

TOWARDS THE INFORMATION SOCIETY: THE BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW RECORDS CULTURE

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Though the ages (Antiquity, Middle Ages, Modernity and the Present), humanity developed successive cultural systems: oral, written, print, industrial, and electronic. The records culture is a component, or manifestation, of nearly every type of culture. Records culture should be defined as the overall body of motivations, attitudes and behaviours of the producers and users of records that occur during the planned and effective creation, collection, retention, processing, and sharing.

Key words: information society, information culture, records culture, record-keeping

The level of development of societies is most often measured by the degree to which their culture has evolved, and culture is sometimes described as the level of development of societies, groups or individuals in a given historical period; in some cases, culture is considered synonymous with civilisation. The model of European culture, which is most frequently referenced in various research materials, involves the periodisation of history into ages: Antiquity, Middle Ages, Modernity, and the Present. This division coincides with major periods in the history of humankind, from hunting and gathering to the agrarian society, industrial society and, eventually, information society. Throughout that time, humanity developed successive cultural systems. At the

same time, an increasing number of types of cultures were defined, and the term itself proved to be ambiguous, prone to abuse and difficult to determine [6, 4]. In the context of this paper, culture should be understood as “the entire body of products of human activity; tangible and intangible values and accepted codes of conduct, objectivised and accepted within any community, and handed down to other communities and successive generations” [15, 78].

Among many types of cultures, one that warrants attention is the records culture, which is a component or manifestation of nearly every type of culture and at the same time an area where different cultures overlap. Records culture has no fixed place in the

typology of cultures, or in the hierarchy of various categories of culture. As an element, it manifests itself and functions in every sphere of social life; this is probably why it remains unnoticed as something too obvious, and therefore has not yet become a subject of academic research. At the same time, due to a characteristic that no other type of culture possesses, it can document various manifestations of social life, i.e. record them and pass on to future generations.

Records culture should be defined as the overall body of motivations, attitudes and behaviours of the producers and users of records that occur during the planned and effective creation, collection, retention, processing and sharing of such records by using methods and principles of comprehensive records management, and by employing available tools, techniques and technologies.

Elements or features of the records culture are the objects, ideas, and actions (models of actions) that determine activities and behaviours important for a group to exist and develop (i.e. activities and behaviours that organise, focus and determine the conduct of others). They may include, for instance, constitutions, acts, codified law, norms and regulations, a signed document that certifies membership of an organisation, an identity card or a passport, a signed endorsement of a specific initiative, or the complete body of records produced as a result of the operation of a single institution (the creator).

Records culture is most closely related to information culture, communication culture and organisational culture. Organisational culture creates social order, establishes group

identity and shared commitment, generates social bonds, and determines the morale, commitment, efficiency and emotional state of the workforce [2]. As a result, records culture is an indispensable part of organisational culture and serves as a means of communication both within and outside an organisation. An institution influences its environment by using a variety of techniques, means and methods, and the written or printed word is believed to be one of the most important vehicles [7, 68]. Organisational culture, is historically determined and reflects the history of an organisation. Importantly, history could only be preserved through records; therefore records culture is, to a certain degree, part of organisational culture.

Records and record-keeping are the product of a certain culture, its medium and symbol. Consequently, the level of development of societies can be measured by the degree to which their records culture has evolved, and systems of culture can be regarded as stages in the development of records culture. Records culture is the most important part of culture, and its products are handed down to future generations as the cultural heritage.

The social, economic, cultural and political development of the world has been made possible by information, its exchange as part of communication processes, and its property of accumulation. Each change of the cultural system occurred as a result of information and communication revolutions, the first of which was the appearance of speech as a product of abstract thinking, followed by the invention of writing, and then print,

the telegraph, photography, film, radio and television, and (most recently) the computer [5]. According to Peter Drucker, humanity is currently experiencing the fourth information revolution (the first being the invention of print in Mesopotamia 5000 to 6000 years ago, the second being the invention of the book in China around 1300 B.C., and the third being the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg) [3]. Naturally, this is a generalisation, since changes of the cultural system have never occurred simultaneously in all communities of the world.

Societies have always needed means and instruments of communication, as well as means of recording the messages being communicated. From the oldest system of oral (spoken) culture, civilised societies of the world progressed to written culture. As a prerequisite for this type of civilisation to come into existence, it was necessary to record speech and ideas in order to preserve them and convey across space and time. This was made possible by the invention of writing, i.e. a system of graphic signs with the associated rules of usage. Writing played a major social role as a means of recording messages of various nature and function, allowing people to communicate across space and time [8, 304]. Documents created in Ancient and Mediaeval scriptoria marked the beginning of records culture.

The next system is based on the culture of print, also referred to as typographic culture. The revolutionary invention of movable type and print radically changed the religious, political, cultural and academic reality of Europe, both at the social and the individual levels, providing greater and more efficient

opportunities to convey cultural messages by means of duplication. The records culture began to encompass ever broader communities with the increasing literacy of societies, i.e. the growing proportion of people who could read and write (and were both producers and consumers of culture).

The end of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the Modern Age saw the redefinition of the social system and its evolution towards an industrial society. The industrial cultural system (based on telecommunications and information technology), with its most rapid development in the 19th and 20th centuries, left its mark on human communication through successive inventions: photography, motion picture (film), and television. The products of that culture, namely photographic, film and television footage, provide a record and proof of how human civilisations have ascended to higher and higher levels. What becomes clear is the authors' awareness that they are working not so much for themselves or their institutions (as was the case in earlier ages), but rather for the future generations, and that their work involves the creation of culture in terms of its reception and role (as a carrier of information on the past) for posterity [16, 26].

Such advances in technology as new duplication techniques and the invention of photography and motion pictures, however, were not as major a shock as computer technology, which is the symbol of information culture, the cultural system of the highest form of development in human civilisation – the information society.

The information society is the stage of social development that follows the traditio-

nal feudal society and the modern industrial society. It is the product of the information revolution and the technological progress that has enabled information to be collected, stored, processed, shared, retrieved and transferred across space and time, in any form and regardless of size. Here, information and knowledge play a special role; the same is true of the techniques and equipment used to transmit and process information and knowledge, namely computers and computer networks [13]. A member of this society, the *homo informaticus*, is aware that all of his or her activity is based on obtaining, creating, processing and using information [9, 177]. The information society undergoes the process of IT literacy acquisition, that is gaining the ability to use the computer and the latest communications technologies.

The information civilisation around the world, and especially in late 20th century Europe, faced a number of challenges, such as driving the development and adoption of information and communications technology and investment in the information network infrastructure, increasing innovation in the economy, using information technology to meet global demographic and environmental challenges, embracing the globalisation of the economy, improving the availability of university education, adapting the education system to the requirements of the information technology civilisation era and preventing the conflicts that it entails [4, 123].

Information societies have produced a new type of culture – information culture [1]. One could even go as far as saying that the new information culture has been built from

ground up, beginning with general access to the developments of the modern civilisation – information and communications networks. Information culture is often considered equivalent to the ability to use information and take advantage of new information handling technologies. Also referred to as online culture or Internet culture, this type of culture is characteristic of the highest stages of development of the human civilization.

For records culture, this stage of development primarily meant the appearance of the electronic record which, while not setting new standards in terms of classification, still raised the bar as regards how the information being recorded is organised, and what methods and tools are used to retrieve it. The new records culture means that every member of society is prepared to participate in both the creation and reception of information. This requirement is the same as in previous cultural systems; however, it requires significantly greater effort from every member of society in order to avoid exclusion.

The information and records culture of European society at the close of the industrial era of the late 20th and early 21st century not only required specific efforts in the field of infrastructure (which largely relied on the involvement of the state), but also affected each individual member of society in terms of their ability to take advantage of the new proposition. This applied to both IT literacy acquisition and the overcoming of psychological and mental barriers to accept the computer and the Internet as convenient tools that make day-to-day life and work easier, thus delivering measurable benefits.

The new information and records culture means an efficient and effective communication, or flow of information. The information culture involves, among other things, attention to the quality of source data, the ability to work as a team (including the ability to convey clear, specific information and share knowledge), and the skills required to utilise computer-based information resources and use information in decision-making processes [14]. Records culture, in turn, involves the ability to record information in an appropriate form (i.e. as electronic records), protected using appropriate authentication and access control methods (electronic signature) and tagged in compliance with clerical procedures; records management to mitigate potential record-keeping chaos, and the treatment of records as a shared asset which, in part, consists of archival material to be retained in perpetuity to certify the existence and operation of an organization.

The following are typically considered to be indicators of information culture: the culture of language, the culture of thought, and the culture of action [12, 197]. The same indicators also apply to records culture.

The culture of language is the vocabulary and the manner in which ideas are expressed; the richer the language and terminology, the higher the culture of language. For the purposes of records culture, a useful definition of the culture of language explains it as “conscious and deliberate use of language in all communication environments” [11, 1650] and the ability to speak and write correctly in accordance with linguistic standards accepted in a particular community [10, 16]. Johann G. Herder has already noted

that, within the context of culture in general, language plays an exceptional role as an art of expressing ideas by means of sounds, voices that are spoken [6, 161]. Today, the culture of language is affected (or rather impoverished) by information technology. In the era of the information society, one can see barbarisation or even vulgarisation of language, especially in individual communication processes over the Internet. In official language, on the other hand, there is a trend towards standardisation and simplification, which progresses at a much faster rate than at the time when its first forms were introduced.

The culture of thought is the manner in which the surrounding reality is captured, and conceptual models of phenomena, events, processes and objects, being part of that reality, are built [4, 192]. Since thought precedes linguistic utterance, the above comments could be reiterated at this point. Lastly, the culture of action as an indicator of information culture relates to one’s attitude towards information, the understanding of its essence, and its application (including the ability to do so).

With respect to records culture, manifestations of each of the above indicators can be added, i.e.:

- culture of thought → information,
- culture of language → communication, and
- culture of action → records.

Importantly, records as a manifestation of the culture of action are a product of the attitude to information, i.e. the willingness and ability to record it.

The current information revolution is unprecedented in terms of the volume of

information, the speed at which it is disseminated, the low cost involved, and the breadth of the audience. At the same time, one can see a dramatic reduction in the time required for the changes to occur, and in the duration of the new information and records culture. Essentially, it encompasses the lifespan of one generation, two at most.

What comes next? In the first decade of the 21st century, digital technology

dominated the world, with the resulting convergence of the media, computer and communications technologies. Will the humanity create a cyber-culture in a new technocratic society? Or will these processes only give a new image to information and records culture? Will the traces and products of the new records culture serve as a testimony to the past in the same manner as paper documents did?

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INFORMACINĖS VISUOMENĖS LINK: NAUJOS DOKUMENTŲ KULTŪROS RADIMASIS IR RAIDA

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Santrauka

Kultūra bendrąja prasme dažnai suprantama kaip visuomenės, jos grupių ar atskirų asmenų išsivystymo lygmuo. Europietiškos kultūros modelyje, kuris dažniausiai pateikiamas mokslinėje literatūroje, istorija skirstoma į tam tikrus periodus: antiką, viduramžius, modernizmą ir dabartį. Toks skirstymas sutampa su svarbiausiais žmonijos istorijos periodais, nuo medžioklės ir gamtos gėrybių rinkimo iki agrarinės, industrinės ir galiausiai informacinės visuomenės. Per tą laikotarpį žmonija išvystė kultūrinių sistemų seką – nuo žodinės per rašytinę, spaudos, industrinę iki elektroninės. Kaskart kultūrinė sistema pasikeisdavo dėl informacinės ir komunikacinės revoliucijos; pirmoji revoliucija – kalbos kaip abstraktaus mąstymo produkto atsiradimas; paskui ėjo raštas, spauda, telegrafas, fotografija, kinas, radijas ir televizija, galiausiai – kompiuteris.

Visais laikais visuomenei reikėjo komunikacijos priemonių, būdų perduodamoms žinioms užrašyti. Atsiradus raštui, ši vaidmenį atliko dokumentai. Taip prasidėjo dokumentų kultūra, kuri gimė viduramžių raštinėse ir kanceliarijose. Kultūra vystėsi augant visuomenės raštingumui, t. y. daugėjant raštingų žmonių, kurie buvo tiek kultūros kūrėjai, tiek jos vartotojai. Šis procesas šiandien vadinamas IT raštingumu, t. y. gebėjimu naudoti kompiuterį ir naujausias komunikacijų technologijas. Dokumentai ir jų saugojimas yra tam tikros kultūros produktas ir kartu jos

terpė bei simbolis. Taigi visuomenės išsivystymo lygį galima matuoti lygmeniu, kurį pasiekė jos dokumentų kultūra, o kultūros sistemas vertinti kaip rašto kultūros vystymosi etapus.

Dokumentų kultūra – tai jų autorių ir naudotojų motyvacijos, požiūrių ir elgsenos visuma, kuri atsiranda planingai ir našiai kuriant, renkiant, saugant, apdorojant ir vartojant dokumentus, pasitelkiant jų visapusiško tvarkymo metodus ir principus, technikas ir technologijas.

Informacijos visuomenė sukūrė naują kultūros tipą – informacijos kultūrą, kuri dažnai tapatinama su gebėjimu naudotis informacija ir jos tvarkymo technologijomis. Šis kultūros tipas, dar vadinamas interneto kultūra, būdingas aukščiausiems žmonijos civilizacijos išsivystymo lygiams. Dokumentų kultūroje šis išsivystymo lygis visų pirma reiškė elektroninio dokumento atsiradimą; nors ir netaikydamas naujų klasifikacijos standartų, šis lygis vis dėlto padidino informacijos dokumentavimo, jos gavimo metodų ir įrankių reikalavimus. Naujoji dokumentų kultūra reiškia, kad kiekvienas visuomenės narys yra pasirengęs dalyvauti informacijos kūrimo ir atgaminimo procesuose.

Kultūra yra žmogaus kūrinys, daugybės žmogaus veiklos formų išdava. Žmogus sukūrė ir dokumentų kultūrą, tobulino ją ilgus šimtmečius, taigi ji apima beveik visą žmoniją. Tai svarbiausia kultūros dalis, ir jos vaisiai perduodami iš kartos į kartą kaip kultūros paveldas.

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