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NO ARCHIVING WITHOUT RECORDS MANAGEMENT. PRACTICAL INSIGHTS FROM THE MUNICIPAL AND PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES OF VIENNA

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Abstract:

This paper outlines the measures initiated by the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna within the framework of the GEMMA 3.0 program that focuses on the disposal and archiving workflow from the electronic file management system of the city administration. In their advisory role, archivists provide ongoing support to ensure file plans are implemented correctly within the system. The paper presents the analytical methods and practical tools developed for systematic data cleaning to ensure consistent metadata and long-term accountability. The author offers a conclusion regarding the engagement of archivists in the records management of their record-creating bodies and pleads for a proactive role as a consistent part of archival work.

Keywords:

records management, file plan, electronic file management system, disposal, digital archiving

Izvleček:

Brez upravljanja z dokumentarnim gradivom ni arhiviranja: praktični vpogled v Mestni in deželni arhiv na Dunaju

V tem prispevku so predstavljeni ukrepi, ki jih je uvedel Mestni in deželni arhiv Dunaja v okviru programa GEMMA 3.0. Le-ta se osredotoča na potek izločanja in arhiviranja v okviru sistema za upravljanje z elektronskim gradivom mestne uprave. Arhivisti s svojo svetovalno vlogo zagotavljajo stalno podporo za pravilno izvajanje klasifikacijskega načrta znotraj sistema. Članek predstavlja analitične metode in praktična orodja, razvita za sistematično čiščenje podatkov, s čimer zagotavljajo doslednost metapodatkov in dolgoročno sledljivost. Avtorica ponuja sklepne ugotovitve o vključevanju arhivistov v upravljanje z dokumentarnim gradivom ustvarjalcev in se zavzema za njihovo proaktivno vlogo kot sestavni del arhivskega dela.

Ključne besede:

upravljanje z dokumentarnim gradivom, klasifikacijski načrt, sistem za upravljanje z elektronskimi dokumenti, izločanje, digitalno arhiviranje

1 Introduction

Archivists are frequently confronted with the transfer of disordered records that must subsequently be organized and made accessible, requiring substantial investments in time and labor. Digital transformation has further added to this challenge in many ways. Therefore, archival professionals must recognize the value of good records management because the consequences of inadequate practices are a persistent challenge for archival work. In general records management can be defined as "the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including the processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records" (ISO 15489-1:2016).

In light of these challenges the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna has decided to play a proactive role in records management measures in the city administration of Vienna.[1] This role is fulfilled in various ways, primarily through the provision of advisory services for the record-creating bodies and by working out file plans and records retention schedules in cooperation with them. Another crucial aspect is the contribution to regulative texts such as records management policies (Büroordnungen) and disposal instructions (Skartierungsordnungen).[2]

Starting in 2023, the involvement of the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna in the records management of the city administration has reached a different quality within the framework of the GEMMA 3.0 program which focuses on the disposal of electronic files from the city government's electronic file management system and their transfer to the digital archive. The archivists provide guidance on implementing the file plans and records retention schedules within the electronic system and offer ongoing and comprehensive support throughout a data cleaning process.

This article outlines the key aspects of the measures initiated by the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna regarding the city administration's records management as part of GEMMA 3.0. The article focuses on the workflow established, the analytical methods applied, and the practical tools developed.

2 Overview of GEMMA 3.0

As stated above, GEMMA 3.0 focuses on the disposal of electronic files from the electronic file management system of the city administration of Vienna and their transfer to the digital archive. ELAK (Elektronischer Akt, literally "electronic file") is based on the Fabasoft eGov Suite and supports fully electronic file management, including an integrated workflow solution (Fabasoft eGov-Suite, 2026).[3] Over a five-year period (2023–2028), all municipal departments and administrative group offices of the city administration undergo the program, resulting in 68 work packages of 11 months in the

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[1] *The provision of advisory support to record-creating bodies regarding their records management is required by law. Gesetz betreffend die Sicherung, Aufbewahrung und Nutzung von in Eigentum oder Verwahrung der Stadt Wien befindlichem Archivgut (Wiener Archivgesetz - Wr.ArchG), LGBl. Nr. 55/2000 idF 42/2018 (2018).*

[2] *For an overview of the digital advisory services of the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna, see Winter K., Stephano A. and Vinandy F. (2026) [manuscript submitted for publication].*

[3] *The workflow functionality allows business processes to be visualized and processed.*

rollout plan.[4] The schedule for an eleven-month work package is as follows (see Figure 1).

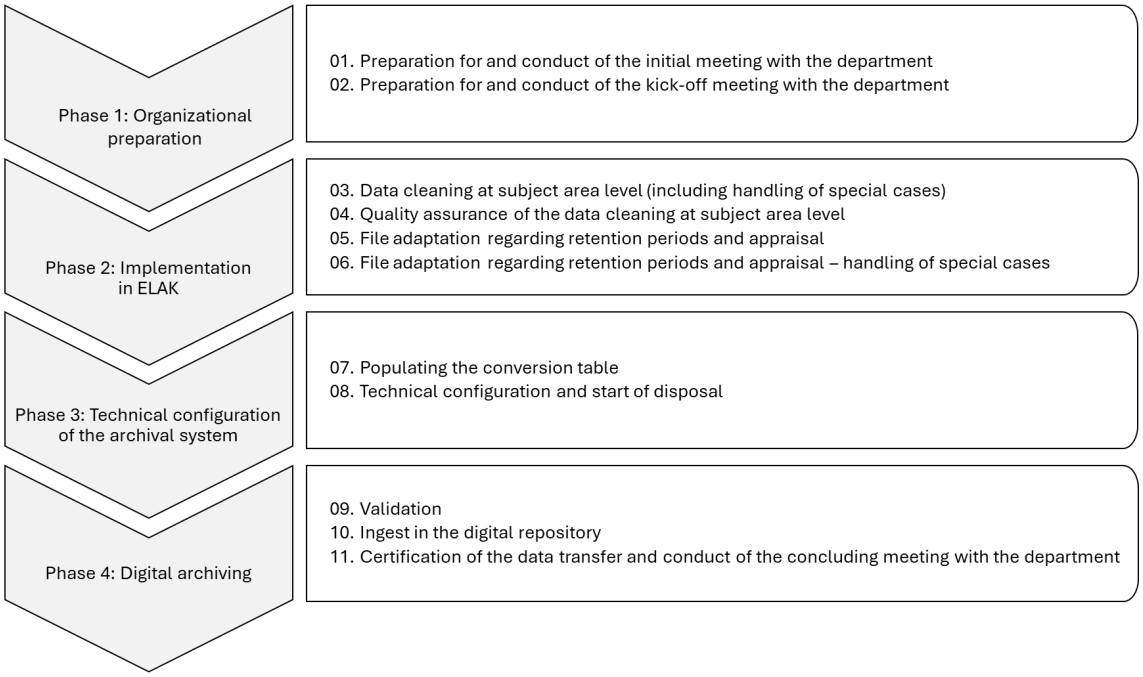


Figure 1: Schedule for an eleven-month work package in GEMMA 3.0

According to the schedule, there are three mandatory meetings, namely the initial meeting as an introductory session, the kick-off meeting to mark the start of the actual activities, and the concluding meeting to complete the work package. Regular follow-up meetings are scheduled as needed in between. Throughout the process the archivists are primarily in close contact with the record-creating bodies during the first four months. This is the period to which the following explanations refer.

[4] *Some work packages are extended to thirteen months. The explanations in this paper are based on the standard eleven-month work package.*

3 Data to Be Processed

In GEMMA 3.0, the entire data in ELAK is being considered which comprises approximately 15.000 subject areas[5] across 214 clients.[6] The data within ELAK can be divided into two categories:

1. There is current data comprising subject areas with metadata and (electronic) files actively used in the departments and regulated in a file plan.
2. There is old data comprising subject areas especially with metadata on (paper) files that has never been regulated in a file plan so far.

With respect to the first category, municipal departments are required to develop file plans and records retention schedules in coordination with the archive for over 15 years.[7] The obligation to maintain a file plan was first embedded in the disposal instruction from 2010[8] and has since been an integral part of both the disposal instruction as well as the records management policy. Both regulative texts are established and published by decree of the Chief Executive Office.[9] While the file plans are a central records management tool for the administrative offices, they work as a central tool for prospective appraisal for the archivists. Processing the first category of data therefore particularly involves providing support for the implementation of the existing file plans within ELAK.

In addition to the current data already regulated by file plans, most time and attention have turned towards the collection of old data, thus the second category. In most cases, old data refers to data that was not regulated by any file plan and/or was often migrated from previous systems. Many municipal departments began using ELAK as an electronic registration system in the early 2000s and migrated data from their previous system PROFI (Protokolliere und Finde, literally “register and find”, also a pun on professional) when they switched to ELAK. Moreover, migration may have been carried out in different ways, depending on differences in structural mapping between PROFI and ELAK. In some cases, protocol groups (Protokollgruppen) became subject areas (Sachgebiete) and subject codes (Betreffcodes) became terms (Begriffe; see Figure 2); in other cases, subject codes became subject areas without further consideration of the protocol groups (see Figure 3). With the latter approach, information

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[5] *A subject area in ELAK contains files related to the same area of activity in accordance with the file plan of a department. Subject areas should be chosen so that they encompass related matters that follow the same workflow or uniform procedure and have the same retention period. Subject areas are converted into record series within the archival information system.*

[6] *A client in ELAK is a domain that contains users (with assigned roles) and the file plans that model a department’s areas of responsibility. Most departments have one client; larger departments with heterogeneous functions may have multiple clients.*

[7] *The beginning of file plans took place with an initial pilot project in 2006 (Rigele, 2007/2008).*

[8] *Allgemeine Vorschrift für das Ausscheiden von Akten (Skartierungsordnung). Neuregelung. Erlass der Magistratsdirektion. (2010). MD-OS-104/2010.*

[9] *Allgemeine Vorschrift für das Ausscheiden von Unterlagen (Skartierungsordnung). Erlass der Magistratsdirektion. (2020). MD-OS-74746-2020; Büroordnung für den Magistrat der Stadt Wien. Erlass der Magistratsdirektion (2025). MDK-19556-2025-1. The structure and composition of the file plans have developed over the years. With the last version of the records management policy, the file plans have been developed into “file and data plans”, gathering information not only about file management within ELAK but also about all data-processing systems (such as specialized information systems, databases, registers, data collections) currently in use. This paper refers only to the part of the file plans that regulates the subject areas in ELAK.*

about the administrative history was lost, which makes it more difficult to contextualize the data retrospectively.

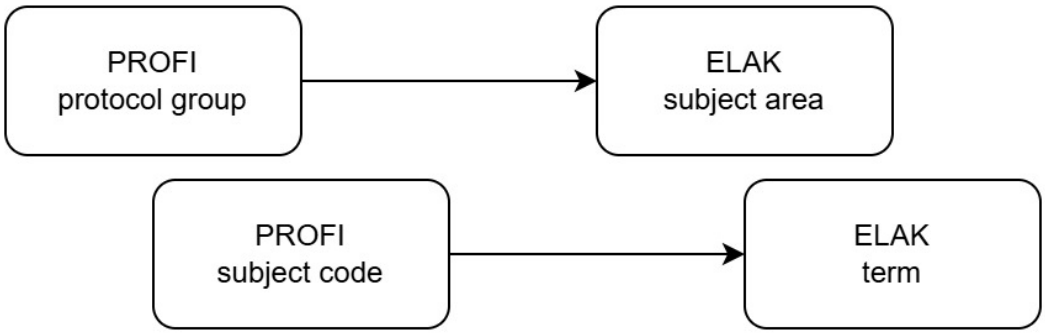


Figure 2: Migration version A

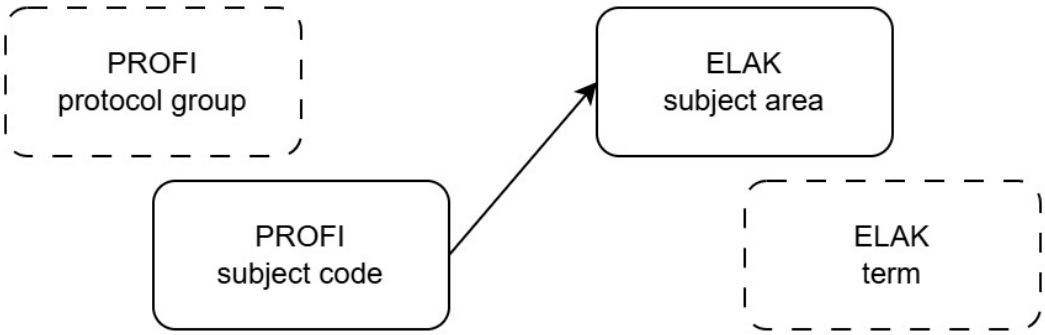


Figure 3: Migration version B

This old data creates significant challenges. It typically dates back more than 20 years and is considered “historical” in many departments. There are only a few departments left with colleagues who originally worked with this data or who are familiar with the organizational structure, task distribution, or registration instructions of that time. For most people in the departments, however, GEMMA 3.0 marks their first encounter with this old data in ELAK.

4 Checklists

Handling old data in ELAK requires a thorough understanding of it. To help municipal departments get started with this topic, checklists were developed and are made available to the departments during the first project meeting. These checklists include 43 detailed questions covering the following topics:

a) Definition of project roles and designated contact persons
b) Administration of ELAK clients, including the number of clients, access rights, the handling of legacy ("historical") clients inherited from other departments, and file management across departments
c) ELAK and previous systems covering the legal basis for electronic records management and the conduct and documentation of migrations from earlier systems
d) Agreed-upon file plans and records retention schedules and their concrete implementation in ELAK
e) General questions on records management and registration practices.

The checklists serve two main purposes. First, they compel the departments to address records management in ELAK and old data in general using a uniform, systematic approach. After all, the departments are responsible for the data as record-creating and/or record-keeping bodies. Second, the checklists facilitate the joint collection of information and the exchange of knowledge between the departments and the archives.

5 Old Data Plans

After gathering all information about the electronic system and the data it holds, the data needs to be processed. The old data – primarily metadata without any electronic content – is regulated in so-called "old data plans". The departments provide a description of the subject areas in question and set retention periods for the records. This is followed by the archivists' appraisal of the subject areas. Once an old data plan is agreed upon, it must be implemented in the system by entering the values in ELAK.

COO Address [unique identifier]	Client	Subject Area	Description	Created on	Valid until	RetentionPeriod	Appraisal	Notes
COO.2039.2181.2.1000251	M20	Training	*to be completed by the department*	02.11.2011	01.03.2012	*to be completed by the department*	*to be completed by the archives*	
COO.2039.2181.2.1000037	M20	Business Travel	*to be completed by the department*	17.01.2011	01.03.2012	*to be completed by the department*	*to be completed by the archives*	
COO.2039.2181.2.15	M20	Energy	*to be completed by the department*	14.01.2011	01.03.2012	*to be completed by the department*	*to be completed by the archives*	
COO.2039.2181.2.1000069	M20	Finance	*to be completed by the department*	22.02.2011	01.03.2012	*to be completed by the department*	*to be completed by the archives*	
COO.2039.2181.2.1000047	M20	Green Energy Subsidies	*to be completed by the department*	18.01.2011	01.03.2012	*to be completed by the department*	*to be completed by the archives*	
COO.2039.2181.2.1000262	M20	Events	*to be completed by the department*	16.12.2011	30.06.2016	*to be completed by the department*	*to be completed by the archives*	
COO.2039.2181.2.1000034	M20	Housing Subsidies	*to be completed by the department*	14.01.2011	30.06.2016	*to be completed by the department*	*to be completed by the archives*	

Figure 4: Simplified and translated example of an old data plan

The specification of retention periods and appraisal decisions is a necessary requirement for the disposal process, because a file must fulfill these two conditions to be disposed of from the system:

1. It must have a retention period so that the system knows when the file is ready to be disposed of.
2. It must be appraised so that the system knows whether it should be transferred to the archives or deleted.[10]

The old data plans serve four main functions. First, they provide a guideline for the systematic processing of old subject areas that departments had not previously been aware of. Second, – like the current file plans – they are a proven tool for archival appraisal. Third, agreement on the old data plan creates an official record documenting decisions on retention periods and appraisal. Fourth, departments provide content descriptions that can subsequently be processed and reused as minimal descriptions for the record series in the archival information system (see below: From Archive to Access). One reason why the instrument of the old data plan has worked quite well is the fact that by the time of its introduction the municipal departments have already been used to regular file plans for over 15 years.

The prevailing approach regarding appraisal until now has been to archive metadata on a broad scale based on its evidential value. However, it has become necessary to depart from this approach when data quality is so poor that it no longer provides meaningful insights and has lost all evidential value. In such cases, the metadata for these subject areas are no longer archived. Old data plans remain the documentation proving that these subject areas once existed.

6 Data Matching

Once all data has been formally regulated, it must be aligned with the data within the electronic system. For this purpose, a data matching process is conducted in which the data from all existing file plans and the agreed old data plans are compared with the current data in ELAK. In this process, the target state of the data (as regulated in the file plans) is systematically compared with the actual state (in ELAK), discrepancies are evaluated, and standardized codes are assigned depending on the type of corrective action required. The table is prepared in such a way that departments can use it as a practical guide for implementing the file plans.

[10] *Values must be correctly entered at the subject areas level (steps 3-4 within the project). These values are then inherited by the files within each subject areas, preparing them for disposal. The technical implementation is carried out by the IT department through automated jobs (steps 5-6 within the project) and is initiated only after the entries at the subject area level have been verified and confirmed by the archivists.*

Code	Title_ELAK	Title_FilePlan	FileReference Number_ELAK	FileReference Number_FilePlan	RetentionPeriod _ELAK	RetentionPeriod _FilePlan	Appraisal_ELAK	Appraisal_FilePlan
0	Budget	Budget	BUD	BUD	7 years	7 years	Archival value (metadata)	Archival value (metadata)
2	Controlling Contract	Controlling Contract	CC	CON	7 years	7 years	Archival value (metadata)	Archival value (metadata)
1	Internal Organization	Organization	ORG	ORG	12 years	12 years	Archival value (metadata & content)	Archival value (metadata & content)
0	Energy Planning Projects	Energy Planning Projects	EPP	EPP	10 years	10 years	Archival value (metadata & content)	Archival value (metadata & content)
4	Renewable Energy	Renewable Energy	RE	RE	10 years	10 years	Archival value (metadata & content)	Archival value (metadata)
3	Public Relations	Public Relations	PR	PR	12 years	7 years	Archival value (metadata & content)	Archival value (metadata & content)

Code Legend
0 = no correction needed
1 = title to be corrected
2 = file reference number to be corrected
3 = retention period to be corrected
4 = appraisal to be corrected

Figure 5: Simplified and translated example of data matching between ELAK (blue columns) and file plans (white columns)

Once the department informs us that all corrections have been implemented in the system, a new round of data matching is conducted. Experience shows that, particularly in larger departments with several hundred subject areas, multiple rounds of corrective measures are required before all entries in the system are correct.

7 Further Data Cleaning Measures

In addition to these fundamental measures for the formal regulation and documentation of the subject areas to be archived from, further actions are taken at a more granular level to consolidate the data in ELAK. Only the most common of these measures shall be presented and explained here.

a) Elimination of empty subject areas

Empty subject areas may exist for various reasons. They may have been created during migration from the previous system PROFI without any data being transferred into the new subject area. They may have been defined in a file plan but were subsequently never used as another subject area has proven more practical for file registration. By identifying and eliminating these empty subject areas, the creation of empty records series in the archival information system and the digital repository is avoided.

b) Renaming subject areas

Some subject areas within a department show duplicate names. These must be corrected not only for “cosmetic” reasons but also because identically named subject areas lead to technical issues in the archiving process. The same applies, for example, to punctuation marks at the end of a subject area title (e.g., “Management, Controlling...”), which can cause technical problems in processing scripts.

In some cases, subject areas are renamed following the archivists’ recommendation when titles are not sufficiently descriptive and unresolved abbreviations would create obstacles in the later use in the archive (for example “CON” instead of “Contracting”). In other cases, renaming is beneficial because fields in the electronic

system were confused in the past and thus used incorrectly (for example, title and file reference number, leading to a title “EM” instead of “Energy Management”).

c) Re-registrations of files

In exceptional cases, re-registrations of files from one subject area to another are initiated; however, this is not done systematically. Such cases may arise, for example, when files of archival value – typically of an organizational nature – have been registered in the wrong subject area that is not intended for archiving, as the remaining files in that subject area lack archival value. In some exceptional cases, re-registration has also been carried out on a larger scale when, over a period of years, records were not consistently managed in accordance with the agreed file plans. Another reason for re-registrations could be when files, occasionally, exist in the system without being assigned to a subject area. This is because the system previously allowed users to register a file without assigning it to a subject area. Only once a file has been registered within a subject area and has inherited its properties (i.e., retention period and appraisal decision), it can be scheduled for disposal.

8 From Archive to Access

Through the steps described above, usually valuable insights into the departments’ records management practices have been gained. The aim is to understand and document the rapid changes that digitization has brought to records management since the early 2000s. Because of this, GEMMA 3.0 represents a previously unprecedented level of engagement with the history of electronic registration and file management systems in the city administration. Hence, the information gathered in GEMMA 3.0 is internally documented and incorporated into the cataloguing data, as it provides important contextual information regarding the history of administration and the collection. In this way, this contextual information is preserved permanently and made available to future users. The metadata for digital records in the archival information system thus consists of:

- metadata from the electronic system ELAK
- data from the agreed-upon file plans and records retention schedules
- additional contextual information from information gathering and knowledge exchange with the departments, particularly from the checklists (especially relevant for the administrative and archival history of the records).

This data is further processed by archivists and imported into the archival information system using a conversion table. This is part of the technical configuration (step 7) within the project.

9 Role of the Disposition Manager

Each department must designate a person to serve as the disposition manager for GEMMA 3.0. In most cases, this is the head of the administrative office and/or the person responsible for the file plan. Since the role of the disposition manager has proven highly effective as the single point of contact for the archive, this role will be retained even after the program for all matters related to analog and digital records management. Both the role and the responsibilities will be codified in the future records disposal instructions. In

order to achieve this, it was necessary to convince the relevant stakeholders of the need for a permanent point of contact for the archives and to present this as a contribution to the improvement of records management within the city administration. The contact person shall coordinate and be responsible for the tasks of regular and automatic disposal (archiving or deletion/destruction) of files and data held by the department as well as records from the electronic file management system and other specialized information systems within the department. During the project's concluding meeting, the department will be explicitly made aware that any changes to the file plan and in the electronic system must be coordinated with the archives.

Of course, a one-time nomination of a contact person (and their substitute) is not sufficient to ensure the long-term and sustainable existence of such a role. Rather, a permanent relationship must be established: Contacts must be maintained, and communication must be ensured. One measure to establish a long-term platform for exchange was an online meeting in March 2026 where all contact persons throughout the administration were invited. It was attended by approximately 50 people. Following a brief presentation, participants had the opportunity to engage in dialogue. From this It has become clear that needs can vary drastically and depend on several factors, such as the disposition manager’s level of knowledge regarding the previous records management within the department, the size of the departments, and how regular record disposal has been handled to date. It is important to provide a framework in which these needs can be articulated as easily as possible.

10 Conclusion

It is fair to say that GEMMA 3.0 shows how digital archiving can extend well beyond technical tasks. Within the program a deliberate decision was made to ensure data cleaning and normalization before ingesting records into the digital archive. Further, a set of methods and tools was developed to ensure a uniform, repeatable process across all record-creating bodies, accompanied by ongoing advisory support to departments. This ensures that both sides benefit from the advisory services. For the record-creating bodies, it provides concrete support in managing their records. For the archive, it lays the groundwork for a structured transfer of records and enables prospective appraisal based on file plans which represents a long-term paradigm shift that is emerging in the digital age (Verband Österreichischer Archivarinnen und Archivare / Arbeitsgruppe Überlieferungsbildung und Bewertung, 2021).

Early intervention in the records lifecycle by actively supporting record-creating bodies in their records management practices reduces the likelihood of receiving chaotic or poorly structured accessions. The recommendation that archivists should take a proactive and engaged role must of course be understood as a positioning in the ongoing and lively debate about archival involvement. Out of the experiences of GEMMA 3.0, it can be argued that active engagement by archivists is necessary to safeguard long term accessibility of records. When accessioned data and records arrive in disordered states, ensuring public access and reliably documenting administrative decision making becomes nearly impossible.

However, all these measures come at a cost: In the current seven-person team, these activities have – during intensive periods – consumed up to about 60% of staff capacity. As of now it remains uncertain how the workload will develop as the project scales and matures. As GEMMA 3.0 is so far deemed a success and the archive is increasingly perceived as a reliable expert contact within the administration, the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna plans to continue this path in the same or at

least similar fashion. This means that playing a proactive role in records management measures is likely to be reinforced and become a regular component of archival work.

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POVZETEK

BREZ UPRAVLJANJA Z DOKUMENTARNIM GRADIVOM NI ARHIVIRANJA: PRAKTIČNI VPOGLED V MESTNI IN DEŽELNI ARHIV NA DUNAJU

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Mestni in deželni arhiv Dunaja ima v okviru tako imenovanega programa GEMMA 3.0 vodilno vlogo pri vrednotenju, uničevanju in dolgoročni hrambi dokumentov, ki nastajajo v sistemu za upravljanje elektronskih dokumentov mestne uprave. Arhivisti v tesnem sodelovanju z oddelki, ki ustvarjajo dokumente, nudijo smernice za izvajanje njihovih klasifikacijskih načrtov in rokov hrambe znotraj elektronskega sistema, s čimer zagotavljajo ustrezno usklajenost administrativnih praks z arhivskimi zahtevami.

V okviru svoje svetovalne vloge zagotavljajo arhivisti stalno in celovito podporo skozi celoten proces upravljanja dokumentov. To vključuje sistematično analizo dokumentov, shranjenih v sistemu, in pripravo dokumentov za prenos v digitalni arhiv. Cilj je ohraniti dosledno kakovost metapodatkov in izvesti celovite postopke čiščenja podatkov, preden so dokumenti vneseni v digitalni arhiv. Ti pripravljalni ukrepi zagotavljajo konsistentne in koherentne dokumente, ki verodostojno dokumentirajo administrativne odločitve in podpirajo dolgoročno sledljivost.

Prispevek se ne osredotoča na tehnično vpeljavo same infrastrukture za digitalno arhiviranje, temveč na vzpostavljeni delovni tok, uporabljene analitične metode in izvedene praktične postopke. Obravnava konkretne izzive, ki so se pojavili v zadnjih dveh letih in pol, ter rešitve, ki so bile sprejete kot odgovor nanje. Te vključujejo na primer upravljanje prenesenih starih podatkovnih nizov z nezadostno kakovostjo metapodatkov, praktične rešitve glede nedoločenih rokov hrambe v elektronskem sistemu in strategije za ohranjanje stabilnega stanja podatkov tudi po uradnem zaključku projekta (nadzor kakovosti/evalvacija).

Avtorica ponuja praktičen vpogled v sodobne postopke in strategije rešitev na področjih upravljanja dokumentov, njihovega vrednotenja in uničevanja v okviru delovanja dunajske mestne uprave. O metodah, uporabljenih v okviru programa GEMMA 3.0, bomo razmišljali v kontekstu širših strokovnih razprav in trendov na področjih digitalnega vodenja dokumentov in arhiviranja.

About the author:

Anouk Stephano is an archivist at the Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna, where she has been involved in the systematic disposal and digital archiving process from the central electronic records management system since 2023. She holds a bachelor's degree in Cultural Studies from the University of Saarland (Germany) and a master's degree in Auxiliary Sciences of History and Archival Studies from the University of Vienna (Austria). With her master's thesis on Records in Contexts, she evaluated and situated the conceptual model in the traditions and developments of archival description as well as in archival theory. Her research interests include but are

not limited to archival description, data modelling, as well as the conceptual understanding of and the access to digital information.

O avtorici:

Anouk Stephano je arhivistka v Mestnem in deželnem arhivu na Dunaju, kjer od leta 2023 sodeluje pri procesih sistematičnega izločanja in digitalnega arhiviranja v okviru centralnega sistema za upravljanje elektronskih dokumentov. Ima diplomo iz kulturnih študij Univerze v Saarlandu (Nemčija) in magistrski naziv iz pomožnih zgodovinskih ved ter arhivistike Univerze na Dunaju (Avstrija). V svoji magistrski nalogi, ki se dotika konceptualnega modela Records in Contexts, je umestila in ovrednotila ta model glede na tradicijo in razvoj arhivskega popisovanja ter arhivsko teorijo. Njena raziskovalna področja vključujejo arhivsko popisovanje, modeliranje podatkov, konceptualno razumevanje digitalnih informacij in dostopanje do njih.