitalnih virov vpliv na učenje o zgodovini države, regije, skupnosti in družine.

Prav tako bo prispeval k večji družbeni dejavnosti in gradnji družbenih vezi na različnih ravneh. Državni arhiv bo razvil svoje e-storitve tako, da bodo transparentne in enostavne za ljudi z različnimi stopnjami digitalnih znanj, in bo spodbujal k njihovi uporabi. Na ta način bo arhiv prispeval k izboljšanju digitalnih spretnosti svojih uporabnikov.