

Wrapping Records in Narratives – Representing Context through Archival Description (Peter Horsman, Univ. Amsterdam)

Archival documents are different from other documentary materials, not in the first place because of the form of material, but rather because of the administrative provenance, that is: the business processes in which they fulfilled their role. The originating organization (records creator), its functions and processes determine the meaning of the documents. Traditional archival theory conceptualized this phenomenon in the principle of provenance, which obliged archivists to arrange the documents by records creator, and, if possible, according to original classification.

Current archival thinking gives less importance to physical arrangement, but focusses on establishing multiple relationships through description. Over the last decades the International Council on Archives developed a set of four international standards, covering both the description of the archival collections, as well as the creating bodies, the business functions and the repositories that hold the records.

This paper discusses a possible method for describing the collections of ITS, based on emerging archival thinking and compliant with international standards, but without the need to physically re-arrange the records, and maintaining the usability of existing finding aids.