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PROPERTIES FOR RECORDS: IS THERE A CONSENSUS?

Abstract:

If one reads ISO 15489, one may see four "core" properties for records. If one reads Interpares ontology, one can see a different set of properties. In practice, authors of records do not always care about those professional properties, emphasizing one or other as an "important" attribute of the records that "matters". In other fields, there are other definitions for same concepts. So, where is the truth? The paper will seek to compare the proposed professional definitions, in an attempt to see where the differences come from, if they are relevant and, in the end, what a record is.

Keywords:

archival theory, records management theory, record property, archives property

Izveček:

Lastnosti zapisov: ali obstaja konsenz?

Pri branju standarda ISO 15489 lahko opazimo štiri "bistvene" lastnosti zapisov, pri branju ontologije projekta Interpares pa lahko opazimo drugačen niz lastnosti. Avtorji zapisov v praksi ne razmišljajo vedno o teh strokovnih lastnostih in poudarjanju ene ali druge kot "pomembnega" atributa zapisa, ki je res "nekaj vreden". Na drugih področjih obstajajo drugačne definicije enakih konceptov. Torej, kje je resnica? Prispevek poskuša primerjati podane strokovne definicije in ugotoviti, od kod razlike izvirajo, ali so pomembne in, na koncu, kaj zapisi sploh so.

Ključne besede:

arhivska teorija, teorija upravljanja z dokumenti, lastosti zapisov, arhivske lastnosti

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper's starting point is personal curiosity. Since the release of ISO 15489 in 2001, in various professional occasions, there were four characteristics of records that were presented as implicit: authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability. They were repeated like a mantra on every occasion and the standard was regarded as a sort of Gospel: believe-and-do-not-question. My questions initially were, where these characteristics came from, where is their intellectual analysis. Broadening the documentation, I discovered a far more documented and grounded list of 'characteristics' in Interpares project. Some of these characteristics, it should be said, are questioned in a post-modern key in professional literature. And so I decided to make a list with these characteristics, to look upon them and check if the circumstances of

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their release are changed or not, since the creation of records suffered many mutations in time. And also, to check a fundamental issue: are these characteristics valid anywhere or are they dependent of the legal or administrative framework?

2 SOME TERMINOLOGICAL ASPECTS

There are several terms naming the entities presented in this paper: *features*, *characteristics*, *properties*, *qualities*. The imprecision is increased by the use of metaphors, like *gift*. In general, definitions cannot be found, various authors using the terms without a proper explanation. This may lead to opposite use of terms. For instance, in ISO 15489 [clause 4.2.1] it is said that: *“In order to act as evidence of business, records must possess the following characteristics, which apply to records in all formats”*. It is understandable that these characteristics refer only to records to be evidence of business. On the other hand, the Inter pares Glossary emphasizes that a *record characteristic* is *“a quality that belongs to all records”*. Going further, in Inter pares Glossary and Inter pares Dictionary there is a mixed use of terms *characteristic* and *quality*, and it is not clear if in all cases these separations are intended, because the expression *quality of record* is not defined¹.

According to ISO 15489:2016, a record is *“information created, received and maintained as evidence and as an asset by an organization or person, in pursuit of legal obligations or in the transaction of business”*. According to Inter pares Glossary, a record is *“document made or received in the course of a practical activity as an instrument or a by-product of such activity, and set aside for action or reference”*. While we can consider the records are not regarded necessarily as an asset (in many cases even a burden...), and that in some circumstances, records are not maintained or set aside intentionally, but just preserved “by accident”, it is obvious that **record is an information**, created, received and eventually maintained for various purposes, **in a certain context** directly linked with the creator business. What individualizes the record from other kinds of information is its character of testimony, of evidence over the activities or facts recorded².

The context of production generates a lot of influences, from form of records, information contained, procedure of creation or use. Therefore, it can be considered that the characteristics of a record can be grouped as: connected with the nature of record *per se*, with the content and form of the record and with the management process of the record.

¹ Assuming, due to a higher degree of sensibility for defining and clarifying concepts, that the Inter pares project the use of the terms was intended, we may consider that *characteristic* is something pertinent to the record as a concept (it is intrinsic, an element defining its nature as a record), while *quality* refers to a special trait of a record, in various circumstances and instantiations of the concept. Though, such interpretation should be refined and validated in the future.

² It should be noted, in this regard, that the term „evidence” should not be read exclusively in its legal meaning. Using a record as legal evidence is conditioned by other factors, such as legal admissibility, legal system etc. A national ID, for instance, is a record and may have legal validity to identify a person in his own country; this is not necessarily true in another country.

3 CHARACTERISTICS OF RECORDS AS A RECORD

From the above definitions of the record two main characteristics of a record may result. In order to serve as evidence, in order to testify about a fact or an information existent at a given moment in time, the information as a record must be “frozen” as it was in the moment of its creation. That is, a record must possess a **fixed form**—a quality that ensures “*its content remains complete and unaltered*”. In other words, in any future moment, the record should communicate the same information, and, generally, the same form, as it did in the moment of its creation. Fixity of the record implies therefore the **stability** of the content of the record, that is, the content is “*unchangeable or changeable according to fixed rules*”, in the latter case being a situation of “*bounded variability*”. Bounded variability allows for a variation of content and form, but governed by fixed rules “*so that the same query, request or interaction always generates the same result*” (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Glossary n.d.). Examples to support these properties are easy to be found. A contract is signed to serve as an evidence for consent over a deal; if the content is changed over time, then the “evidenceness” is null. On the other hand, a record in a database may not be frozen, that is the results of a query may change what a user see; but, if the database serves as record, to the same query the same result will be returned.

A second characteristics that results from the definition is that every record has an **identity** of its own, that is “*the whole of the characteristics of a document or a record that uniquely identify it and distinguish it from any other document or record*” (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Glossary n.d.). This characteristic derives from the content, circumstances of creation and the way content is structured. All the other characteristics we shall discuss below contributes to the identity of the record.

Scrutinizing the particularities of records over other information materials, Hillary Jenkinson asserted that records, due to the nature of their creation, possess some specific characteristics.

Impartiality, said Jenkinson, is generated by the fact “*A document which may be said to belong to the class of archives is one which was drawn up or used in the course of an administrative or executive transaction (whether public or private) of which itself formed a part; and subsequently preserved in their own custody for their own information by the person or persons responsible for that transaction and their legitimate successors*”. (Jenkinson 1966, 11) Due to the fact that records are created as a means for, and a by-product of, an action and not “*in the interest or for the information of Posterity*” (Jenkinson 1966, 11) and because they are “*free from the suspicion of prejudice in regard to the interests in which we now use them*” (Jenkinson 1966, 12), archival documents are “impartial” and “*cannot tell anything but the truth*”. This perspective was sharply criticized, mostly from a postmodern archival approach (Cook 1997, 25), (Nesmith 2002), all along with Ranke’s approach over history. It was appreciated that, in fact, records are influenced by a large amount of factors, from broad influences (like political, social or cultural environment) to individual interests of the authors, holders, records managers, archivists, readers and so on. It was correctly appreciated that these factors may alter, sometimes dramatically, the content or contexts of the records, until delivering maybe a complete opposite perspective for the

readers than that of the records' creators. Victoria Lemieux noted that *"...it is not realistic to expect that even the best practices will ever result in the perfect preservation of some inviolate intended meaning in records, and that records will ever be perfectly reliable and impartial evidence of either the "facts" of a transaction or intended meaning"* (Lemieux 2001, 110).

Despite, such a general statement cannot be accepted as universally true, it should be noted that Jenkinson's argument was not so naïve as it may have seemed at a first look. The English archivist's argument was basically that records *"are not the purpose of the activity from which they result, but their by-products"* (Duranti and Franks 2015). We may agree that no human artefact is impartial, but, on the other hand, it is a fact that records are not created for future historians, but for the need of creators/authors; those needs, in most cases, are supposed to observe legal rules of content and form. This gives, without any doubt, a higher mark of objectivity over a fact or information, if not as an Absolute Truth, then at least as the acceptable truth in a certain context. In this regard, Luciana Duranti noticed, *"Impartiality is a characteristic of archival documents, not of their creators, who are naturally partial to their own interests. To protect the impartiality of archives is to protect their capacity to reveal the biases and idiosyncracies of their creators..."* (Duranti 1994, 334) But, as long as the society, at a certain moment, decided legally and administratively that this is the acceptable truth, I think it should be regarded as such, and considered as *the truth of the creators* of the records. In spite of various interpretations, as far as I know, the legal system still gives prevalence to written evidence and official evidence, so records created must have a probative value. If these type of testimony would be completely unreliable and totally partisan, it is doubtful this situation would last.

On the other hand, it is true, as Duranti noticed, *"if creators are made too vividly aware of the power of their documents, they may begin to draw or alter them for the benefit of posterity, and the documents would not be the un-self-conscious residue of action but a conscious reflection on it"*. Such actions are equivalent with removing pages from a record: the original had the quality of being a complete record, and this characteristic should be proved later on; and ulterior removals do not affect the initial quality of integrity. But, anyway, to even consider such "adjustments" of records, it is almost impossible for the creator to anticipate all research needs. In the end, this is what Jenkinson says: *"...Drawn up for purposes almost infinitely varying the administrative or executive control of every species of human undertaking they are potentially useful [...] for the information they can give on a range of subjects totally different but equally wide: the only safe prediction, in fact, concerning the Research ends which Archives may be made to serve is that with one partial exception these will not be the purposes which were contemplated by the people by whom the Archives were drawn up and preserved.* (Jenkinson 1966, 12). For concluding, while agreeing Impartiality cannot be absolute, I consider records possess a sort of *autonomy* (independence, impartiality) *of creation from its initial and its long term uses.*

Another characteristic of the records (as accumulations) identified by Jenkinson is **naturalness** [presented sometime as **organicity** (International Council on Archives 1999), **ingenuity** (Cortes Alonso 1982, 44) or **involuntariness** (Duranti and Franks 2015)]. He wrote: *“Archives are not Documents collected artificially, like the objects in a Museum, because it is thought that they will be of use or interest to Students, but accumulating naturally in Offices for the practical purposes of Administration”* (Public Records Office 1949, 2). Another author, Robert-Henri Bautier, goes even further, saying that *„Les documents se déposent (...) dans les archives exactement comme se forment les sédiments des couches géologiques, progressivement, constamment.”* (Bautier 1961, 1120). As impartiality, naturalness can hardly be accepted as such, without any limitations. Considering records are created and kept as a result of a practical need, their accumulation is barely natural: they are expected to be created and, often, mandated to be created. In their creation and preservation, a lot of influences may occur: from the various way records are aggregated to form a file up to the changes in post-production (the semi-active and inactive phase), which ultimately may lead to artificial structure of the fonds. Until records become archives, their initial structure and organisation may change several times, often in unpredictable ways, so they are really neither as geological layers, nor natural by themselves. A perfect example is a “forgotten”, unregistered folder, that will be send to the organisation’s records centre long time after the folders resulted from the same activity and time, and that will be arranged separately. On the other hand, the difference between (an artificial) collection and an archival series or fonds cannot be ignored. In the first case, records are accumulated as objects *per se*, while in the “natural” archival aggregation records arrive as by-products of an activity. They *“are not contrived outside the direct requirements of the conduct of affairs”* (Duranti 1994, 335). While the collections most often contain only valuable specimens, the archival aggregation, if it sprung from the performing of the regular performing of business, has a mixture of valuable and not valuable records, because not the value of records would have generated that aggregation, but the business needs for evidence or information. In this regard, naturalness or organic character of records may be regarded as referring to the testimonial and supportive character of the records for the business and so, to the direct connection between records and business transactions. Records accumulations, therefore, is basically the result of running business in time. Also, naturalness is not a self-evidencing characteristic, but a quality that must be proved and that can be lost in time, if an improper management occurred.

Other characteristic identified by Jenkinson is **interrelatedness** of the records generated from the activity of the same creators. In Jenkinson’s words, *“any Archive is potentially related closely to others both inside and outside the group in which it is preserved and that its significance depends on these relations”*. This characteristic was coined in 1939 by Giorgio Cencetti as *“vincolo archivistico”* (Cencetti 1970, 39) or, in English translation, *“archival bond”* (Duranti 1997, 216). At a first glance, a record, being one single entity, is not necessarily connected to other similar entities for understanding the information it conveys. For instance, a class book seems to be independent of other records. By similarities with other class books in that school (therefore, the series of class books), or by connections with pupils’ applications to enrol in that school (or similar records that serve the compiling of the class book), the mentioned record acquires the

archival bond. In the *Encyclopedia of Archival Science* the expression of interrelatedness is characterised as being “originary” because it comes into existence when a record is created (i.e., made or received, and kept in connection with other records), „necessary” because it must exist for every record (i.e., a document unrelated to others is not a record) and „determined”, being qualified by the aggregation in which it belongs (Duranti and Franks 2015).

From the concept of interrelatedness some authors, like Luciana Duranti or Vicenta Cortes Alonso (Cortes Alonso 1982, 44), derived the concept of **uniqueness**. As a matter of fact, the property is a common place in archival literature: “*Modern archives are unique in character*” (Schellenbeg 1956, 114) or “*the quality which distinguishes an archive from a library is its uniqueness*” (Norton 2003, 87). This property was defined in the *Encyclopedia of Archival Science* such as each archival document has “*a unique place in the structure of the group in which it belongs and in the documentary universe. Even when a document is an identical copy of another, the complex of its relationships with the other documents within and outside the group of which it is part is always unique*” (Duranti and Franks 2015). But, as James O’Toole noted, there are at least four various meaning for uniqueness in archives: the uniqueness of records; the uniqueness of information in records; the uniqueness of the processes which produce records; and the uniqueness of the aggregations of documents into files (O’Toole 1994, 657). Even though O’Toole was writing about records with archival value, his considerations seem valid also for the records as such, in a world with so many systems of multiplication or communication. In this regard, he was skeptical about this quality of records anymore: “*The simple and often unspoken assumption that archival records are unique and that unique records are archival is insufficiently nuanced. Rather, in examining any body of records, we must inquire how they are unique (if they are) and, just as important, whether and why that matters*” (O’Toole 1994, 658). Duranti pleaded though for a broad perspective: “*if the context relevant to uniqueness is considered more broadly than the file or the series, and includes location and jurisdiction, then the concept of uniqueness continues to hold true also in the digital environment*” (Duranti and Franks 2015).

Finally, the last characteristic for the record as a record is **authoritativeness**. An authoritative record, as defined in ISO 15489:2016, is a record that can serve as evidence of business, and this can be accomplished if the record bears authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability. One of the basic questions about this statement is: What if a record does not fulfil all these four prerequisites—are they no longer evidence of business? In our opinion, the answer is that they are still evidence of business, though they may be partial or incomplete evidences. Otherwise, some may consider that all the records that are not perfect should be disposed...

4 CHARACTERISTICS OF A RECORD: THE CONTENT

Some characteristics of records are derived from the way its content reflects the fact/information it is intended to reflect, and the way this information is presented/structured. A record has an information content, which is delivered in a certain diplomatic form. For instance, a presentation of a car accident will be differently

presented in an eye-witness' testimony than in a newspaper column or in a Police report, from the point of view of structure of the content, language used or other procedural aspects. Or, a draft of a building plan will look different, in formal aspects, that the final and approved plan.

From this point of view, records may present some characteristics that contribute to the definition of the degree of perfection of records, that is: correctness, completeness and effectiveness (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Glossary n.d.).

TERM	DEFINITIONS
correctness	content and form fulfil the requirements set by the creator and the juridical system for the record to reach the consequences or produce the effects for which it was intended
completeness	presence of all the elements required by the creator and the juridical system for it to be capable of generating consequences
effectiveness (enforceability)	presence of all the elements required by the creator and the juridical system for it to be capable of reaching the consequences or producing the effects for which it was intended

All these proprieties are completely met by the original record.

Supplementary, records possess the quality of **pertinence**, when their "*content is relevant to the purpose for which they are created and/or used*" and **truthfulness**, if their "*content is in accordance with the actual state of affairs*" (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Glossary n.d.). Sometimes, truthfulness is also named **veracity**.

The quality of records as statement of facts is also covered by the property of **reliability**. According to Interpares, reliability is "*the trustworthiness of a record as a statement of fact. It exists when a record can stand for the fact it is about, and is established by examining the completeness of the record's form and the amount of control exercised on the process of its creation*" (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Glossary n.d.). Reliability, therefore, consists of completeness of form and creation in a controlled manner. On the other hand, ISO 15489:2016 defines reliability in relation with the content "*as an accurate representation of the transactions, activities or facts to which they attest and can be depended upon in the course of subsequent transactions or activities*". For this, a record should be created in proper time (at the moment of the transaction or soon afterwards) and by proper agents (those who know the facts or systems that routinely capture information). It should be highlighted that in ISO 15489 the quick and proper recording of the information about a fact/event is considered as the main element for reliability, no matter the form or rules observed. Interpares, on the other hand, has a more "legalist" approach, emphasizing form and control in order for a record to serve as reliable evidence. Another perspective over reliability is brought by a document drawn up by Richard Blake for The National Archive of UK. In this paper, the characteristics of reliability are: trust, relationship/context and longevity (The National Archives [2004], para. 5.).

Accuracy is "*the degree to which data, information, documents or records are precise, correct, truthful, free of error or distortion, or pertinent to the matter*" (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Glossary n.d.). Pertinence, correctness, precision

and truthfulness are the compound properties. It is considered a cumulative quality of the content of the record, though precision is referring to the form. It should be remarked that **precision** (another quality of records) is not referring to the details of the fact/event recorded, but with conformation “*in every detail of content and form to an established standard, guideline or convention*” (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Dictionary n.d.).

Trustworthiness of the record is defined “*both an accurate statement of facts and a genuine manifestation of those facts*”. It is determined by the degree of accuracy, reliability and authenticity of a record (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Glossary n.d.).

One important property of the record, also present as element in information security theory, is **integrity**. Both, Interpares and ISO 15489, define record integrity as being complete and uncorrupted. In Richard Blake’s paper, characteristics of integrity are considered to consist of traceability; retention periods; applicable rules, standards and regulations, risks (The National Archives [2004], para. 6).

Genuiness is defined in Interpares as “*the quality of a record that is truly what it purports to be*” and it is considered to be evaluated based on reliability and authenticity of the record. (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Glossary n.d.). The definition of the term is a clear example of parallel confusing professional terminology: in ISO 15489 one requirement for authenticity is to be able to prove the record is “*what it purports to be*”; this denotes genuiness is part of the authenticity and not viceversa...

5 CHARACTERISTICS OF A RECORD: THE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Maybe the most common quality of a record, shared by all jurisdictions and professional traditions, is **authenticity**. The degree of authenticity is measured anywhere, but what consists authenticity is a matter not so universally accepted. According to Interpares, authenticity is “*The trustworthiness of a record as a record; i.e., the quality of a record that is what it purports to be and that is free from tampering or corruption*” (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Glossary n.d.). ISO 15489:2016 defines an authentic record as the one that can prove a) to be what it purports to be, b) to have been created or sent by the agent purported to have created or sent it, and c) to have been created or sent at the date and time purported. It is here where the standard asks for policies and procedures for creation of records and for their proper management (capture, disposition, access, protection against unauthorised deletion, alteration, use and concealment). Jenkinson, on the other hand, considered records as authentic when they are created by those who need to act through them and preserved in official custody and for official information only (Jenkinson 1966, 8-11)³.

³ Jenkinson offers an interesting example for the value of unbroken custody: “*So great is the value of custody that the constant effort of private forgers in all periods has been to get copies of their forgeries enrolled in some public series, because they knew that the authenticity of the enrolment would never be called in question and hoped that by a confusion of ideas the thing enrolled would pass uncriticized. As will appear later, we do not wish to press for a purely legal definition of custody; but the above*”

If authenticity is considered in Interpares as being supported by identity and integrity of the record, in the document authored by Richard Blake, authenticity is regarded as “...an implicit value derived or presumed from the presence of the explicit elements that characterise the other three characteristics [reliability, integrity, usability, n.n, BFP]. A presumption of authenticity is an inference that is drawn from known facts about the manner in which a record has been created, handled, and maintained” (The National Archives [2004], 3.1.4). In another volume, the statement is even more straightforward: “BS ISO 15489 defines an authentic record as one that can be proven. This can only be done if the elements that constitute the other three characteristics referenced above are present” (The National Archives [2004], 3.1.6).

As it can be seen from the definitions above, there are many angles the authenticity can be regarded from. Some emphasize the form; others underline the unbroken custody. Moreover, the legal definitions may vary from country to country. In Romania, for instance, an authentic record is defined legally as referring to persons who wrote it, their consent about the content, their signature and date (*Noul Cod de Procedura Civilă al României*, art. 369). But for being authentic, it must be connected with a State authority. In other interpretation, a forgery from 14th century may be considered as an authentic artefact from that time, no matter the diplomatic characterisation of it as a fake.

These examples seem to show the concept of authenticity may vary. A first reason was identified by Luciana Duranti, who makes several distinctions. *Legally authentic* documents are those which bear witness on their own because of the intervention, during or after their creation, of a representative of a public authority guaranteeing their genuineness. *Diplomatically authentic* documents are those which were written according to the practice of the time and place indicated in the text, and signed with the name(s) of the person(s) competent to create them. *Historically authentic* documents are those which attest to events that actually took place or to information that is true. (Duranti 1998, 45-46). A deeper relativizing was made by Bonnie Mak: “*The purpose of establishing the authenticity of a record is to position it as trustworthy for a particular purpose and authoritative within a particular framework (...) what constitutes authenticity in any given context is negotiable and will change over time*” (Duranti and Franks 2015).

Another characteristic of record, presented in the process of its management, is **usability**. ISO 15489 defines usability as the quality of records that can be “located, retrieved, presented and interpreted”. From this definition, usability seems to refer to availability (*located, retrieved*), technical accessibility (*presented*) and intellectual capability of comprehension (*interpreted*). In Interpares project though, **accessibility**, another characteristic of a record, is defined in terms of availability and usability, but none of these terms are defined⁴, nor the border between the two is being drawn. Other

examples make it clear that Archive quality is dependent upon the possibility of proving an unblemished line of responsible custodians”. (Jenkinson 1966, 11).

⁴ *To add more complexity, let us mention that the ISO/IEC 27000:2014 defines availability as “property of being accessible and usable upon demand by an authorized entity”...*

elements involved in accessibility refer to legal authorization and the existence of finding aids (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Dictionary n.d.). Finally, another characteristic of a record pertaining to its use is **admissibility**, defined as “*the quality of being permitted to serve as evidence in trial or hearing or other proceeding*” (Interpares, The InterPARES 2 Project Glossary n.d.).

6 CONCLUSION

This paper strives to bring together various characteristics or properties, or qualities of records, identified in time in professional literature. Conclusions for this compilation of various definitions and characterization may be drawn on several levels.

At the knowledge level, despite some similarities, concurrent terminology is rather confusing; same terms may be used in various contexts with different meanings. Maybe it is worth for a professional endeavor, to unify various qualities of records in an ontology. On the other hand, a high subjectivism in definitions and explanations is visible. While Jenkinson had a sort of a poetic approach, though, in our opinion, unfairly considered too metaphoric, his findings may have validity in certain contexts. On the other hand, Interpares project is heavily based on Diplomatics and often displays a very legalist approach. This may be useful in an organizational framework, though today’s trend toward the lack of rules and constraints may find this approach too rigid. Also, in a broader perspective over records (for example, personal paper or oral history), its emphasis on form and procedure may be less useful. ISO 15489, on the other hand, also seems narrow in its determination of records as evidence of business; characteristics listed are not necessarily “the ones and only”, nor the definitions fit very well in other contexts.

In spite of this variability, one common feature for all the qualities of records is that they are not intrinsic, they are not attributed to a record for good. On the contrary, these characteristics should be able to be proved, because they can change in various stages of the record. The “record trail” should not only indicate where a record is and who owns it, but also the life events of the record and how these events affected its various qualities.

Beyond these theoretical considerations, we believe the real-life record may share one or more of the qualities listed here. Some of them may share none, but this will never stop a recorded information to act as a record. This is why, in the end, “*if it looks like a record, sounds like a record, smells like a record, behaves like a record, and is treated like a record, it cannot be anything else than a record*” (Duranti 2004).

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POVZETEK

LASTNOSTI ZAPISOV: ALI OBSTAJA KONSENZ?

Prispevek želi približati različne lastnosti ali kvalitete zapisov, ki jih je moč najti v strokovni literaturi. Zaključke te kompilacije različnih definicij in karakterizacij lahko prikažemo na več ravneh.

Na ravni poznavanja, znanja, ne glede na nekatere podobnosti, je terminologija precej zavajajoča: enaki termini imajo lahko v različnih kontekstih različni pomen. Morda bi bilo dobro te raznovrstne lastnosti zapisov združiti. Po drugi strani pa je pri definicijah in pojasnilih moč opaziti veliko subjektivnosti. Medtem ko je Jenkinson k zadevi pristopil bolj poetično (čeprav se ga po mnenju avtorja neupravičeno označuje kot preveč metaforičnega), imajo njegove ugotovitve v določenih kontekstih težo. Po drugi strani pa projekt Inter pares sloni na diplomatiki in pogosto izraža zelo birokratski pristop. To je lahko koristno v okviru organizacije, pa čeprav bi ga morda današnji trend, ki stremi k pomanjkanju pravil, označil kot preveč togega. V širši perspektivi zapisov (npr. osebni zapisi ali ustna zgodovina) pa je Inter paresov poudarek na obliki in postopkih manj uporaben. Po drugi strani je ISO 15489 pri definiranju zapisov kot dokazov posla enako ozek; navedene lastnosti niso nujno »ene in edine«, definicije pa se ne vklaplajo dobro v druge kontekstne.

Ne glede na to različnost je skupna značilnost vseh lastnosti zapisov ta, da niso bistvene, zapisu niso pridane za vedno. Nasprotno pa bi te lastnosti morale biti preverljive, saj se lahko spreminjajo v različnih fazah dokumenta. »Sled zapisa« naj ne bi zajemala samo podatka o tem, kje zapis je in kdo je njegov lastnik, ampak tudi življenjske dohodke zapisa in kako so ti dogodki vplivali na mnoge njegove lastnosti.

Ne glede na vsa ta teoretična razmišljanja, pa verjamemo, da ima resnični zapis skupno vsaj eno ali pa več lastnosti, ki so navedene v prispevku. Nekateri morda nimajo skupne nobene, vendar to ne pomeni, da zapisana informacija ni zapis. Zato na koncu velja, da »če izgleda kot zapis, se sliši kot zapis, diši kot zapis, se obnaša kot zapis in se z njim dela kot z zapisom, ne more biti nič drugega kot zapis« (Duranti 2004).