DESCRIPTION OF ARCHIVAL HOLDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND AND THE PROJECT TO MAKE DESCRIPTIONS AVAILABLE ONLINE

Abstract:
The Archives of the International Monetary Fund have successfully conducted an ambitious project to produce standardized description of the archival holdings of the institution and make these descriptions widely available online through the use of the software Adlib. This paper will examine the different steps that made this project possible, the lessons learned during the process and the way forward for this excellent project. The views expressed in this article are the author’s own and in no way reflect the views of the Council of the European Union.

Key words:
International Monetary Fund, standardized description, Adlib

THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND
The International Monetary Fund is an international financial institution that finds its origin at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, during the Second World War, and formally created in December 1945, when 29 member countries signed its Articles of Agreement. Currently the IMF has 188 member countries with a mandate for global economic and financial stability by providing to its members:

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1 For more see: http://www.imf.org/external/about/whatwedo.htm.
2 For more see: http://external.worldbankimflib.org/Bwf/whatisbw.htm.
policy advice to governments and central banks based on analysis of economic trends and cross-country experiences,

research, statistics, forecasts, and analysis based on tracking of global, regional, and individual economies and markets,

loans to help countries overcome economic difficulties,

concessional loans to help fight poverty in developing countries,

technical assistance and training to help countries improve the management of their economies.

All these activities turn the IMF into a major player in the international scene, complementing the activities of the United Nations\(^5\), the World Bank\(^6\), the World Trade Organization\(^7\) and the International Labour Organization\(^8\). The international economic crisis has made even more important\(^9\) this global role.


The first mention of the IMF archives is contained in the cornerstone of the institution, the Articles of Agreement from 1945. The Article IX on Status, Immunities and Privileges acknowledges the inviolability of the Fund’s archives.

Considered since its inception a confidential advisor of governments and central banks, the IMF had always maintained secrecy regarding the information kept in its archives. This changed drastically and decisively during the decade of the 1990s\(^10\).

In January 1996, the IMF Executive Board\(^11\) adopted its Decision 11192-(96/2), opening access to its archives for documents over 30 years old\(^12\), with certain restrictions.


\(^7\) For more see: [http://www.wto.org/](http://www.wto.org/).


\(^11\) Composed by 24 executive directors that represent the member countries, the Executive Board takes the daily operative decisions of the IMF. Large economies (China, France, Germany, Japan, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom and the United States) have their own seat around the table while other countries are grouped in constituencies (from 4 to 24 countries) and represented by one of the executive directors (Slovenia is grouped with Austria, Belarus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Slovak Republic and Turkey and is currently represented by the executive director Johann Prader from Austria).

\(^12\) “The Executive Board decides that outside persons, on request, will be given access to documentary materials maintained in the Fund’s archives that are over 30 years old, provided, however, that access to Fund documents originally classified as “Secret” or “Strictly Confidential” will be granted only upon the Managing Director’s consent to their declassification. It is understood that this consent will be granted in all instances but those in which, despite the passage of time, the material remains highly confidential or sensitive. Access to the following will not be granted: (a) legal documents and records maintained by the Legal Department that are protected by attorney-client privilege; (b) documentary materials furnished to the Fund by external parties, including member countries, their instrumentalities and agencies and central banks, that bear confidentiality markings, unless such external parties consent to their declassification; (c) personnel files and medical or other records pertaining to individuals; and (d) documents and proceedings of the Grievance Committee.”
In March 1999, through Decision 11915-(99/23), access was extended, reducing the requirement of 30 years to 20 years. Additionally Executive Board documents over 5 years old were also open to the public.

Decision 12882-(02/113), in November 2002, further extended access, opening to the public Board Minutes and Decisions after 10 years.

THE ARCHIVES TRANSPARENCY PROJECT (2003-2008)

In April 2003, Decision 12891-(03/34) expanded the number of series open to the public after 10 years. Most importantly, it provided budgetary support for the Archives Transparency Project, an ambitious project that aimed at providing archival description for the holdings of the Fund between 1946-1988, effectively creating the historical archives of the Institution, that despite the mention in the Articles of Agreement, had only managed current records for the immediate business need. During 5 years, a task force of 25 contract archivists would tackle a massive backlog of 18,000 linear feet of records in order to make the holdings available to the public through standardized description. A key element in this endeavour was the appraisal framework, a document that established a structure of two sous-fonds for each fonds (based in turn on the different Departments of the institution, whose evolution had been well registered in the successive organization charts corresponding to each reorganization): these two sous-fonds where Immediate Office (a directive cell composed by the Director, Deputy Director and Advisors that received and managed highly relevant information) and Divisions (specialized teams that managed and dealt with the sectorial issues covered by the Department). The appraisal framework was also the primary tool to assimilate the different accessions produced by the records management team to the two sous-fonds and the different series that composed each of them (Director files, country files...). It also provided guidance to appraise and dispose of these accessions: the majority of series under Immediate Office had a permanent preservation, while the material under Divisions was much more likely to be destroyed, following the reasoning that the majority of the relevant material produced by the Divisions would be sent to the Immediate Office for action.

The standardized description would be based in ISAD (G), ISAAR (CPF) and the Canadian RAD. A multilevel description practice arriving to the level of file and providing institutional history/biography for producers (institutions and individuals), coupled with a robust use of keywords (Person/Institution, Country and Subject).

THE REQUEST FOR GREATER TRANSPARENCY

Notwithstanding these bold changes, the institutions that were monitoring transparency in international financial institutions requested more. A policy briefing by Global Transparency Initiative (GTI) dated October 2008 is a clear example: "Upon a critical analysis of these issues, the IMF’s practices on information disclosure..."
falls far short of the best practice standards outlined in the Global Transparency Initiative's Transparency Charter for IFIs. The transparency policy of the IMF contains no recognition of the right of access to information, a basic requirement for effective and accountable governance of an institution. Additionally it is limited in coverage and badly integrated with the archives policy". These are the recommendations made by GTI in relation to access to IMF archival material: "Put all archival materials (including executive board series documents) that have passed the relevant period for public access on the IMF website.

Most external stakeholders do not have the ability to go to Washington DC to access the archives. Much of the information has already been digitized and can be easily put online provided the board agrees to a blanket policy of consent and release of this information that has passed the relevant time delay. None of this material is likely to be market sensitive given the long delays in publication. Some Archival material is already being put online”.

These concerns were acknowledged by the Fund in their 2009 Review of the Transparency Policy\textsuperscript{16}. While stating that the public’s access to the Fund’s archives had increased significantly, the document also said the following: “However, there are concerns about how and how quickly archived material can be accessed. Many observers, including the IEO in its review of Fund governance, as well as key civil society organizations during outreach for this review, see scope to shorten the archives period and to make access to the archives more user-friendly (today, physical presence is required to search the archives)”. In the same document, several reforms were proposed to enhance the accountability of the Fund. One of the proposed reforms was to “allow for web posting of digital or digitized material when it becomes publicly available under the Archives Policy (AP). The need to travel to Washington to gain full access to the archives is an anachronistic legacy of the “pre-internet” era and raises issues about evenhandedness across the membership. Under the current Archives Policy decision, documents that meet the specified time rules are available to the “outside person, on request”. A “request” for this purpose has so far meant a written (including email) or oral request (physical presence or phone call). The Archives Policy decision would be amended to make clear that a click on the section in the external website designated for access to archival material would also serve as a “request” for the purposes of the Archives Policy. As budgetary resources permit, Technology and General Services Department (TGS) is working on increasing the amount of information and documents that are available in digital format”.

This is the background for Decision 14498-(09/126) that would update in December 2009 the policy on access to IMF Archives, confirming a 3-year rule for most Board documents, making Board Minutes and Decisions available after 5 years (instead of the 10 years determined in 2002), establishing a 20-year rule for Evaluation Committee Minutes and reiterating the 20-year rule for all other departmental material. Additionally it enabled access to archives via Internet, setting the background for the project to make these descriptions available online.

\textsuperscript{16} Review of the Fund’s Transparency Policy (October 2009).
FROM STATIC TO DYNAMIC FINDING AIDS ONLINE

The question was how to make standardized descriptions available online, passing from static finding aids in pdf format to dynamic finding aids that reflected the progressive additions to the descriptive database and answered the needs of a potentially large public, not necessarily acquainted with search strategies in archives and expecting something along the lines of a Google search. How to combine the best of both worlds: provide a simple search interface while at the same time not renouncing to the contextual information that gives its nature to archives?

This conundrum was the main challenge for the project team that worked between 2010 and 2012 to develop a public search interface for the archives database, Adlib, a Dutch archival management software originally designed for museums and libraries. In order to be interdisciplinary the team not only consisted in staff from IT Units plus Archives and Records Management, but there was also a significant participation from the Library and Knowledge Management Staff members and a selected number of external researchers would also give their feedback as sample users in order to correct and improve the performance of the search engine and to ensure that the final result would be user-friendly.

The result can be seen here, under the name IMF Archives Catalog: http://www.adlibsoft.com/products/archive-software.

The initial page provides a brief explanation of the kind of material available through the catalog, with links to the Policy on Access to the IMF Archives and the archival processes applied to the IMF records, with the resulting archival structure in fonds, sous-fonds, series, sub-series, files and documents. An upper tab gives access to the search screen, while a left-hand lateral menu provides links to the main page of the IMF Archives, FAQ for the IMF Archives Catalog, Access Policy, Copyright Information and a Feedback form.

One of the discussions of the Project team was about the number of search options that should be available. A proposal with three search types (simple, expert and advanced) was finally discarded and simplified into just two options: basic search (available by default) and advanced search (accessible through a left-hand lateral link).

The basic search screen was kept deliberately simple, but at the same time offers multiple fields. A first dropdown allows selecting which collection should be searched. The option by default is “All Archive Materials” meaning that search will be conducted across two different collections: Executive Board Documents and Archives Descriptions and Records. In fact the online access to Archives Project was seen as the golden opportunity to provide a single search engine for two separate collections: the institutional archives proper plus the collection of the Executive Board Documents, which had been completely digitized and was maintained by the Secretary's Department. The dropdown allows you the option to restrict the search to one of the two collections.

17 For more see: http://www.adlibsoft.com/products/archive-software.
18 For more see: http://www.imf.org/external/np/arc/eng/archive.htm#policy.
19 For more see: http://www.imf.org/external/np/arc/eng/archive.htm#archival.
The next field, "Combined Field Search" is the closest equivalent to a general "google Search"\textsuperscript{20}.

"Date or Year" allows search for specific dates, a single year, or a range of dates or years.

The following three fields contain the search for keywords: "Person/Institution", "Country" and "Subject". One of the problems was harmonizing the different practices for allocating keywords in the two different collections\textsuperscript{21}. A nice feature is the possibility of typing a few letters and "browse terms" with a link provided in the right-hand side of the keyword search boxes. This deploys all available keywords for that specific type, improving the pertinence of our searches.

The field "Authoring Person or Department" works in a similar way. The browse terms option offers the possibility of accessing a list of all the archival producers\textsuperscript{22}.

To complete the simple search screen, a box allows us to tick the option "Digital Objects Only" and we have several sort possibilities: by title (the default option), oldest date and newest date.

The breadth of options available may appear intimidating for a simple search screen, but it's important to point out that we don't need to use all the options. If we conduct a search in the Combined Field Search and don't select any other option, the result will be sorted by title (the default option) and across all archive materials (that is, both institutional archives and executive board documents). Example: the search term "Slovenia" gets 257 results\textsuperscript{23}.

In fact the simple search is a combination of the "google search" plus the options normally available in the expert search mode. Instead of offering two different options it was decided that it was better to present this option that allowed a more faceted search experience while at the same time providing a simple search for those users that preferred no complications.

Once a search has been made, a let-hand menu provides the opportunity of "Refine search result" by allocating additional criteria. Therefore the results obtained through the first search can be refined. Example: the 257 results obtained in the previous search could be sorted by oldest or newest date, restricted only to digital objects (228 results) or restricted to the period 2001-2010 (150 results).

The idea behind the advanced search screen was that of an expert user, proficient with search engines and able to tailor his own search. This screen offers three fields with dropdowns set by default to "Title", "Start Date" and "End Date", but search can be potentially conducted in following fields:

\textsuperscript{20} "The Combined Field Search allows you to search for words or phrases across all of the following fields: Title, Scope and Content, Authoring Person or Department, Person and Institution Keywords, Subject Keywords, Country Keywords, Biographical and Administrative History, and Archival History."

\textsuperscript{21} "In the Institutional Archives, keywords were applied at the series level and above and sometimes added at the file level. In the Executive Board Collection, keywords were applied at the item level to most documents created after 1983, however only country keywords were applied to most documents prior to 1983."

\textsuperscript{22} "Authoring People and Departments are who actually created the records, rather than who the records are about. This includes both internal Fund divisions, as well as individual people such as deputy directors or the authors of papers in the Executive Board Documents Collection."

\textsuperscript{23} All the results for searches conducted the 28th January 2014. As this is a dynamic search engine, the results may well change as new documents and descriptions are uploaded to the database.
The three search boxes presented by default in the advanced search screen can be narrowed down to one or expanded to more than three. Additionally the search boxes may be combined with Boolean operators (a dropdown with the options “and”, “or”, “and not”).

We also have, like in the simple search, the checkbox for “digital materials only” and the sorting options title, oldest date and newest date.

Of the options available in the advanced search one of the most relevant is the possibility to search for level. The levels available in the dropdown are the following: Fonds, Collection, Sub-fonds, Series, Sub-series, File, Item, Book, Box and Folder. A search by Fonds produces 26 results, all the Fonds available in the holdings of the IMF archives. A search by collection produces 5 results. The solution chosen to integrate the Executive Board Documents in the archival holdings has been allocating them the level of collection. The Executive Board Documents collection is in turn subdivided in Series, Sub-Series and from sub-series goes directly to items.

As we can see the majority of the fonds (19) correspond to Departments, the default organic level chosen by the IMF as equivalent to fonds. There are also 3 Bureaus (Computing Services, Language Services and Statistics), the IMF Institute

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24 Administration Department, African Department, Asia and Pacific Department, Bureau of Computing Services, Bureau of Language Services, Bureau of Statistics, Central Banking Department, European and North American Department, European Department, European II Department, Exchange and Trade Relations Department, External Relations Department, Fiscal Affairs Department, IMF Institute, Jacques J. Polak Papers, Latin American, Middle Eastern and Far Eastern Department, Legal Department, Middle East and Central Asia Department, Office of the Managing Director, Research Department, Secretary’s Department, Staff Association Committee, Technology and General Services Department, The Per Jacobsson Foundation, Treasurer’s Department and Western Hemisphere Department.

25 Bretton Woods Conference, Central Files, Executive Board Documents, Hubert Neiss Collection Diaries and Jacques J. Polak Library (Publications).

26 The IMF Institute for Capacity Development was established in 1964 to provide training in economic management to officials of the IMF’s member countries. Training is delivered at IMF Headquarters in Washington, D.C., through seven IMF regional training centers, in collaboration with other regional training institutions and national governments, and through a distance learning program. [http://www.imf.org/external/np/ins/english/about.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/np/ins/english/about.htm)
the Staff Association, the Per Jacobsson Foundation\textsuperscript{27} and one personal fonds, Jacques J. Polak Papers\textsuperscript{28}.

Amongst the collections, the central files merit special attention both for its volume (over 1,600 linear feet) and its genesis. In fact the IMF adopted a centralized filing practice that spawned these files at the same time that the different Departments managed their own records. In fact a researcher interested in a policy issue for the period 1946-1993 should look both at the specific Department in charge and at the Central Files.

Another collection of note is the one about the Bretton Woods Conference, the seminal event for both the IMF and the World Bank.\textsuperscript{29}

The search results provide links that allow navigation to the corresponding description (title, range of dates, level of description, Scope and Content). An interesting feature is a contextual diagram that shows us the context of the entry: which archival level are we currently in (in red), plus the related levels above and below (in yellow), indented to show the hierarchy. The entries adopt the form of links that can be also used for navigation. This effectively combines the best aspects of "google search" with archival context. I can do a general search by "Combined Field Search" and later find the context of the entries navigating to the archival levels above and below the search results.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the most interesting aspects of the IMF archives experience is the work in "tranches" and the sustainability of the descriptions. The Archived Transparency Project was a massive endeavour (25 contracted archivists, 5 years of duration, processing of all the IMF archives from the period 1946-1988). A much smaller group of archivists (amongst whom I had the privilege of working) would continue with the "tranche" 1989-1992. One of the problems that we encountered was the difficulty of combining these necessary but arbitrary chronological cuts with the accessions that were our primary source of material. Initially the criterion adopted was that if two thirds of the material of a given accession fell within the range of dates of our "tranche" we would process that accession.

A greater problem would be the one posed by the fact that we were effectively expanding the existing descriptions for different fonds (the work done by our colleagues from the Archives Transparency Project). We often discovered that their description had not been drafted taking into account this future expansion (for example, for physical arrangement and numeration of series). Take for instance Country Files, a prominent series of files generated by the Immediate Office of each Area Department \textsuperscript{30} with the monitoring activity of the situation of member

\textsuperscript{27} For more see: http://www.perjacobsson.org/per-jacobsson.htm.

\textsuperscript{28} For more see: http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2008/06/people.htm.

\textsuperscript{29} Both institutions organized a joint exhibition for the 60\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the conference: http://external.worldbankimfl.org/Bwf/index.htm.

\textsuperscript{30} The IMF has three types of Departments: Functional, Area and Support. The nine functional departments carry out its policy, analytical, and technical work and manage its financial resources. The five areas, or regional, departments are responsible for advising member countries on macroeconomic policies and the financial sector, and for putting together, when needed, financial arrangements to support economic reform programs. Currently the area Departments are: African, Asia and Pacific, European, Middle East and Central Asia and Western Hemisphere. http://www.imf.org/external/about/staff.htm.
countries, for example all African countries for the Africa Department. The country files were arranged in a single series, with the files installed in a single series of boxes by alphabetical succession by country (Algeria, Angola, Benin…). The problem came when the archivists processing the following "tranche" were adding files to this arrangement. The ideal solution would have been to initially create sub-series by country and install them independently so that new accruals could be added as necessary. Just an example that brings to mind the need to think ahead when describing archives and take into account future accruals to produce sustainable descriptions.

Possibly the most important lesson learned was the validation of the interdisciplinary approach taken by the online catalog project. The final result has managed to balance quite successfully the technical requirements of archives about presenting information in context and hierarchized with the need for a simple search interface very extended amongst the users.

THE LATEST REVIEW OF THE TRANSPARENCY POLICY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE IMF ARCHIVES (JUNE 2013)

At the moment of drafting this article, the latest review of the IMF’s Transparency Policy is very recent. With 6 reforms in 18 years we can see that this is indeed a very dynamic sector. This new review has direct consequences for the IMF archives:

"Major reforms to the Archives Policy took place in 2009 and are being implemented. Many archival documents are now available via the internet, including Board papers, Board minutes, and a catalog of other documentary material in the Archives. Staff sees a case for further efforts to digitize other documentary material, and to introduce streamlined procedures for declassifying other documentary material"\(^{31}\).

The key recommendation related to archives is clear: “Complete the implementation of the 2009 reforms to the Archives Policy, with the digitization of paper-based records a priority. Declassify other documentary material on a lapse-of-time basis”.

The same document further elaborates: “Further work is required to complete the implementation of the 2009 decision, with digitization of paper-based records a priority. Most of the other documentary material remains available only in paper-based form, which reduces its accessibility while increasing the risk of physical deterioration. This material is highly valuable as it provides important insights into the thinking behind key policy and operational decisions in the past, and so staff considers its digitization an important step in terms of access and transparency. To reduce resource requirements, management would arrange that the declassification of other documentary material be carried out by staff on a lapse-of-time basis”.

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\(^{31}\) 2013 Review of the Fund’s Transparency Policy.
Declassification of archival materials is indeed a thorny problem for the IMF given the often confidential nature of the information shared by member countries and the need to respect multiple national regulations\(^\text{32}\).

A quick look at the IMF Archives catalog outlines the scope of the challenge. If we search only Archives descriptions and records, excluding Executive Board Documents, all of them digitized at item level (over 195,000 items) and we search only for digital objects at file level, the result is meagre: only 341 files.

The IMF online archives catalog is an excellent project, but in order to fully develop its potential the online availability of the descriptions will have to be reinforced by a massive digitization project of the archival holdings with the objective of making the information directly available through the web.

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POVZETEK

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**POPISOVANJE ARHIVSKEGA GRADIVA MEDNARODNEGA DENARNEGA SKLADA IN PROJEKT PREDSTAVITVE POPISA NA SPLETU**

Mednarodni denarni sklad (IMF) je mednarodna finančna institucija, katere izvor najdemo na Konferenci v Bretton Woodsu leta 1944, med drugo svetovno vojno, uradno pa je bila ustanovljena decembra 1945, ko je 29 držav članic podpisalo sporazum o ustanovitvi. IMF ima trenutno 188 članic in mandat globalnega gospodarstva in finančne stabilnosti.

Od svojega začetka velja IMF za zaupnega svetovalca vlad in centralnih bank, IMF pa je bil glede informacij, ki so hranjene v njegovih arhivih, vedno skrivšten. V devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja se je to izrazito spremenilo.

Aprila 2003 je Odločba št. 12891-(03/34) razširila število serijskih javnosti po desetih letih. Še pomembneje pa je bilo to, da je zagotovila sredstva za projekt Transparentnosti arhiva, katerega cilj je bil priskrbeti arhivske popise gradiva sklada med letoma 1946 in 1988. Tako je bil ustvarjen zgodovinski arhiv sklada, ki je prej, ne glede na omembo v Sporazumu, upravljal samo z aktualnimi dokumenti, ki so bili potrebni za takojšnjo poslovno rabo. V petih letih naj bi se 25 pogodbenih strokovnih delavcev prekopalo skozi okoli 5500 tekočih metrov gradiva, jih popisalo po standardih ter dalo na razpolago javnosti.

Standardizirani popisi naj bi temeljili na standardih ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF) in kanadskem standardu RAD. Večnivojsko popisovanje bi tako doseglo nivo zadeve in opisalo zgodovino/biografijo ustvarjalcev (institucij in posameznikov) skupaj z rabo ključnih besed (oseba/institucija, država in naziv zadeve).

Ne glede na te drzne spremembe pa so institucije, ki nadzorujejo transparentnost mednarodnih finančnih zavodov, zahtevale še več. To je potem bila podlaga za Odločbo 14498-(09/126), ki je omogočila dostopanje do gradiva preko svetovnega spleta, projektu pa prehod v fazo priprave popisov za dostop preko spleta.

Pojavilo se je vprašanje, kako standardizirane popise objaviti na spletu ter tako preiti od statičnih iskalnih pripomočkov v formatu PDF do dinamičnih, takih, ki bodo vsebovali napredne dodatke k popisni bazi in bodo odgovarjali potrebam potencialno

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ogromnega števila uporabnikov, ki pa niso nujno seznanjeni s strategijami iskanja v arhivih in pričakujejo nekaj podobnega kot pri iskalniku Google. Kako kombinirati najboljše obeh svetov: vzpostaviti enostaven iskalni vmesnik in se hkrati ne odpovedati vsebinskim informacijam, ki dajejo arhivskemu gradivu njegov pomen?