

Notice

Disputed Archival Claims. Analysis of an International Survey: A RAMP Study. LEOPOLD AUER. Paris: General Information Programme and UNISIST, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1998. 29 p. CII - 98/WS/9.

Disputed Archival Claims. Analysis of an International Survey: A RAMP Study is the most recent publication of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) concerning archival issues. The International Council of Archives was commissioned by UNESCO to undertake this analysis. Covering both government and private archival records, the study examines the effects that war, political re-organization and re-structuring, de-colonization, and other factors have had on archival institutions and archival documentation.

The study is divided into parts: an introduction, a case by case survey, an analysis of claims (which includes statistical data and data evaluation), a conclusion, and an appendix containing the text of the survey questionnaires. After analyzing the data derived from these questionnaires (completed by thirty-eight of the eighty-three surveyed countries), the author, Leopold Auer of the Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, makes several observations on archival claims. Major archival claims have been known for many years, are well documented, and are of long standing (many being over fifty years old). Claims are still primarily made for originals. And microfilming of records seems to be of limited value as an answer to problems (being applicable more to claims from Asia and Africa than elsewhere). The concept of joint heritage (practiced by Austria and Hungary after the First World War and by others) is gaining popularity as a solution.

The study suggests guidelines which can be used in dealing with disputed claims and the restitution of archives and documents, and indicates the need for pragmatic approaches to those issues. It suggests that international consultation is necessary, among other things, to secure agreement among states

regarding objectives, devise an adequate conceptually-based framework for action, and develop principles to be observed in negotiating bilateral agreements.

The issue is not only a concern for professional archivists but one also of political and national importance. The states involved prefer to deal with these issues on a bilateral and, in some cases, multilateral basis rather than through a truly international approach. Such negotiations are, however, time consuming. Auer suggests that though the international community has developed a number of legal and other guiding principles, few countries seem to be aware of these. A priority is to heighten awareness of their existence, thus creating more effective processes.

This RAMP Study will be of interest to all archivists, librarians, students of international affairs, and cultural workers (as well as respective institutions), who are interested in international aspects of documentary heritage and the role of the international community and national governments in archival preservation and the resolution between states, of access issues. The availability of this publication is very timely in the light of recent events in Kosovo, Yugoslavia, East Timor, and other parts of the world where war and political re-organization have recently taken place, affecting the fate of both archival institutions and archival documentation.

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