

## *Review Articles*

### *Unesco's RAMP Programme: A Pause to Reflect*

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This brief survey of the documents and some other activities of the Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) represents the personal opinions of the author, who accepts any blame that may arise from the expression of them, but who wishes to make a respectful gesture — a wave of gratitude and admiration — to the Director and staff of Unesco's General Programme of Information (PGI). Some of this acknowledgement is also due to the authors of RAMP studies, who in general are an interesting band, possibly the best international club of archivists.

The international aspect of archives work is slowly becoming more obvious to the generality of colleagues working in repositories other than those in the great national centres. From a position of invisibility, the international contribution now seems to offer the prospect of authoritative support in several areas of professional concern. The growth of the perception of this by ordinary archivists is one of the constant features of professional experience over the last two decades. It is not a feature which would necessarily have been foreseen before that time. Of all information-related jobs, those in archives are most deeply rooted in local knowledge and interests, which perhaps tends to restrict the imaginative horizons. Most archivists see their main professional virtue (rightly, indeed) in becoming expert in the subjects documented by their holdings. This has meant that professional methodology has tended to be robustly home-made. Archivists have often had a built-in resistance to ideas and practices which come from international, or at least non-domestic, sources.

Education, culture, knowledge and information were agreed to fall in the province of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco), when the modern UN system was inaugurated after the Second World War. In the ensuing scramble for host countries, France made the successful bid, and secured the headquarters of this agency for Paris. Today the Unesco building stands not far from the Eiffel Tower, and is one of the tourist sites of the city. By 1966, a specialized department was formed to deal with the development of libraries, documentation and archives (DBA). An expert in archives was appointed, and a development programme begun which was well under way by the start of the 1970s. Development work took the same pattern as with most external aid, consisting mainly of projects financed and operated

either by the Unesco Participation Programme with individual countries, or by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These projects varied in size from the very small, such as the gift of some shelving, to the quite ambitious, such as the establishment of a model national archives service. This invaluable aspect of international aid still continues, though with a much reduced budget, and has an important contribution to make. The initiative in setting up these aid projects often comes from the Unesco National Commission, which exists in each member country, and therefore the whole programme has something of a reactive appearance.<sup>1</sup> Each of these projects resulted in a published report, and many of these reports are of value as models for similar action elsewhere, or as studies of a particular problem. The PGI has always been particularly interested in training, which is after all the key to development. In this field, the most successful project was the foundation of the regional training school for French-speaking Africa, at Dakar, in the early 1970s. A similar venture for English-speaking Africa, based in Ghana was not so successful, owing to political and economic problems, but is still in operation.

The first archival expert to be appointed to the DBA was Alfred Wagner, on secondment from the West German Bundesarchiv, and a very well-known and popular colleague. Under him archival development work expanded, and began to show evidence of proactive thinking. These were the good years, when there was still much optimism about external aid, and when Unesco's budget had not been decimated by the withdrawal of the USA and Britain. Following this initial success, in 1977 the DBA was taken into a larger department, the General Information Programme (PGI), which since 1985 has itself come within the General Programmes and Programme Support Sector of Unesco. In 1976 Dr. Wagner left, and Frank Evans, seconded from the National Archives of the USA, and well-known to many of this journal's readers, took over. Under him archival activities burgeoned, and despite financial cutbacks and the absence of a full-time archival expert since 1985, the programmes initiated then are, on the whole, still running. Much work has been done, and much effort went into the planning and financing of it. The rest of this paper is really a discussion of what was planned and done during the Evans régime, and an attempt at evaluating it as it stands in 1990.

In Unesco, archives were seen from the beginning as one of the three main branches of information work. The other branches were of course librarianship and information science (or "documentation," as it was termed in the French tradition). This perception was not a usual one in many of the member countries, though it is certainly a feature of French culture. It was natural in this context that overall information strategies should have included an archival contribution. This contribution was not strong in the first of Unesco's grand schemes, for an international exchange of data on scientific and technological subjects: this was UNISIST, started in 1971. When this scheme came to be revamped, however, the scientific and technological bias was reduced, and the aim broadened. NATIS, the successor programme, introduced in 1974, visualized national information systems which would include archives and which would be planned in an integrated way. The round of conferences and specialist meetings which were called in connection with NATIS had a strong archival component. Some of the initial papers presented proved to be seminal.<sup>2</sup> NATIS was successful in stimulating the development of information services in several small countries, particularly in the Caribbean, but the concept was always difficult in the larger ones. A later development was the programme for promoting harmonization in information training, which had been an element in the

NATIS plan but which was launched as a separate project in 1979. The high point of this scheme came in 1984, when papers were commissioned to provide harmonized training syllabuses in management, information technology and user studies.<sup>3</sup> There was a follow-up in 1987, when IFLA held a further international seminar on harmonization in association with its annual congress in London.<sup>4</sup> Resolutions were then passed which advised information training schools to seek harmonization among the three branches, and gave guidelines on how this might be done. Broadly, the approach was to provide a separate training channel for each of the three professions, but to harmonize particular elements (for example, management studies or information training) wherever possible. Many harmonized areas could be visualised.

Looking back from 1990, an archivist's judgement on all this is moderately pessimistic. The harmonized approach is not one that appeals to every archivist, though the case for preserving a distinct professional education for each of the professions (while combining common elements) was fully made and is written into all the reports. Some of the new information training courses and schools which have appeared since, have adopted the Unesco approach at least in principle.<sup>5</sup> No example of established training schools radically restructuring their courses to accommodate harmonization has come to notice otherwise. Soon after the last of the harmonization meetings Unesco's continuing political and financial crises began, which have crippled its main programmes ever since. However, it ought to be said that the experience of debating common problems and aims with members of the other information professions was a useful and refreshing one, and that many of the contributory papers were useful in other work.

In its present form, the Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP) was invented by Frank Evans while he was the archive expert of the PGI. The programme began in 1979, and by the spring of 1990 it had produced 76 reports and documents on virtually all aspects of archive work. The flow of new documents, although reduced by Unesco's financial and staffing difficulties, continues, and there are periodic reassessments of the programme.<sup>6</sup> The RAMP documents are instantly recognizable by their format: "A 4" booklets with white paper covers. A complete set by now forms a solid block of paper longer than a standard one-metre bookshelf. They are distributed with Unesco materials to major libraries and to anyone else who asks to be on the mailing list. There have been some difficulties of supply, and some complaints that copies have not always been sent in response to requests, but Unesco officials have repeatedly assured archivists that RAMP documents are sent out free of charge to all who ask for them,<sup>7</sup> as long as stock remains. The RAMP documents, written mostly in English, French and Spanish, but with some available also in Arabic and Russian, comprise studies, guidelines and readers, and deal with a wide range of professional problems. About half a dozen of them have acquired the status of definitive standards. The following is a list of some which would generally be admitted as such:

- Felix Hull, *The use of sampling techniques in the retention of records*. (PGI-81/WS/26), 1981.
- Rosemary Seton, *The preservation and administration of private archives*. (PGI-84/WS/6), 1984.
- Derek Charman, *Records surveys and schedules*. (PGI-84/WS/26), 1984.
- Harold Naugler, *The archival appraisal of machine-readable records*. (PGI-84/WS/27), 1984.

Eric Ketelaar, *Archival and records management legislation and regulations*. (PGI-85/WS/9), 1985.

Sally Buchanan, *Disaster planning, preparedness and recovery for libraries and archives*. (PGI-88/WS/6), 1988.

This list of what might be called the "Top Six" gives quite a good idea of the range and approach of the series. There are several other candidates for inclusion in it.

Most of the RAMP studies deal with topics or problems which are commonly met with on the shop floor of any archive service, whether in the developing or in the developed world — this indeed is one of the principal strengths of the series. There are two topics which are seen from an international standpoint and which receive especially full attention. These are the interchange of archival materials as a result of changes in the world scene (this is linked with microfilming); and the archives and records management of the international agencies themselves. On the first of these, five RAMP studies deal with questions of international exchange and transfer, and another one with the associated matter of the legal validity of microforms. There is a model bilateral and multilateral agreement for the transfer of archives (in consequence of boundary changes, newly granted independence, etc.);<sup>8</sup> feasibility studies on the exchange of materials by microform, and by the creation of a database; and a substantial study of the obstacles to data transfer.<sup>9</sup> Problems connected with archival management in the international system are dealt with in a series of reports which cover the development of archives and records management for the principal agencies,<sup>10</sup> appraisal,<sup>11</sup> managing electronic records,<sup>12</sup> and user access.<sup>13</sup> There is also a three-part guide to the content and range of the UN archives.<sup>14</sup> All these reports by archivists with international reputations, are valuable studies in themselves and for comparative reference.

Perhaps it would be suitable to add a third class to these two areas of international work. This would contain the four RAMP studies which deal with international exchange and transfer. This is of course a field which can only really be dealt with by an international agency, and though it does not touch the daily affairs of most of us, at least directly, where it does apply it is vital. The series began with a model bilateral and multilateral agreement and convention governing the transfer of archives.<sup>15</sup> Next came a feasibility study on the creation of an internationally financed and managed microfilming assistance fund to facilitate the solution of problems involved in the international transfer of archives, and in obtaining access to sources of national history located in foreign archives;<sup>16</sup> this was followed by a similar study in support of a database to contain national historical sources in foreign repositories.<sup>17</sup>

The remaining RAMP studies are general, and provide expert examinations of many of the central professional problems. The following is a list of the subject headings on which there is one or more studies. (See next page) It would be tedious to list every publication under these headings. Some have turned out to be too ephemeral, too much concerned with the situation in a single region, or badly designed. Some, though carrying authority, have turned out rather too general or abstract to be practically useful, especially after the first few years. Most have a wide and continuing value, however, and should be mentioned by name.

The topic with the largest number of studies, perhaps predictably, is that of conservation. Several studies set out to provide models for conservation workshops and programmes, and for the conservational aspects of archival repositories.<sup>18</sup> The most

| Topic                         | Number of studies |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| access and use                | 2                 |
| archives in technical formats | 5                 |
| automation                    | 3                 |
| educational uses              | 1                 |
| guides and inventories        | 1                 |
| international standards       | 3                 |
| machine-readable archives     | 1                 |
| microforms                    | 2                 |
| moving images                 | 1                 |
| oral tradition                | 1                 |
| photographs                   | 2                 |
| conservation                  | 15                |
| professional associations     | 1                 |
| professional journals         | 1                 |
| role in national planning     | 2                 |
| security and storage          | 2                 |
| sound recordings              | 1                 |
| professional standing         | 3                 |
| surveys                       | 2                 |
| training                      | 2                 |
| user services                 | 1                 |

valuable of all the studies are those which give an expert view of a specific, usually highly, technical aspect of conservation. These are the most authoritative documents available for those subjects at the moment. Among this group should be counted the study on mass conservation techniques;<sup>19</sup> the study on integrated pest management for libraries and archives;<sup>20</sup> the impact of environmental pollution on the preservation of archives and records;<sup>21</sup> the prevention and treatment of mould, especially in tropical climates;<sup>22</sup> and vacuum freeze-drying, as a method of salvaging water-damaged archival and library materials.<sup>23</sup> The study on disaster planning, preparedness and recovery for libraries and archives deserves an honourable mention, though on this topic other studies exist in commercial publications.<sup>24</sup> There is a useful review of training needs in preservation and conservation, needs which are probably the greatest priority in archival development in the world today,<sup>25</sup> and are certainly not discussed elsewhere. Taken together, the RAMP publications on preservation would probably be sufficient to give the archivists of a small country enough theoretical and practical information to set up and run a conservation programme. It is to be hoped that the series will continue to examine particular technical problems, especially since it is clear that many more of these will emerge in the future.

The analysis so far has shown that the great strength of the RAMP series is in timely and accurate studies of very specific problems or aspects of archival work. This generalization is true over the whole range of publications. In fact, very few could be called general, theoretical or abstract. The most abstract are the studies of training curricula, both for the general training of archivists and for their training in information technology. This is a somewhat difficult admission to make, for two of them happen to be by the present author,<sup>26</sup> but it is perhaps impossible to avoid in work which is intended to institutionalize what has hitherto been rather bits-and-pieces approaches to

training. Only the study on writing general guides approaches this degree of abstraction,<sup>27</sup> together with those on the role of archives in national systems.<sup>28</sup> Most of the rest maintain the tradition of authoritative specialization. All the major texts cited above belong to this group. In addition, there are important studies on the management of archives in special formats: appraisal of moving images;<sup>29</sup> appraisal and conservation of photographic archives;<sup>30</sup> appraisal of sound recordings.<sup>31</sup> The concentration on appraisal and technical preservation is noteworthy: these are the areas where established literature tends to be lacking, even in the most advanced countries, and where the expertise of an individual or a group can be brought to bear on the problem quickly. Evidence of the same line of thought and planning can be found in those publications which deal with professional processes and practices. The three studies which examine and list national and international standards bearing on archives bring in a subject which is not treated anywhere else, and which is directly useful. They cover ISO standards and UNISIST guidelines generally,<sup>32</sup> and develop standards for archival paper and ink.<sup>33</sup> Other procedures dealt with include records surveys and scheduling,<sup>34</sup> access and user services.<sup>35</sup>

Another group of RAMP studies concentrates on special areas of professional activity which are not central processes within the repository. The studies on professional journals and on building a repository library have not proved as generally useful as the original concept promised;<sup>36</sup> and the three which deal with the comparative status of archivists in Latin America and Africa<sup>37</sup> may perhaps be best used within those regions. The study of educational work using archives,<sup>38</sup> and the management of the professional associations<sup>39</sup> are among the most promising of these specialized analyses. From some points of view, the relatively generous treatment which has been given to microforms, and (a related question) the legal status of microcopies and machine-readable formats, is not easy to justify. It is true that most of the studies on the legal standing of microforms came early in the series,<sup>40</sup> when the managers of the programme had not had so much chance to consult professional opinion worldwide. Another batch, also mainly early in the series, dealt with questions of international exchange by microforms; the study on machine-readable records came later.<sup>41</sup> Evaluation through criticism by active colleagues was always part of the RAMP plan. There have been four international consultations, and these have acted as the central steering body for the programme. The consultative body has encouraged specific development work to continue. Specially commended were the pilot projects for developing archival networks in Kenya and Zambia and machine-readable archives in Mexico and Zimbabwe. A scheme to assist the setting up of a national archives in a country which did not already have one was considered. Another suggestion which clearly has merit is that there should be short expert consultations which would be the preliminary to writing new RAMP guidelines. All of this work should be assisted and coordinated by the three non-governmental organizations: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, *Fédération Internationale d'information et de documentation* and International Council on Archives. Much of the planned work would be regional. The fourth RAMP consultation meeting, in October 1990, provided a brief evaluation of the programme so far, pointing out that many of the early RAMP studies had been tested or evaluated by professional bodies in different parts of the world. The meeting went on to point out the areas which had not yet been covered. These included arrangement and description (the main professional area left untouched), and specific advice on equipment and materials.<sup>42</sup>

Kenneth Roberts, in his survey and evaluation of Unesco's effort in the information field,<sup>43</sup> remarked "There is a persistent feeling that PGI's activities and documents are insufficiently known in Member States." This feeling would certainly be shared by most archivists. Unesco's central distribution system ensures that all its published documents are supplied (free of charge) to the large libraries that are designated for this. In addition, PGI has always set itself to compile meaningful distribution lists which would include, as far as RAMP is concerned, every relevant information service or institution known to them. The mail is often slow, and of recent years the lack of resources has slowed the pace of production visibly; but it is true that Unesco as a whole and PGI in particular, have been assiduous in trying to get their documents out. Yet the feeling that they are difficult to find persists. To some extent the format of the RAMP documents does not help. Large but relatively slim pamphlets with paper covers are not easy to display and administer in a library setting; they seem to belong to grey literature rather than to independent published monographs. Many libraries hide their individual titles under the general series; others distribute them through subject classification. The libraries of many archival repositories or small training schools are insufficiently organized and staffed to make the best use of this type of material. It is probable that this problem has not been taken seriously enough by the RAMP planners and those they have consulted. However, it remains true that any archivist or archival institution can get itself put on the distribution list at no cost to itself, beyond the stamp on the initial letter and the use of a little patience. Is it all worth it? Emphatically, it is. No library of professional literature in archives could now be considered adequate unless it contained at least the key RAMP studies. The whole collection certainly does not amount to a balanced and complete statement of professional standards and practice, but it fills important (and otherwise unfillable) gaps between commercial published materials; provides definitive studies of particular areas; and — perhaps most important of all — sets a standard for the approach to professional subjects which ought to be adopted everywhere. Liberal, self-reliant, effective archive services are the one modelled on the RAMP guidelines. Not only has Unesco set specific material standards in the areas dealt with by its authors; it has also pointed out a professional approach worthy of the initial high ideals of its founders, by applying the broad outlook and humane principles which are the underlying assumptions of so many of the studies.

### Notes

- 1 *Review of the General Information Programme, 1977-1987: a compilation of information on its characteristics, activities and accomplishments*, prepared by K.H. Roberts. General Information Programme and UNISIST, Unesco, Paris, 1988 (PGI-88/WS/19). In the references which follow, PGI document numbers are given. All are published at Paris, the date is the figure immediately after PGI-, and, if still in print, can be obtained from Unesco, PGI, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75700 Paris, France.
- 2 P. Havard-Williams and E.G. Franz, *Planning information manpower*. Intergovernmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures, Paris, 23-27 September 1974. Unesco, 1974.
- 3 International Symposium on Harmonization of Education and Training Programmes in Information Science, Librarianship and Archival Studies. *Final report*. Unesco, Paris, 1984. The three papers referred to were by P. Wasserman, M. Cook and H. Sene.
- 4 *The harmonization of education and training programmes for library, information and archival personnel*. Proceedings of an International Colloquium, London, 9-15 August 1987, I.M. Johnson et al. ed., 2 vols. IFLA Publications 49-50. K.G. Saur, 1989.
- 5 Information from Dr. N.M. Mnjama, Department of Library and Archival Studies, Moi University, Kenya, and from Dr. Lucy Fontes, Escola de Biblioteconomia, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil.

- 6 The most recent of this series is the Fourth Expert Consultation on RAMP (RAMP IV), Chinchon (Spain), 6-9 October 1989. *Final report*. PGI-90/WS/10.
- 7 Information from Mr. Y. Courrier, Programme General d'Information, Unesco, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75700 Paris.
- 8 C. Kecskemeti and E. van Laar, PGI-81/WS/3.
- 9 M. Duchein, *Obstacles to the access, use and transfer of information from archives: a RAMP study*. (PGI-83/WS/20).
- 10 M.C. Stark, *Development of records management and archives services within United Nations agencies: a RAMP study*. PGI-83/WS/26.
- 11 M.B. Guptil, *Archival appraisal of records of international organisations*. PGI-85/WS/4.
- 12 C. Dollar, *Electronic records management in archives in international organisations*. PGI-86/WS/12.
- 13 B. Ulate Segura, *Access to the archives of the United Nations agencies*. PGI-86/WS/24.
- 14 *Guide to the archives of international organisations*, Parts I-III. PGI-79/WS/7, PGI-85/WS/18, PGI-85/WS/19.
- 15 By C. Kecskemeti and E. van Laar, PGI-81/WS/3. Available in Arabic and Russian.
- 16 I. Borsa, PGI-81/WS/7.
- 17 J. Pieyns, PGI-81/WS/24.
- 18 C. Crespo and V. Vinas, *Preservation and restoration of paper records and books*. PGI-84/WS/25. G. Benoit and D. Neirinck, *Les moyens de conservation les plus économiques dans les bâtiments d'archives des pays industriels et tropicaux*. PGI-87/WS/18. M. Roper, *Planning, equipping and staffing an archival preservation and conservation service*. PGI-89/WS/4.
- 19 Regional Centre of IFLA core programme FAC, Deutsche Bucherei Leipzig. PGI-89/WS/14.
- 20 T.A. Parker, PGI-88/WS/20.
- 21 M.W. Pascoe, PGI-88/WS/18.
- 22 M.W. Lee, PGI-88/WS/9. Available also in Arabic and Russian.
- 23 J.M. McCleary, PGI-87/WS/7. Also in Russian.
- 24 S.A. Buchanan, PGI-88/WS/6. Arabic, Russian.
- 25 D.W.G. Clements et al., PGI-89/WS/15.
- 26 M. Cook, *Guidelines for curriculum development in records management and the administration of modern archives*. PGI-82/WS/16. *Guidelines on curriculum development in information technology for librarians, documentalists and archivists*. PGI-86/WS/26. M. Fishbein, *A model curriculum for the education and training of archivists in automation*. PGI-85/WS/27.
- 27 F. Hildesheimer, PGI-83/WS/9.
- 28 J.B. Rhoads, PGI-83/WS/21, revised as PGI-89/WS/6.
- 29 S. Kula, *The archival appraisal of moving images*. PGI-83/WS/18.
- 30 K.B. Hendriks, PGI-84/WS/1. W.H. Leary, PGI-85/WS/10.
- 31 H.P. Harrison et al., PGI-87/WS/1.
- 32 J.B. Rhoads, PGI-82/WS/4. M. Roper, PGI-86/WS/16.
- 33 D.L. Thomas, PGI-86/WS/22.
- 34 D. Charman, PGI-84/WS/26.
- 35 M. Duchein, PGI-83/WS/20. H.A. Taylor, PGI-84/WS/5.
- 36 B. White, PGI-81/WS/10.
- 37 J. d'Orleans, PGI-85/WS/2. E. van Laar, PGI-85/WS/3. A. Tanodi, PGI-85/WS/13.
- 38 E. Franz, PGI-86/WS/18.
- 39 R. Bowden, PGI-89/WS/11.
- 40 J. Bacso, COM-75/WS/30. G. Weill, PGI-81/WS/25.
- 41 B. Fredberg et al., PGI-88/WS/15.
- 42 Fourth Expert Consultation on RAMP (RAMP IV), Chinchon (Spain), 6-9 October 1989. *Final report*. PGI-90/WS/10, pp. 7-9.
- 43 *Review of the General Information Programmes, 1977-1987*. *op. cit.*, p. 50.