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telefon/ Phone: +386 2228 5017; e-pošta/e-mail: [ivan.fras@pokarh-mb.si](mailto:ivan.fras@pokarh-mb.si)*

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## **ACCESSING ARCHIVES – FROM EXPECTATIONS TO REALITY: ANALYSIS OF ACCESS AND USE OF ARCHIVAL RECORDS IN THE ARCHIVES OF THE TUZLA CANTON DURING THE LAST DECADE**

**Adnan Tinjić**

Archives of the Tuzla Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina

[tinjicadnan@gmail.com](mailto:tinjicadnan@gmail.com)

**Hatidža Fetahagić**

Archives of the Tuzla Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina

### **Abstract:**

*The paper analyses requests for access to archival records kept by the Archives of the Tuzla Canton. Focus is given to the last ten-year period (2007 – 2017). Records are sought by both individuals and legal persons (companies, law firms, judiciary and other branches of government, etc.) in order to fulfill their civil and/or human rights. Often, as data will show, how and what they expect from accessing and using archives is different from what can really be done to help them. Through analyzing a decade of collected data, the authors aim to give a brief overview on tendencies in working with users, and point out important factors in accessing archival records preserved by the Archives of the Tuzla Canton.*

### **Key words:**

*Archives of the Tuzla Canton, using archival records, records, Bosnia and Herzegovina, accessing archival records*

### **Izveček:**

**Dostop do arhivskega gradiva - od pričakovanj k realnosti : analiza dostopa do arhivskega gradiva v Arhivu Tuzelskega kantona in njegove uporabe v zadnjem desetletju**

*Članek analizira vloge za dostop do arhivskega gradiva, ki ga hrani Arhiv Tuzelskega kantona. Poudarek daje obdobju zadnjih desetih let (2007–2017). Vloge za dostop do arhivskega gradiva dajejo tako posamezniki kot tudi pravne osebe (družbe, odvetniške pisarne, sodna in druge uradne instance) z namenom pridobiti podatke za dokazovanje državljskih in drugih pravic. Kot kažejo podatki, se pričakovanja uporabnikov pogosto razlikujejo od dejanske storitve, ki jo nudi arhiv. Na podlagi analize podatkov iz desetletnega obdobja avtorja podajata kratek pregled dela z uporabniki in izpostavljata pomembne dejavnike pri obdelavi gradiva.*

### **Ključne besede:**

*Arhiv Tuzelskega kantona, uporaba arhivskega gradiva, dokumenti, Bosna in Hercegovina, dostop do arhivskega gradiva*

## 1. Introduction

According to the International Council on Archives (ICA), “access is the availability of records for consultation as a result both of legal authorization and the existence of finding aids” (Principles of Access to Archives, 2012). Access service links archives to the public. It provides information for users about the institution and its holdings. The Principles of Access to Archives (2012), created by ICA, consists of 10 Principles with a commentary explaining each of them. While each archives has local legislation to uphold, the Principles (2012) provide a general guide and principles on how archivists should behave and what values they should uphold regarding the access. The Principles (2012) declare, among other things, that “the public has the right of access to archives of public bodies”, “institutions holding archives must make known the existence of the archives, even closed materials”, that archivists have a professional responsibility to promote access to archives on equal and fair terms, etc.

The Code of Ethics (1996) states in principle 6 that “archivists should promote the widest possible access to archival materials and provide an impartial service to all users”, and in principle 7 that “archivists should respect both access and privacy, and act within the boundaries of relevant legislation”. Also, the Universal Declaration on Archives notes “the vital necessity of archives for supporting business efficiency, accountability and transparency, for protecting citizen’s rights, for establishing individual and collective memory, for understanding the past, and for documenting the present to guide future actions” (The Universal Declaration on Archives, 2011) and it identifies importance of archivists who make records available for public use.

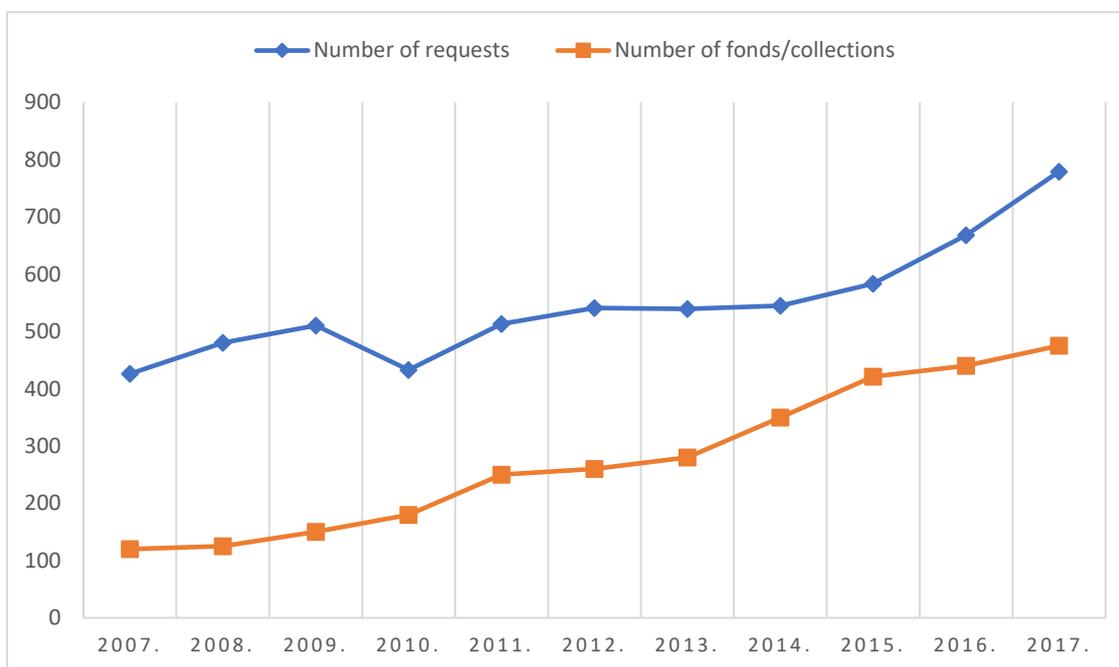
In a way, providing access to archival material is the main function of an archives and the culmination of all its previous efforts. Having the users achieve their aims either in researching the past for various purposes (scholarly, genealogical or other) or in seeking to obtain civil and human rights they are entitled to, is the reason archives, ultimately, exist and preserve archival material. Therefore, accessing archives and the results it provides should be a guideline in all roads leading to improvement of archival profession and institutions. This paper will look into one of the regional archives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Archives of the Tuzla Canton (located in northeastern Bosnia). It currently has competence over 13 municipalities (at most it covered 19, during the last century) and preforms its archival duties, from supervising creators, acquisition of archival material to providing users with it. Albeit the Archives is relatively small, a regional one, the development and growth of this, 65 years old institution in the last decade puts certain strains and shows patterns that should be analyzed and observed. The data provided in this article is extracted from records (tracked data obtained monthly) of the Archives of the Tuzla Canton.

## 2. More archival records, more requests for access

In order to access records in the Archives of the Tuzla Canton, one must formally submit a request (as is the case in similar institutions). The form for submitting requests and thus, accessing the material, can be found at the website or in the Archives itself. The submission must contain personal information (or company/institution information), and data regarding the material that is requested (dates, locations, type of document, purpose, etc.). “Additional data provided by users increases the likelihood of positive feedback and locating documentation that contains needed information”. (Fetahagić, 2015). Situation is nearly identical in other Bosnian archives. For example, the most common requests to access archival material in the Archives of Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) are:

- “Issuing of certificates that prove years of service, payment amounts and other similar information related to working rights and retirement procedures.
- Issuing of certificates proving certain educational level.
- Property relations issues that need projects and technical documentation.
- Creating genealogies and other similar requests.” (Soldatović, 2016.)

The same can be stated for the Archives of the Tuzla Canton - similar records are in high demand. What about the users’ perspective and expectations? A relevant number of users, coming to the Archives for the first time, come with two kinds of extreme expectations: one group is expecting the material to be arranged, digitized, searchable and ready for them instantly, while the second expects that the resolution of their request will be a long, tedious process – and are surprised they actually get positive results. These users usually need records to ensure their civil rights, and are often in a hurry, stressed, jaded and irritated by the procedure so far (one that led them to the Archives). In several professional papers published in Bosnia and Herzegovina, these users are called “Users out of necessity” (Šauperl, Vilar, Šabotić, Rajh, Mezek, Fetahagić, 2016). What they expect can often be correlated to their educational level, age and general experience (or lack of) with government administration (that the Archives is seen as part of). This type of users is steadily increasing, but the Archives manages to cope with the demand. While the legislation allows the Archives to reply to any requests within a month (30 days after it was submitted), most of required documents, certificates and other records are ready for users within a week, in some cases within a day.<sup>1</sup> The increase is visible from Picture 1:



**Picture 1: Number of requests (fulfilment of civil rights) and number of fonds between 2007 and 2017**

<sup>1</sup> The main building of the Archives of the Tuzla Canton is located near the city center, but a large amount of records is located in one of two off-sites: one in a nearby high school (the Archives has a section/depo there) and another about 15 km away from the main building. This, of course, creates delays in providing access to archival material stored off-site.

As the Picture 1 shows, there is a constant increase in requests to access archival material in order to fulfil certain civil rights. A sharp increase is especially evident since 2015. Since there is also a constant increase in the number of fonds and collections, which more than doubled during the last decade, demands to access archival material can only grow. Actually, several reasons might be responsible for this increase in requests:

- social processes and changes (in the last few years notable changes are: high number of early retirements due to upcoming changes in retirement related laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina, changes in needed documentation for issuing personal documents, etc.),
- increased amount of fonds and collections (especially in cases where the archives see frequent use, like parish registers),
- increased awareness of the Archives' existence and its role in society (according to large number of first-time users, they were not even aware of the Archives' existence at all before they needed a record to fulfill their civil rights. Some are fascinated by what they can access, so they come back again, sometimes as researchers).

Even though the number of requests to access archival material increased, the number of archivists working in this service did not change. Since the Archives of the Tuzla was founded in 1954, only one employee had duties to receive requests, locate and make appropriate copies/collect information from archival material and issue adequate responses to these requests. As we can imagine, this was not an issue in 1954, as demand and even the amount of records was negligible compared to today. There is still one employee working in this service in 2017 and it is proving to be an almost impossible task, since the Archives now possesses over 13.000 meters of archival material sorted in 475 fonds.

Some attempts were made to alleviate this situation: other archivists assist with the users; more and more information sources are prepared (inventories of fonds and collections, lists of permit holders, etc.) to assist in faster search for documentation. Registries of often used fonds are made by archivists (for example, for building permits of each municipality), which are easily searchable. (Fetahagić, 2016) Digitizing is also used as a way to ease the access to records and speed up the process.<sup>2</sup>

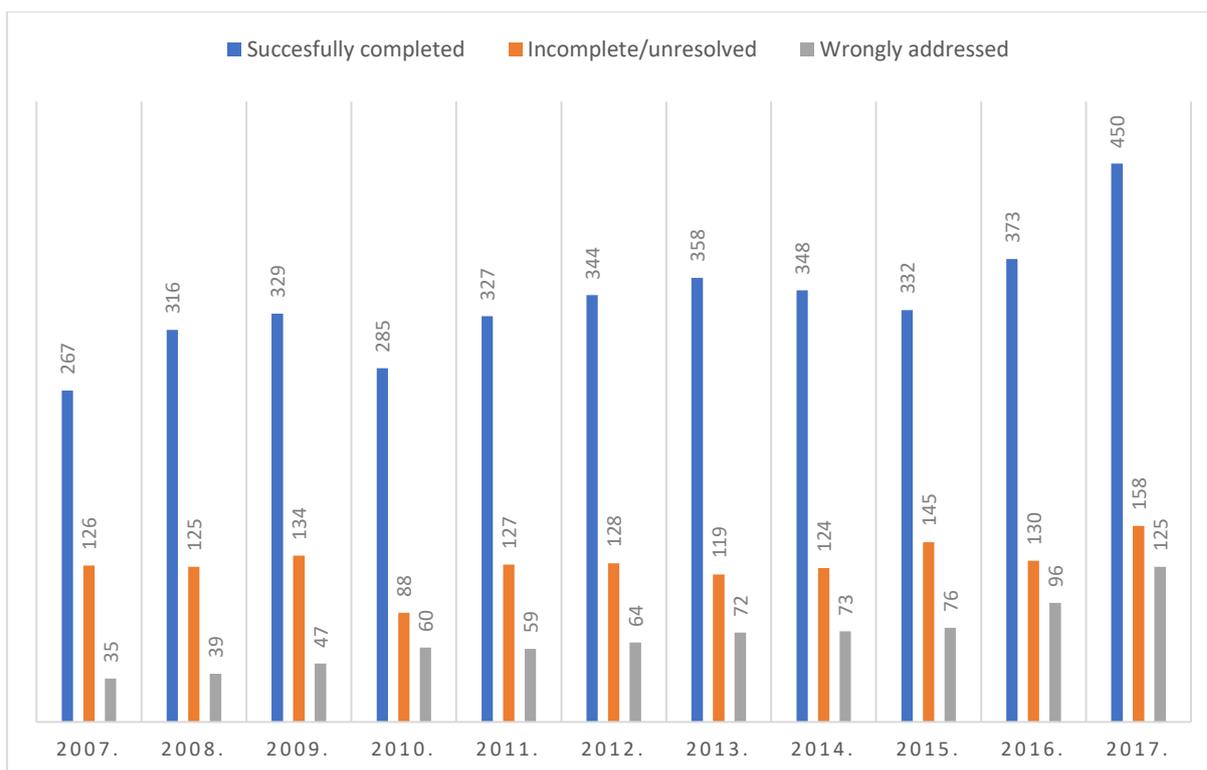
Amazingly, the percent of successfully solved requests is only increasing. In 2007, percentage of positively resolved inquires was 61,74 %, in 2010 65,83 %, in 2013 65,30 % (Isić, 2014) and in 2017, the percentage was almost 75 %. This was achieved thanks to decent organization and making sure fonds and collections that are transferred to the Archives are already well arranged, described and prepared – therefore usable right from the start. Picture 2 shows data about the resolution of requests, including 3 types: successfully completed requests for access, incomplete/unresolved and wrongly addressed ones.

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<sup>2</sup> *Digitizing is often used to make accessing the archives easier: scanned material is readily available and can be prepared for use in very short amount of time, while the original archival material is stored safely. For users abroad, digital scans of the archives they want can be provided. Digitizing of fonds and collections that are used often usually takes the priority. One example of this are digitized parish registers. Besides ensuring that originals are kept from overuse, digitized registers are easier to search.*

Successfully completed requests are usually those cases where the archivist managed to, based on starting information submitted by users as well as his experience gained in resolving similar requests and knowledge about the fonds and collections, locate needed records and information that user needs.

Incomplete or unresolved requests are evident in cases when the archivist could not locate requested information or records, even if they should or were supposed to be located among archival fonds and collections.

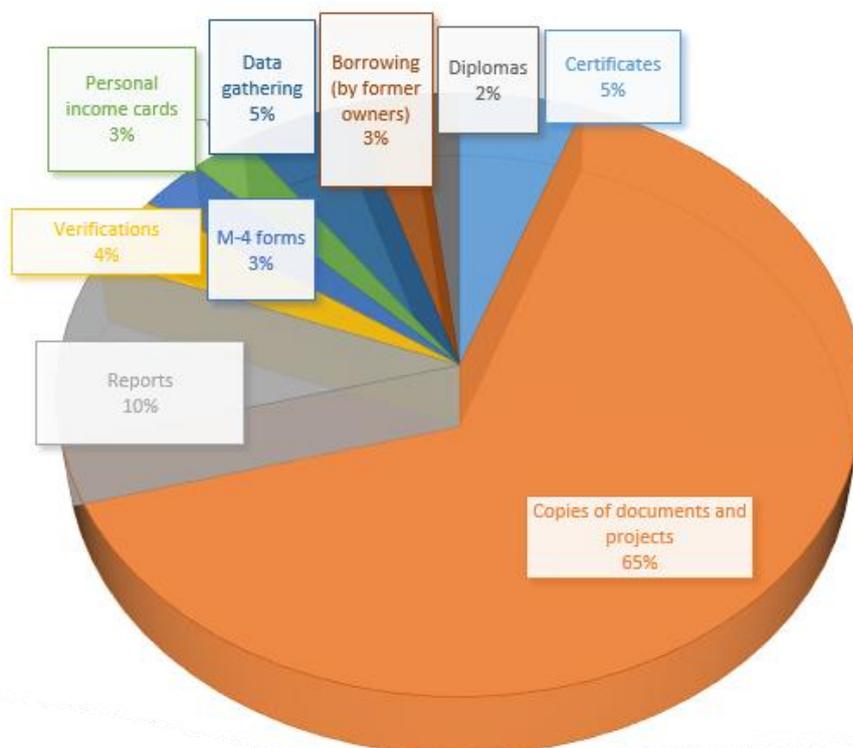


**Picture 2: Requests for accessing archival material (fulfilment of civil rights) in the Archives of the Tuzla Canton 2007 – 2017**

Wrongly addressed requests are often delivered to the Archives, and information or records sought are not in archives' fonds or collections. These types of requests come via post office, email or personally by users. Most of them contain inquiries regarding proof of employment for pension and disability insurance of (former) employees who worked in now closed companies. Status of the records these companies produced is often unknown, and the Archives is issuing a confirmation that no such records were acquired by it. In addition, the Archives holds some of local parish registers, and in cases where registers are missing, it must issue a verification that that particular register is missing. This group also includes requests submitted to the Archives for records still kept by its creators/owners and other similar cases.

Regarding the type of records, users were looking for in the last ten years, it is obvious that the majority of users seeks access to archival material in order to fulfill civil rights and are looking for copies of documents and related data (building permits, projects, forms, etc.) – about 65 % of all requests are this particular type. The rest includes different sorts of reports and replies to requests, certificates, verifications, M-4

forms (issued as proof for state's retirement fund), school diplomas, personal income cards, etc. This is represented in Picture 3.



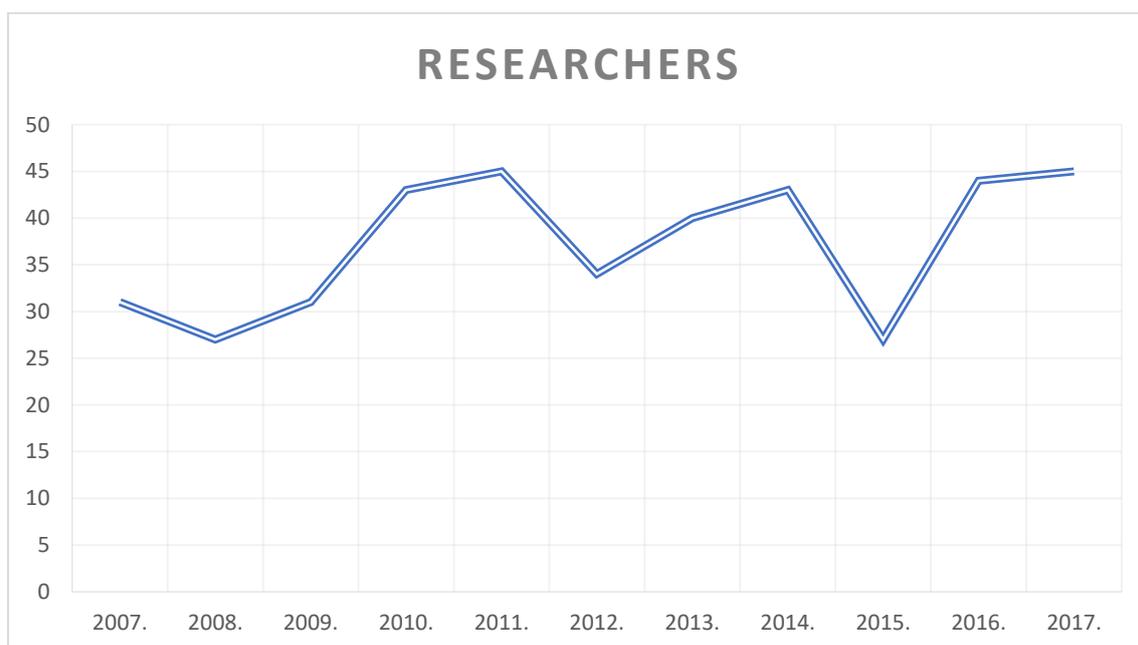
**Picture 3: Types of records sought in the Archives of the Tuzla Canton during the last ten years (2007 – 2017)**

Larger acquisition of new funds and collections is one of the major reasons for a higher number of requests to access the records. Since the Archives was founded in 1954, only 109 funds and collections were acquired until 1995. From 1995 to 2017, the number of acquired funds amounted up to more than 370. As more and more records are acquired by the Archives, the “pressure” of users to get information or copies from these records is increasing. This issue was noticed years ago by some of the colleagues: “If this trend continues, while the number of personnel stays the same, the Archives will find itself facing serious issues. Some of the ways that we try to alleviate the problem is a well done specification of funds and collections, as well as making well-prepared inventories before any archival material is moved to the Archives.” (Isić, 2016). Unarranged funds present a large problem in their use, either in cases of civil and human rights or for research purposes. Therefore, unarranged funds are one of the main reasons for the archives not to be able to respond to its user’s demands. To overcome this problem, a significant strengthening of service must be done, and archival funds and collections must be reconstructed to reduce eventual flaws and provide better informational aids, thus making the use easier.

### 3. Accessing archives for research

In case of researchers, the staff of the Archives pays attention whether these users are locals (easier to access material daily and often) or not, their age and physical condition, etc. If there is an objective reason to expedite the process, it will be done, and the researchers could, if needed, gain access to archival material they requested the same day. As much as it is possible, users are approached as individuals and the Archives is often praised by its users in the local and social media. This would probably be harder if the number of researchers was not relatively low, and usually includes historians, genealogy researchers, history students, etc. Researchers expectations are often surpassed, and the Archives is praised as an “government institution that stands out” when it comes to accessibility and the “friendly” approach to users. The reality is – the lack of personnel often reduces opportunities to provide an even better service.

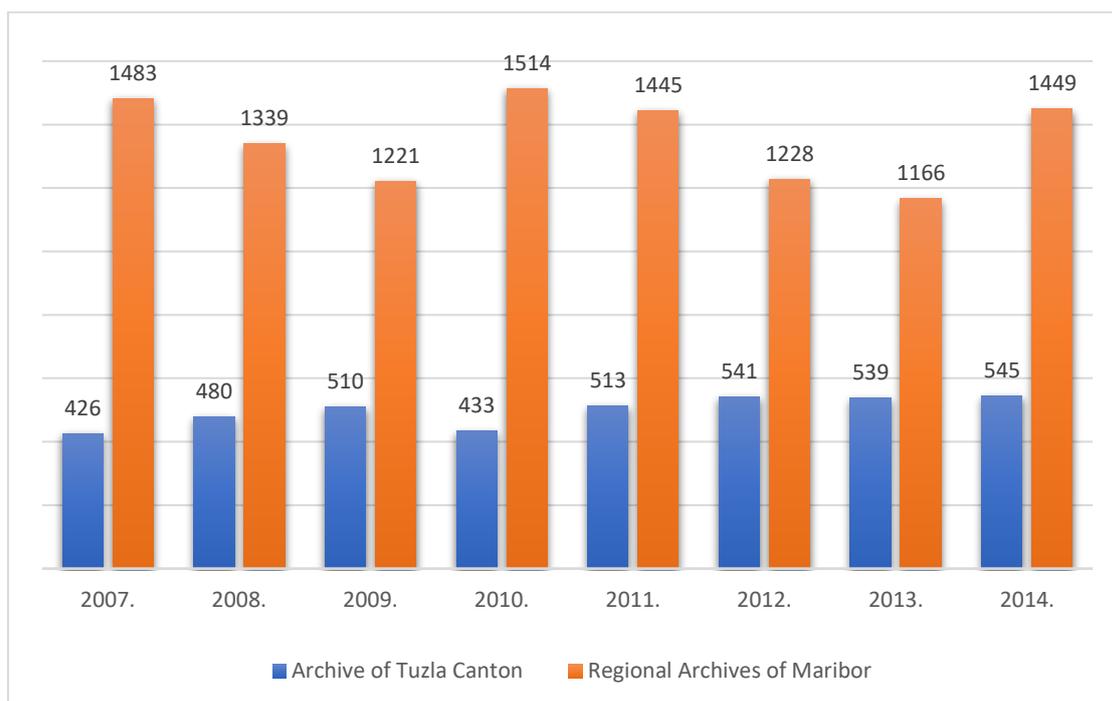
Number of researchers was rather steady in the last decade, ranging from 26 to 45 per year, as is evident in Picture 4. There is room for growth here, mainly by promoting the Archives and its archival material, its cultural and historical importance. This ought to attract local community to show more interest in researching and dealing with records. The main obstacle for this is the already mentioned lack of personnel devoted to scientific and cultural promotion. The Archives employs eight professionals – archivists, who are already stretched thin. The founder of the Archives, the local (cantonal) government, has recognized the issue and aims to employ more during 2018.



**Picture 4: Number of researchers in the Archives of the Tuzla Canton, 2007 – 2017**

#### 4. Conclusions

While the Archives of the Tuzla Canton is one of the larger archival institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the size of area it has competence over as well as the amount of fonds and collections it keeps, comparing it to the region there is still a lot of room to grow. If we take the example of a well-respected Slovenian archive, the Regional Archives Maribor, that also has competence over 13 administrative units (similar to Tuzla's archives), we can see the difference in request's numbers (data in the graph shows the period from 2007 to 2014 only, Picture 5).



**Picture 5: Number of requests to access records (civil/human rights reasons) for period 2007 – 2014. Comparison between the Archives of the Tuzla Canton and the Regional Archives Maribor (Šauperl, Vilar et al, 2016)**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, many citizens do not expect much from their government institutions, but this is changing. Modern users have higher demands. The Archives of the Tuzla Canton, according to provided data, is growing and developing. The increased quantity of archival material, processing and providing access to archives and organization of cultural activities oriented towards the presentation of archival material, gave the Archives of the Tuzla Canton an important role in local community<sup>3</sup>. In order to keep the momentum, the Archives will need support, mainly in the form of more employees and resources. This will enable the institution to provide adequate access to archives in the future.

<sup>3</sup> The Archives of the Tuzla Canton organizes several exhibitions, commemorates important professional and national holidays and also organizes a conference focusing on archival science, its theory and practice. The conference, titled „Arhivska praksa“ is held every year, and in 2017 it marked its 30th anniversary.

## POVZETEK

### DOSTOP DO ARHIVSKEGA GRADIVA - OD PRIČAKOVANJ K REALNOSTI: ANALIZA DOSTOPA DO ARHIVSKEGA GRADIVA V ARHIVU TUZELSKEGA KANTONA IN NJEGOVE UPORABE V ZADNJEM DESETLETJU

**Adnan Tinjić**

Arhiv Tuzelskega kantona, Tuzla, Bosna in Hercegovina  
[tinjicadnan@gmail.com](mailto:tinjicadnan@gmail.com)

**Hatidža Fetahagić**

Arhiv Tuzelskega kantona, Tuzla, Bosna in Hercegovina

*Avtorja predstavljata analizo vlog za dostop do arhivskega gradiva, ki ga hrani Arhiv Tuzelskega kantona. Poudarek dajeta obdobju zadnjih desetih let (2007–2017) in uporabnikom, tako fizičnim kot pravnim osebam, ki gradivo iščejo za dokazovanje določenih pravic. Mnogokrat se izkaže, da so pričakovanja uporabnikov drugačna od realnega stanja. Gradivo je pogosto necelovito ali pa še ni bilo predano v arhiv. Negativnim rešitvam njihovih vlog botruje predvsem napačna predstava o funkciji in namenu arhiva, a tudi pomanjkljivi podatki pri izpolnjevanju vlog.*

*Analiza je zajela naslednje podatke: število vlog za dostop do gradiva, njihovo rešitev, tipe gradiva, ki so jih uporabniki običajno iskali, namen itd.*

*Avtorja prav tako predstavljata težave, s katerimi se arhiv sooča pri reševanju vlog, in podajata vsaj delne, če ne celovite predloge rešitev. Iz pridobljenih podatkov je razvidno, da se povpraševanje po podatkih iz gradiva, ki ga hrani Arhiv tuzelskega kantona, povečuje, kar avtorja pripisujeta številnim novim prevzemom obsežnih fondov. Od ustanovitve arhiva leta 1954 pa do leta 1995 je bilo prevzetih 109 fondov in zbirk. Od leta 1995 do 2017 pa se je število fondov povzpelo na 370. Večanje števila prevzetih fondov obenem povečuje »pritisk« uporabnikov, zlasti glede na dejstvo, da se število zaposlenih v arhivu ni povečalo vse od njegove ustanovitve. Ves ta čas je namreč za delo v arhivski čitalnici in z uporabniki zadolžen le en strokovni delavec, slednji tudi izdaja kopije in drugo dokumentacijo. Danes je uporabnikov mnogo več kot v petdesetih ali devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja. Ena oseba je za opravljanje tega dela odločno premalo. Bilo je že nekaj poskusov v smeri izboljšanja stanja: arhivisti so pomagali v čitalnici in pripravili več iskalnih pripomočkov, ki pomagajo pri iskanju gradiva, lažji in hitrejši dostop pa omogoča tudi digitalizacija. Trajna rešitev bi bile seveda dodatne zaposlitve. Veliko bi doprineslo tudi celovito urejanje in popisovanje arhivskega gradiva.*

*Na podlagi analize zbranih podatkov avtorja podajata kratek pregled tendenc pri delu z uporabniki in izpostavljata pomembne dejavnike pri dostopanju do arhivskega gradiva, ki ga hrani Arhiv Tuzelskega kantona.*

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