Archivaria
The Journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists

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Archivaria 98 (Fall 2024), pp. 166-91

Cite this article:

Dancy, Richard. "Waiting for RiC: The Release of

Records in Contexts, version 1.0." *Archivaria* 98 (Fall 2024): 166-91.
https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13997

Waiting for RiC

The Release of Records in Contexts, version 1.0[1]

RICHARD DANCY

Introduction

At the end of November 2023, the International Council on Archives (ICA) released version 1.0 of *Records in Contexts* (RiC). This represents the first complete and stable version of a new archival description standard, intended to integrate and replace the ICA's existing suite of standards: ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF), ISDF, and ISDIAH.[2]

The terms just used here to describe RiC – *new*, *complete*, *replace* – all need to be qualified. RiC is not exactly new. The ICA's Expert Group on Archival Description (EGAD) has been at work on RiC since 2012 and previously released consultation drafts in 2016 (version 0.1), 2019 (version 0.2 preview), and 2021 (version 0.2). Nor is it yet fully complete: RiC is envisioned as a set of four components, only three of which were included in the version 1.0 release: *Records in Context – Conceptual Model* (RiC-CM) defines the entities of interest

1 With thanks (and apologies) to Greg Bak for stealing this title. Thanks also to Aaron Hope of the Archives of Ontario (AO) for sharing information (and documentation) on the AO's RiC implementation pilot project.

2 ISAD(G) = *General International Standard Archival Description;* ISAAR(CPF) = *International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families;* ISDF = *International Standard for Describing Functions;* ISDIAH = *International Standard for Describing Institutions with Archival Holdings*. The texts are available from the online resource centre on the ICA's website (accessed June 30, 2024, https://www.ica.org/online-resource-centre/). See International Council on Archives, *General International Standard Archival Description* (ISAD(G)), 2nd ed. (Ottawa: International Council on Archives, 2000); International Council on Archives, *International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families* (ISAAR(CPF)), 2nd ed. (Paris: International Council on Archives, 2004); International Council on Archives, *International Standard for Describing Functions* (ISDF) (Paris: International Council on Archives, 2007); International Council on Archives, *International Standard for Describing Institutions with Archival Holdings* (ISDIAH) (Paris: International Council on Archives, 2008).

to archival description, their attributes, and their relations.[3] *Records in Context – Ontology* (RiC-O) provides rules for translating the model's entities, attributes, and relations into the classes and properties of a web ontology language (OWL) that will allow archival descriptions to be published as linked data on the Web.[4] *Records in Context – Foundations of Archival Description* (RiC-FAD) is a brief narrative introduction to the system.[5] The last piece is titled "*Application Guidelines*" (RiC-AG); this has not yet appeared, and EGAD has only just started work on it. Finally, RiC's replacement of the existing standards is not a straightforward substitution. RiC has radically recast the standards' structure, such that "archivists familiar with ISAD(G) may initially find RiC-CM challenging to understand."[6] Its adoption will be dependent on software that largely does not yet exist. RiC's authors foresee a gradual transition period, in which the existing standards continue to be used as both archivists and software developers find their way with the new standard.[7]

The purpose of this communication note is to help clarify some of the issues likely to be encountered along that way: What is RiC, how does it differ from previous standards, and what does it all mean for Canadian archivists still lumbering along with the *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD)? This note provides some background, exposition, and commentary, and it suggests some practical ways by which archivists can starting using RiC without adopting it (in the absence of RiC software). The tone is somewhat tentative throughout. It is difficult to assess RiC without working through the weeds of testing its model against existing descriptions or seeing its linked data implementations in action – two tasks that still largely belong to the future.

3 International Council on Archives Expert Group on Archival Description (ICA-EGAD), *Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model*, version 1.0 (n.p.: International Council on Archives, 2023), https://www.ica.org/en/records-in-contexts-conceptual-model.

4 ICA-EGAD, "Records in Contexts – Ontology," International Council on Archives, November 2023, https://www.ica.org/resource/records-in-contexts-ontology/. See also ICA-EGAD, "Records in Contexts: Ontology," version 1.0.1 (May 2024), GitHub, accessed August 10, 2024, https://github.com/ICA-EGAD/RiC-O; ICA-EGAD, "About ICA *Records in Contexts Ontology* (RiC-O)," GitHub, accessed August 10, 2024, https://ica-egad.github.io/RiC-O/.

5 ICA-EGAD, *Records in Contexts – Foundations of Archival Description*, version 1.0 (n.p.: International Council on Archives, 2023), https://www.ica.org/resource/records-in-contexts-foundations-of-archival-description/.

6 ICA-EGAD, *Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model*, 8.

7 ICA-EGAD, 13.

My own perspective is that of an archivist with an interest in descriptive standards who entered the field in the late 1990s. This was a time when Canadian archivists were still flush with the success of their new standard, RAD; the heroic years of RAD conversion were still in swing, if winding down; and there was a general, somewhat complacent sense of the superiority of all things RAD. It was the release of the draft second edition of RAD (RAD2) in 2004 that really triggered my interest in descriptive standards. I recall the sense of shock that greeted RAD2 – a document aligned with ISAD(G) and developed in parallel to the Americans' *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS).[8] RAD2 suggested that there were fundamental problems with a standard that had up to then only been celebrated. Canadian archivists seemed unready for change, skeptical of the need, and fearful of disruptive consequences ("We only just converted to RAD, now something new again?"). The Canadian Committee on Archival Description (CCAD) – the body that maintained RAD – shelved RAD2 after some consultation and opted for a much more minimal revision that was finalized in 2008. I joined CCAD in 2007, just at the tail end of this process, and served on the committee until 2018. Following the 2008 revisions, RAD became basically a fixed document. In February 2016, a revived CCAD, supported by Library and Archives Canada (LAC) convened a two-day national meeting on the future of RAD in Ottawa to attempt to break out of the stasis. The meeting achieved a broad consensus: that Canadian archivists should continue to maintain a national descriptive standard and that it should be revised to align with the ICA standards.[9] Shortly afterwards, EGAD released the first draft of

8 RAD2 and DACS were both outcomes of the Canada–US Task Force on Archival Description (CUSTARD), which aimed to create a single North American descriptive standard aligned with the ICA standards. Differences between representatives from the two countries emerged, however, and they brought out separate, but broadly similar, documents: RAD2 and DACS. DACS was adopted by the Society of American Archivists in 2005. For CUSTARD, see, e.g., Jean Dryden, "Cooking the Perfect Custard," *Archival Science* 3, no. 1 (2003): 27–42. For RAD2, see Canadian Committee on Archival Description, "RAD2 Backgrounder Report" (n.p.: Canadian Council of Archives, 2004); Canadian Council of Archives, Canadian Committee on Archival Description, "Rules for Archival Description (RAD)," 2nd ed. (unpublished draft, Canadian Council of Archives, 2004); and Canadian Committee on Archival Description, *Toward a Second Edition of RAD: A Report* (n.p.: Canadian Council of Archives, June 2005) (copies in author's personal possession). Copies are no longer available on the CCA's website but may be available directly from the CCA itself. I covered some of this ground in more detail in an earlier article in *Archivaria*; see Richard Dancy, "RAD Past, Present and Future," *Archivaria* 74 (Fall 2012): 7–41.

9 See Canadian Committee on Archival Description, *National Meeting on the Future of RAD: CCAD Report with Recommendations* ([Ottawa]: Canadian Council of Archives, May 26, 2016) (copy in author's personal possession); This document is no longer on the CCA website but may be available directly from the CCA itself.

RiC, leaving our plans in flux. It was no longer clear what exactly we should be aligning RAD with: the old ICA standards that were on the way out or the new RiC, which was radically different and not yet finalized or stable. I recall another sense of shock as CCAD members met to discuss RiC and struggled with what to make of the proposed new standard and where it left us with RAD. "Well, I guess we wait and see."

We have waited a long time now for RiC. We are still waiting for the application guidelines, and we will likely be waiting a while yet for readily available software that implements it. In the meanwhile, I suggest there are things we can do to put this time to good use.

Why a New Standard?

In the 1990s and 2000s, the ICA produced a series of standards that circumscribed the archival descriptive domain. ISAD(G) (1992) provided elements for the description of archival records; ISAAR (1996) covered the creators of records; ISDF (2007), the functions and activities that generate records; and ISDIAH (2008), the repositories that hold archival records.

The structure of the standards evolved over the course of two decades. With its second edition in 1999, ISAD(G) introduced a Description Control area for elements that describe the production and revision of a description itself. Initially just three elements, it was expanded in the second edition of ISAAR (2004) to eight – a standard set that was then applied to ISDF (2007) and ISDIAH (2008). The 2004 edition of ISAAR also introduced a separate Relationships section, which provided elements for describing relations between entities covered by different standards (e.g., between creators and their records). This too was extended to ISDF and ISDIAH.

By 2008, then, the ICA had three similarly structured standards, leaving ISAD(G) as the outlier. It could have simply "normalized" ISAD(G) by furnishing it with the common Description Control set and a Relationships section. Instead, the ICA created the EGAD group in 2012 to step back and take a fresh look at the suite as a whole – as an integrated system of linked components that could be articulated in a new, single standard.

There were several good reasons for doing this. When ISAD(G) first appeared, most archives dealt mainly with paper and analog records. Repositories have

since experienced an influx of digital materials (both digitized and born-digital), presenting new complexities. Neighbouring descriptive communities have developed entity models as the bases for creating or renewing their own descriptive standards. These model their descriptive domains in terms of entities, their attributes, and relations, with particular attention to disentangling intellectual content from physical embodiments or supports. A similar move was needed for archives.[10]

From another angle, a critical archival literature has questioned many of the assumptions of the finding aid, and there have been calls to expand the traditional concept of provenance, decolonize description, and open it up to other voices. The finding aid itself – as a print document available in the reading room – is no longer most researchers' first point of access to repositories' holdings. Online databases and Encoded Archival Description (EAD) have taken its place, but these mainly project the format of the paper-based finding aid on to the Web, providing "an online presentation that is more or less an analogue of it."[11] They have not exploited the possibilities for new ways of representing and interacting with descriptive data that the Semantic Web and linked data afford.

Against this backdrop and responding to these challenges, EGAD set out from the existing standards to model the archival descriptive domain. It is a commendable effort. One may agree or disagree with this or that aspect of *RiC*, but it marks out the paths that archives need to pursue, one way or another.

10 Examples of conceptually separating the intellectual and the physical: the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) model distinguishes *work, manifestation, expression*, and *item*; the PREMIS model distinguishes *intellectual entity, representation, file*, and *bitstream*.

For librarianship, see IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Section on Cataloguing Standing Committee, *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records*, IFLA Series on Bibliographic Control, vol. 19 (München, DE: K.G. Saur, 1998), https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/830. The FRBR model provided the basis for *Resource Description and Access* (RDA), the standard that replaced the second edition of *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (AACR2) in 2010.

For digital preservation, see also PREMIS Editorial Committee, *PREMIS Data Dictionary for Preservation Metadata*, version 3.0 (n.p.: Library of Congress, 2015), https://www.loc.gov/standards/premis/.

For records management, see International Organization for Standardization (ISO), "ISO 23081 Series: Metadata for Records," ISO/TC 46/SC 11, accessed August 10, 2024, https://committee.iso.org/sites/tc46sc11/home/projects/published/iso-23081-metadata-for-records.html; these three standards were published in 2011, 2017, and 2021

For cultural heritage, see International Council of Museums, International Committee for Documentation, "What Is the CIDOC CRM?" CIDOC CRM Conceptual Reference Model, accessed August 10, 2024, https://www.cidoc-crm.org.

11 ICA-EGAD, *Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model*, 5.

RiC-CM: The *Conceptual Model*

At the centre of RiC is the *Conceptual Model* (RiC-CM). It presents a picture of records; the agents and activities that create, manage, and use them; and their interconnections.

Entities are the main objects of interest for archival description. RiC identifies 19 entities, ordered hierarchically (see figure 1 below for the full list). There is a single root entity, Thing (E01), from which the rest branch off as "kinds of *thing*,"[12] with their own sub-entities. RiC designates four entities as core: Record Resource (E02), Instantiation (E06), Agent (E07), and Activity (E15).

Attributes are the characteristics of entities that are captured by description, corresponding roughly to the elements of the existing standards. RiC provides 42 attributes. Many apply to more than one entity. Some are repeatable; others are not. For example, a Record Resource may have multiple Identifiers (A22) but only one History (A21).

Relations are connections that can be made between entities – links important for capturing the contexts of records creation, management, and use. RiC identifies 85 such relations, grouped into 13 types (e.g., "Whole-part relations," "Sequential relations," "Provenance relations," and so on). Within each type, they move from broader to narrower. Some relations (15 of the 85) are symmetrical – that is, their expression is the same from the standpoint of either entity – for example, *Person* ***has sibling*** *Person* (R048). The rest (70) require an inverse expression, for example, *Record Resource* ***has creator*** *Agent* (R27), but *Agent* ***is creator of*** *Record Resource* (R27i). Every relation between entities can itself be qualified or described by a set of six *relation attributes*: certainty, date, description, identifier, source, and place of the relation.

The RiC model is flexible and more concerned with inputs than outputs.[13] It imposes no order or grouping of attributes analogous to the existing standards' *areas of description*, it does not designate an obligation status (mandatory or optional) for any of its components, and it prescribes no particular output formats. The model is also extensible. RiC allows implementers to add new entities, attributes, and relations or to break existing ones into more specific sub-entries as needed in specific contexts. Finally, the model is hierarchical. Any attribute or relation that applies to a parent entity is shared by (available to) all its sub-entities.

12 ICA-EGAD, 17.

13 ICA-EGAD, 9.

All this allows for a certain economy of presentation in RiC, which sets out entities, attributes, and relations in separate sections, but it can also make it difficult to see exactly how the components all fit together. Figure 1 attempts to convey something of this by showing the full list of entities, and for two examples (Record Set and Corporate Body), it gives the full list of attributes and a selection of the relations available to them. Attributes and relations that directly apply to an entity are marked with asterisks; the others are "inherited" from parent entities.

One notable feature is that ISAD(G)'s "unit of description" has become RiC's Record Resource (E02), with sub-entities for Record Set (E03), Record (E04), and Record Part (E05). RiC-CM argues that there are important distinctions between set, record, and part that are obscured in the concept of "multilevel description" and that justify their treatment as distinct entities.[14] Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, the same set of attributes applies to each.[15]

The more critical move, in my view, is RiC's distinction between Record Resource (with its sub-entities) and Instantiation (E06). An Instantiation is a distinct physical or digital version or iteration of a Record Resource. Take the example of a film that was transferred to the archives in the 1960s on two 16 mm film reels, copied in the 1990s to Beta and VHS tapes (for preservation and access), digitized from the VHS in the 2000s to make a DVD access copy, then subsequently digitized from the original film in the 2020s as MKV files (for preservation) and MP4s (for access). With the current standards, it is a challenge deciding where to put all this information within a single unit-of-description record.[16] With *RiC*, the intellectual content, representations, and carriers can be separated. There is one Record Resource (the moving-image document) – the "intellectual" content, which has a title, a date, a creator, and so on. Then there are its multiple Instantiations: the original film reels (Instantiation I-1), the Beta tapes (I-2), the VHS tapes (I-3), the DVD (I-4), the MKV files (I-5), and the

14 RiC-CM, 10, 20–22.

15 Records and record sets may differ in their origins and the activities associated with them; the identity of a record is derived from the record itself, whereas that of a record set derives from its members (ICA-EGAD, *Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model*, 20–21). But Record Set, Record, and Record Part all share the same RiC attributes, with two exceptions: Accruals (A01), which applies only to Record Set, and Documentary Form (A17), which does not apply to Record Part.

16 RAD supports extent statements in the Physical Description area (1.5), with notes available for "Physical description" (1.8B9) and "Availability of other formats" (1.8B15b).

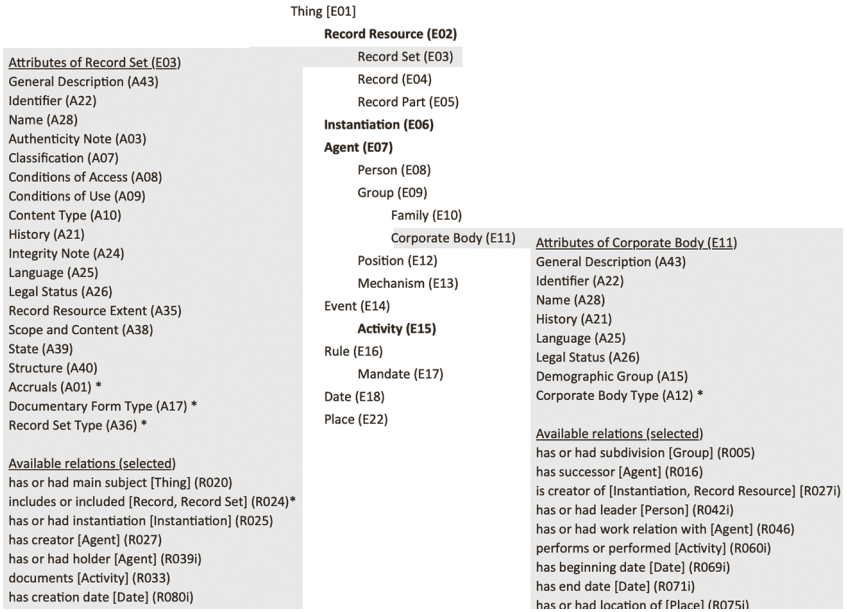

FIGURE 1 *RiC entities with attributes and selected relations for two entities (Record Set and Corporate Body)*

MP4 files (I-6). Instantiations can themselves have Instantiations as parts; for example, each individual film reel can be a carrier of I-1. Each of these entities (the Record Resource plus the Instantiations) can be described separately while being linked back together through relations. This model is especially useful with digitized and born-digital records. What was an edge case in the analog world (the need to migrate to new formats, mainly an issue with audiovisual materials) is the norm for born-digital and digitized records. Digital records will typically exist and need to be managed over time in multiple versions in multiple file formats (original, preservation, and access copies) stored on multiple physical supports and network locations. RiC should make identifying and describing these ensembles and their relations much easier and more precise.[17]

17 But while RiC allows one to parse out extent statements to different entities (Instantiations), it doesn't seem to offer a place to summarize the physical extent of the ensemble as a whole or to provide a narrative of the migration or format history of a Record Set, as discussed below.

The treatment of dates, on the other hand, is an example of something that is relatively straightforward under existing standards but becomes more complicated with RiC. A Date in RiC is not only an entity in its own right (E18) but also a relation attribute (RA02) that qualifies relations between entities. Existing standards readily distinguish *dates of creation* (dates of the records themselves) from *dates of accumulation* (dates of recordkeeping activity), though both get slotted into a single Date element. In RiC, the date of creation is expressed as a relation between two entities (Record Resource and Date) via relation R080, *is creation date of / has creation date: Training films (series)* ***has creation date*** *1958–1996*. But there is no equivalent *is date of accumulation of* relation in RiC. There are a few options. You could employ the more general relation *is date associated with* (R068) to link Record Resource and Date, using the relation attribute *description of relation* (RA03) to note that it is a date of accumulation. Or you could create a relation between the Record Resource and an Agent, linked via the *has accumulator* (R028) relation, using *date of relation* (RA02) to indicate the dates over which accumulation occurred. Or you could perhaps invoke RiC's extensibility here and create a new *is date of accumulation of* relation to link a Date to a Record Set.

In these kinds of situations, where there are multiple ways to model the same data, RiC's flexibility may not always be a great thing. Different implementations will likely result in different decisions. Depending on how many such decisions are required and how wide the range of options are, the result may be different "flavours" of RiC, with potential problems for interoperability. Hence the importance of RiC's forthcoming *Application Guidelines* (RiC-AG), which will presumably tackle precisely these issues.

RiC-O: The *Ontology*

The RiC *Ontology* (RiC-O) is not so much a "part" of the standard as it is a specific implementation of it in the context of the Sematic Web and in accordance with the rules of a web ontology language (OWL) and the Resource Description Framework (RDF). Most archivists (myself included) are not experts in this area. My remarks here will be brief and general (and hopefully will not include too many mistakes). But a sense of what is going on here is useful, as the linked-open-data implementation of RiC is central to its claim to open new possibilities that go beyond the traditional finding aid.

RDF is a standard for exchanging data on the Web.[18] It structures information as statements in the form of subject-predicate-object *triples*. Sometimes, both subject and object are entities connected by the relationship expressed in the predicate – e.g., the *Greg Evans fonds* ***has creator*** *Greg Evans*. Here, both subject and object are entities that should have unique uniform resource identifiers (URIs) on the Internet, and the predicate (*has creator*) should be a term defined by a controlled taxonomy also published on the Internet. In this way, any RDF-based system can parse the data produced by any other by referencing the URIs of the entity and predicate terms. Sometimes the object in a triple is not itself an entity but is just a block of text (i.e., a literal) characterizing the subject – e.g., the *Greg Evans fonds* ***has scope and content*** *<<block of text>>*. This difference between object as entity, as opposed to object as a block of text, forms the basis for the distinction in OWL between *object properties* (predicates that take an entity, e.g., *hasCreator*) and *datatype properties* (predicates that take a block of text, e.g., *hasScopeAndContent*).

An RDF triplestore is a set of RDF subject-predicate-object statements that can be queried by its own distinct protocol language, SPARQL Protocol and RDF Query Language (SPARQL). It can be visualized as a *knowledge graph* consisting of *nodes* (subject and object entities that can be represented as circles on a graph) with *edges* (lines that connect the circles) and *labels* (terms or properties that characterize the nature of the connecting lines) (see figure 2).

An OWL ontology defines for a particular domain the kinds of things that count as RDF node entities (classes) and specifies their predicates (properties). For RiC, the challenge is to translate the three-fold schema of the *Conceptual Model* (entities, attributes, and relations) into the two-fold schema of OWL and RDF (classes and properties). RiC entities map to OWL classes and RiC relations to OWL properties, but what happens to RiC attributes? The values of some RiC attributes behave in entity-like ways – e.g., the same Name (A28) or Language (A25) may apply (have relations to) more than one entity. In RiC-O, these become classes (e.g., *rico:Name*, *rico:Language*) with associated object

18 For good overviews of the Semantic Web for archivists, see Seth van Hooland and Ruben Verborgh, *Linked Data for Libraries, Archives and Museums: How to Clean, Link and Publish Your Metadata* (Chicago: Neal-Schuman, 2014); and David Stuart, *Practical Ontologies for Information Professionals* (London: Facet Publishing, 2016). I found the blog of the Neo4J graph database project (https://neo4j.com/blog/) a useful source of information, e.g., Jim Webber, "RDF vs. Property Graphs: Choosing the Right Approach for Implementing a Knowledge Graph," Neo4J, June 4, 2024, https://neo4j.com/blog/rdf-vs-property-graphs-knowledge-graphs/.

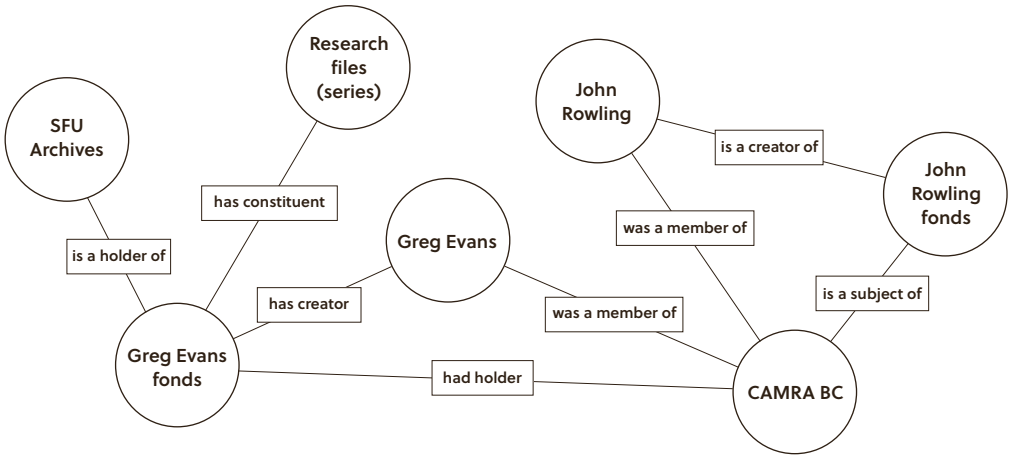

FIGURE 2 *Entities and relations in a graph, reading relations from left to right*

properties (e.g., *rico:hasOrHadName*, *rico:hasOrHadLanguage*). Other attributes that just take blocks of text become datatype properties (e.g., *rico:history*, *rico:scopeAndContent)*.

There are other complexities at work in RiC-O, including how to translate RiC-CM's relation attributes (RA01-06) into the OWL schema. It all results in an explosion of numbers in RiC-O: 106 classes, 61 datatype properties, and 400 object properties.[19] RiC-O is not for the faint of heart. Whether this complexity is a good thing or not I leave to others more competent than I. Some commentators have lamented RiC's "isolationist" approach to ontology building, which creates its own classes and properties from scratch rather than re-using elements of already existing and widely shared ontologies.[20] No doubt,

19 For the numbers, see Daniel Pitti and Florence Clavaud, "A Quick Overview of Records in Contexts Conceptual Model and Ontology" (presentation at the Study Day on Early Implementations of RiC, Archives nationales de France, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, November 15, 2023), slide 25, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1O9uAq_DOy2ik34MQMEIaaIlkv6VP_qTb/view.

20 See InterPARES Trust, "Comments on 'Records in Context,'" 6, InterPARES Trust, December 10, 2016, http://interparestrust.org/assets/public/dissemination/interparestrust_commentsonric_final2.pdf. Another such comment reads, "As a wholesale approach it strikes us contrary to the linked data best practice of reusing standard vocabularies when possible (see for example the W3C Best Practices), and represents an enormous maintenance burden for the ICA." Dan Gillean, "Artefactual Response to RiC-CM Draft," posted to AtoM Users Google group, January 17, 2017, https://groups.google.com/g/ica-atom-users/c/QwSor7OQ90U/m/1USGAGI1BgAJ.

RiC-O is not the only way to model archival descriptive data for the Semantic Web, but it is one way that we now have, and it seems likely to gain traction as RiC software projects come online.

For practising archivists and non-ontologists, the main takeaway here is probably the idea of the knowledge graph as a new way of representing archival description data.

From Finding Aids to Knowledge Graphs … and Back

The finding aid presents a narrative description, which proceeds hierarchically (from the general to the specific) laid out in fields in a prescribed order, of a circumscribed set of records accumulated by a given agent. The graph, on the other hand, presents an open-ended group of entities linked by lines of relations that can be queried and followed up in any number of directions. The hierarchy of arrangement of the finding aid is itself one way of reading the graph.[21] Hence the plurals in RiC: *records* in *contexts*. RiC should support more precise queries:

> An end user should be able to ask of any given data set, for example, "What are (according to your dataset) the corporate bodies that succeeded a given entity from its end of existence to now (as concerns this given activity)?", or "what instantiations of this photograph exist?", or "what are the existing copies of this original charter?", and get a list of these entities. This means that institutions or projects that invest in the implementation of RiC-O will be able to query their data in ways not possible with the previous ICA standards, and will get new insight into the content and context of their archives that wasn't visible with the existing ICA-standards.[22]

21 But is this "just" one graph among others? Without the archival work of "fixing" a record in its context of creation (e.g., its date, author, accumulator, draft or finalized status, and bond with associated records in the same file and with other files in the same series), it is more difficult to reliably draw other relations and inferences around or from it.

22 ICA-EGAD, "International Council on Archives *Records in Contexts – Ontology* (ICA RiC-O) version 1.0.1," introduction, section 4, International Council on Archives, May 13, 2024, https://www.ica.org/standards/RiC/RiC-O_1-0-1.html.

With RiC-structured descriptive data, it should be possible to create interactive visualizations in a variety of forms, from graph diagrams of nodes and lines to timelines, charts, and geographical maps. There are also potentially far-reaching implications for networks like Canada's provincial and national aggregator sites. In the current model, repositories export descriptions from their own systems for import into their provincial portals, and the provincial databases in turn export their data for upload into the national portal, Archives Canada. But typically, only fonds-level descriptions rather than all data from the source repositories are included, and over time, the different versions get out of sync as changes to the source versions are not always reflected in the provincial or national databases. However, if repositories can publish their descriptive data in a shared linked-data format, it should be possible to move away from this replication model: participating repositories could make their full descriptions available, via an application programming interface (API), to a single interface that can query across holdings and repositories with no need for multiple exports and imports.

Of course, it is easy to say that all this "should be possible." These remain theoretical and somewhat abstract possibilities until we have actual software and can see it in action. (Current RiC-related software projects will be discussed in the next section.) If the proof is in the pudding, RiC is just an ingredients list.

Where does all this leave the traditional finding aid? RiC acknowledges that the "fonds-down hierarchical description" of the traditional (i.e., RAD/ISAD(G)/DACS) finding aid will likely remain the "prevailing approach" for most archives into the near future.[23] It frames this as a kind of necessary evil that ideally will be phased out over time. But is it? There seems to be no reason why the linear finding aid and the open-ended graph cannot co-exist as complementary tools that suit different researchers, purposes, and repositories. One of the core purposes of archival description is to communicate to potential researchers enough information about holdings that they can decide whether it is worth their while to go to the archives (physically or virtually) and spend time consulting the actual records themselves. For some, the graph may be sufficient; others, having found their connections of interest, may prefer a textual document that draws everything together in a narrative format.

23 ICA-EGAD, *Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model*, 8.

One benefit of a RiC-based system is that it could improve (not just replace) existing finding aids. With the data parsed out among separate entities, it should be possible to output finding aids on demand from the standpoint of any entity in the system – not just fonds creators and not just Agents. These would pull together all the attributes and relations for a given entity– output as a continuous narrative document structured by fields.[24]

What do such outputs look like? One answer is given by the ICA standards' *areas of description* (which have analogs in RAD and DACS): they are logical groupings of elements that give structure and flow to a narrative description intended for readers. But they have no counterpart in RiC. RiC attributes are simply listed alphabetically and numbered (in RiC-CM section 3, where they are defined) or grouped by entity and ordered by the entity hierarchy (in RiC-CM section 4, as reproduced in figure 1 above).[25] None of this is meant to prescribe how the information might be presented to researchers; RiC is silent on this and basically uninterested in the question. "The existing ICA standards model description, that is, they model a finding aid, whereas RiC-CM models the entities as such, as a basis for describing but without anticipating any particular end product."[26]

But RiC's indifference to end products is problematic because it likely means, in practice, privileging one type of output (RiC-O RDF data), which is available only to institutions that can afford the needed investments in software, data conversion, and staff training. One of the real gains of the existing standards has been that, over the last 30 years, researchers have no longer (or less frequently) been confronted with idiosyncratic, institution-specific finding aid formats that need to be relearned at each repository. This is partly because of the expectation that finding aids (paper or online) not only contain certain kinds of information but also broadly conform, in their presentation, to a certain logical structure. Institutions lacking access to RiC-based software will still need to create finding

24 So, one can imagine Agent finding aids, for record subjects who interacted with many fonds creators but do not have fonds themselves, or Event finding aids for specific events that have left documentary traces in numerous fonds. It would be interesting to see where or if the thematic subject guides that many archives continue to create fit here.

25 The three attributes that apply to every entity as kinds of Thing (E01) – General Description (A43), Identifier (A22), and Name (A28) – are given first; those that apply to second-level entities, next; and so on down through the entity hierarchy.

26 ICA-EGAD, *Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model*, 2.

aids and will still need guidance to help them do so. If the structured data of the knowledge graph is seen as a supplement to rather than a replacement for the narrative finding aid, then the form of the latter should have a place in the descriptive standard. The standard needs to work for all institutions, not just those that have the resources (professional and technical) to create knowledge graphs.

At a more micro level, the same supplementary (rather than competitive) relationship obtains between narrative description and structured data. Take a typical administrative history or biographical sketch. It presents a continuous narrative but is full of information that can also be presented in the form of RDF triples (e.g., *has date of birth*, *has date of death*, *was born at*, *has parent*, *had position*, *performed activity*, and so on). The "same" information can be made available in two formats: as a narrative aimed at human readers and as structured data for machine processing and visualization. The standard should provide guidance and support at both these levels, and software that implements it should provide interfaces that allow archivists to move easily between these two modes of representation.[27]

All this, I think, reinforces a point that other commentators have previously noted: what is missing in RiC is a fulsome content standard.[28] Without this, RiC cannot really replace the existing standards or take over their practical role for the archival community as a whole. A RiC content standard (RiC-CS?) could broadly

27 For example, it could include free text fields for narrative biographical sketches or administrative histories, with buttons (or right-click actions) that pop up data entry forms for registering structured relationships, drop-down menus for subject and object entities, and controlled vocabularies for predicates. There is always (for me at least) something vaguely disappointing about linked data projects that point the reader to what looks like the proverbial laundry list of RDF triples. Compare the experience of reading a narrative Wikipedia entry with its correlate Wikidata page, which gives a list of structured statements about the item. The value of RDF tiples is best experienced not through reading but rather via visualizations produced by machine action on the triple-store – or by linking from an entity back to a readable narrative about it.

28 "While the ontology and conceptual model might provide enough of a framework for consistent modeling of descriptions across space and time, it does not seem to address the specific descriptive practices to be followed within freetext descriptive attributes such as a scope and content." Gillean, "Artefactual Response to RiC-CM Draft."

The recent statement of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) on the implementation of RiC notes that "while RiC supersedes the former ICA standards, it does not replace the practical guidance expressed in them so much as it abandons that guidance in favor of abstracting from it. . . . essentially leaving the international professional community without a content standard." Society of American Archivists, "Technical Subcommittee on *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*: Records in Context (RiC)" (Agenda Item A.2, SAA Council Meeting, February 5–6, 2024), 2, accessed June 30, 2024, https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0224-IV-A.2-TSDACS.pdf.

prescribe what entity outputs (finding aids) should logically include; make recommendations about the obligation status of attributes and relations (mandatory, recommended, or optional); and provide detailed guidance for creating the content that goes into the attributes and relations. The content standard would be useful to all archivists, and it would allow institutions lacking the technology to produce and host knowledge graphs to continue preparing descriptions and finding aids. Without something of this sort, the existing standards are retired but not withdrawn, like retirees brought back as consultants.

It is not clear that RiC's forthcoming *Application Guidelines* (RiC-AG) will be this kind of document. It seems likely that the guidelines will be aimed largely at software developers tasked with creating systems and will clarify situations where there are multiple ways to model the data in RiC. The content standards envisioned here would be aimed instead at practitioners responsible for the day-to-day preparation of actual descriptions. These two audiences (developers and practitioners) seem sufficiently different to warrant their own separate guidance documentation.

The bodies best positioned to prepare content standards are the national archival organizations, which can respond to local practice and traditions. All that may be needed at the ICA level is to make a place for content standards in the RiC suite, indicate broadly what they should do, then let local or national organizations get to it. In Canada, this suggests one possible future for RAD: map RAD elements to the RiC model, create extensions where needed, and rework the detailed content rules in RAD to align them with RiC entities, attributes, and relations.

Adoption, Implementation, Use

RiC is dependent on software in ways that previous standards were not. This can be mitigated to a certain extent by developing the kind of content standards sketched above, which would allow institutions to continue to create fonds- and other entity-based finding aids without specialized software. But to realize the full benefits of RiC will require computer applications that allow archivists to create, store, link, and output RiC-structured data. This means that institutions cannot just "adopt RiC" at will; they can only really adopt software that implements RiC.

RiC's software dependence both complicates and simplifies the problem of adoption. Complicates it because such software is not yet readily available – it must still be developed. Simplifies it because adoption will mean learning how to use an application whose user interfaces need not be radically different from the ones that archivists are already familiar with in their current ISAD(G)-, RAD-, and DACS-based systems. If well designed, RiC-based software should hide a lot of the complexity from users. From the archivist's point of view, they are simply entering a "Scope and content" note or a "Date" in accordance with their content standard, however the data is organized behind the scenes.

Several RiC-related software projects are currently underway, and tools are becoming available.[29] The Swiss company Docuteam recently released the web-based application Docuteam Context, the first commercially available implementation of RiC. The Archives nationales de France (AnF), working with earlier drafts of RiC, in 2018 developed a prototype, the Pilote d'interopérabilité pour les Autorités Archivistiques françaises (PIAAF). The AnF has since released a RiC-O conversion tool that takes EAD files and outputs RDF XML files. It was also behind the development of Sparnatural, a user-friendly interface for building SPARQL queries on an RDF dataset. Richard Williamson has created a library of RiC shapes for the graph-drawing program Draw.io for use in modelling with RiC-O. On November 15, 2023, to coincide with the release of RiC 1.0, the AnF hosted the International Study Day on Early Implementations of Records in Contexts, with presentations from a range of institutions and projects. Closer to home, the Archives of Ontario (AO) has a received a grant from the University of Toronto's GLAM Incubator program for a RiC implementation pilot project.[30]

29 Thanks to Aaron Hope for pointing me to resources mentioned in this paragraph.

30 See Docuteam AG, "Docuteam Context," Docuteam, https://docs.docuteam.ch/context/; PIAAF (website), https://piaaf.demo.logilab.fr; Sparnatural (website), https://sparnatural.eu; and "Williamsonrichard / Records_in_contexts_draw_io_shape_library," GitHub, https://github.com/williamsonrichard/records_in_contexts_draw_io_shape_library. (All links accessed June 30, 2024.) Presenters at the AnF event included EGAD; the working group on the ISO records management standard ISO 23081; the AnF; national archives from Sweden, Norway, Liechtenstein, and Singapore; the Notarial Archives Foundation in Malta; archives of the Swiss cantons of Vaud and Zug; the Amsterdam City Archives; InterPARES Trust; and Docuteam. Recordings are available on Daily Motion, at https://www.dailymotion.com/playlist/x86ajs; slides are on Google Drive, at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1zywJxTuccDjSX-QUrYc4deACs_BTw9z8. For the AO's project, see the description on the University of Toronto's Glam Incubator site, at https://glam.ischool.utoronto.ca/?project=graph-based-archival-description-at-the-archives-of-ontario. (All links accessed June 30, 2024.)

RiC-based software is coming, then, but it is still very much early days. However, if most archives cannot today just "adopt" RiC, they can nevertheless start to "use" it in various ways. Most critically, archivists can start to conceptually take apart their existing finding aids (whether based on the ICA standards, RAD, or DACS) and map their elements to the RiC model to see what happens: What changes? What goes missing? Where are the ambiguities? What are the options? This would allow archivists to get their hands on RiC, gain a feel for how it can work in practice, find gaps in the model itself, and identify areas where practitioners are likely to need more guidance in a content standard that can draw freely on the existing ones.

This sort of preparatory work seems vital. At various points over the last eight years, EGAD has released drafts of RiC and invited comments. It is not clear how much response was generated, but EGAD never really had a process to publicly engage with this feedback – e.g., by publishing summaries of responses, highlighting areas of community concern, identifying options, opening debate, letting consensus emerge where possible, or explaining decisions made. In February 2024, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) announced that it was delaying RiC implementation, partly out of frustration with the process and partly because it did not see how its own concerns and comments had been addressed in the final 1.0 version. Tellingly, the SAA statement characterizes RiC as a standard designed for rather than by the archival community. But this is not an outright rejection of RiC; rather, it pushes alignment back to a time frame of the SAA's own choosing, in accordance with its own community-driven processes.[31]

Perhaps it is really only now – after the release of a stable 1.0 version and before software is widely available – that archivists can truly dig into RiC. Archival communities can use this "pre-implementation" phase for experimentation and testing and perhaps create for themselves a more engaged and public process. In this sense, I do not think that archives need to choose right now between RiC and the existing standards (the ICA suite or RAD or DACS). It seems fine to take RiC as a supplement and see where it takes us and what it can

31 The SAA statement describes RiC as "a standard that has been developed outside of SAA's norms for developing standards with, not for, the user community." Society of American Archivists, "Technical Subcommittee on *Describing Archives*," 3. Implementation in the SAA context means harmonization of DACS and EAD with RiC. In June 2024, EGAD made available the comments it received on RiC-CM 0.2. See the announcement (with links to Google Drive and GitHub): Daniel Pitti, "Community Comments on RiC-CM 0.2," posted to Records in Contexts Users Google group, June 7, 2024, https://groups.google.com/g/Records_in_Contexts_users/c/RZx5bqSp48Q.

do – especially in the realm of linked data, where real benefits may be anticipated. This is a way of working with RiC without adopting it – using it to make it usable for the range of institutions, with their varying needs and levels of access to professional expertise and technology. Ideally, this activity can feed back into the development of both software and the standard itself.[32]

Comments and Questions

Without working through RiC in these ways, it is difficult to assess it. This section contains some commentary based on my own very preliminary and rudimentary attempts. As archivists undertake their own mapping efforts, there are several criteria they can keep in mind. Does RiC's entity model adequately capture the archival domain? Does it leave space for multiple contexts, voices, and perspectives? Does it allow archivists to move easily between the creation of narrative descriptions for human readers and the production of structured data for machine processing? And does it truly absorb its predecessor standards such that existing descriptive data can be losslessly migrated into RiC-based systems, while new data can, if desired, be output in the old narrative formats? This section takes up some of these questions in an impressionistic way, in a spirit that means to be both critical and sympathetic.

Repositories

RiC's four core entities (Record Resource, Instantiation, Agent, and Activity) map back to the main objects of three of the four earlier ICA standards. But ISDIAH – the standard for describing archival institutions – has gone missing. There is no Repository entity. Archival Institution is presumably a sub-entity of RiC's Corporate Body (E10), but few of the attributes available for describing RiC corporate bodies capture the characteristics of repositories in ways relevant to researchers who want to access their holdings. This is what ISDIAH sets out to do in its 17 repository-specific elements. And it is hard to see how the RiC attributes could be simply extended into sub-attributes to capture them.

32 However, how RiC revision will work is not yet clear. The SAA notes that "We have heard nothing about how RiC will be maintained, by what body, and on what schedule." Society of American Archivists, "Standards Committee: Statement on the Adoption of *Records in Context* (RiC)" (Agenda Item IV.A, SAA Council Meeting, February 5–6, 2024), 3, accessed June 30, 2024, https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0224-IV-A-Stands.pdf.

Does this matter? It is curious, considering EGAD's mandate to integrate all the existing ICA standards, but it might seem unimportant given ISDIAH's relative obscurity.[33] But, in Canada at least, ISDIAH does play a role in the provincial and national portals to which most institutions contribute descriptions: ISDIAH fields structure the information about each participating repository. In this sense, ISDIAH is a hidden or infrequent but widely used standard in Canada. Only a few archivists ever need to prepare ISDIAH descriptions (and they typically do so just once for their own institutions), but these institution descriptions anchor the system in multi-repository environments. With linked data, it seems even more useful to have a standardized way of describing the institutions responsible for publishing archival descriptive data that can be consumed by and integrated into external systems. In any case, Canadian archives already have ISDIAH data and will have to do something with it.[34] The absence of Repository feels like an omission.

Missing Entities?

RiC-CM notes in its introduction that, in feedback received for earlier drafts, some wanted fewer entities, while some wanted more.[35] No doubt, every archivist will have their own favourite candidates here. But an open discussion and debate would be beneficial.

There are several entities that lurk on the edges of description, even if they belong more properly to the domains of other archival functions – accessions, physical storage locations, and rights, for example.[36] Accession is an interesting case. It pertains to the acquisition function but can show up in description in an "Accrual" or "Immediate source of acquisition" note. And for some institutions, accession records function as de facto description and public access tools. Accessions in some ways resemble a RiC Record Set (a body of materials); in others, a RiC Event or series of Events (the transfer of physical custody and legal control).

33 "Though ISAD(G) has significantly influenced international archival descriptive practice, ISAAR(CPF) has some use, and both ISDF and ISDIAH very little." ICA-EGAD, *Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model*, 8. "ISDIAH is nearly unknown in the world." InterPARES Trust, "Comments on 'Records in Context,'" 3.

34 This reinforces a general point made by InterPARES Trust in their response to the first *RiC* consultation draft: the RiC initiative "started with no analysis of both the actual level of application of the ICA standards in different countries and their major criticalities." InterPARES Trust, 3.

35 ICA-EGAD, *Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model*, 15.

36 See Artefactual's comments on the first RiC consultation draft: Gillean, "Artefactual Response to RiC-CM Draft."

There have been attempts in recent years to standardize accession information; the *Canadian Archival Accession Information Standard* (CAAIS) was released in 2019, and the SAA sponsored a working group that produced "Archival Accessioning Best Practices" in 2024.[37] Both propose data elements for an Accession record, and it would be interesting to map these against RiC to identify gaps. At a cursory glance, *transfer* and *donation* do not figure in RiC relations. Appraisal also seems to be missing from the RiC model; there appears to be no counterpart to ISAD(G)'s "Appraisal, destruction and scheduling information" element (3.3.2). This matters in the face of calls to use description to make archivists' own interventions in shaping the record more visible.

To be sure, RiC's mandate is to model the domain of one archival function (description), not all of them. But the boundaries between domains are not hard and fast; entities cross over, and an archival information system is ideally a series of separate but interconnected modules. It would be useful, I think, to have a more global analysis of the entities involved in all archival functions, as most of these will find their way at some level into archival description.

Repeating Attributes

RiC attributes are sometimes repeatable and sometimes not. For example, RiC allows an Agent to have multiple Identifiers (A22) and Names (A28) but only one History (A21). But to use repeating attributes, archivists will typically need to add information that characterizes how the value applies to the entity. Just listing all the names of a particular Agent (e.g., Personnel Office, Human Resources, HR) has limited value; it is more meaningful to also give the *type* of name (e.g., authorized, variant, parallel, nickname, or acronym) and the *dates* over which it was effective.

Where does this kind of qualifying information fit in RiC? There appear to be two main ways to go with repeatable attributes. They could be treated as quasi-entities themselves, using RiC relations to link them to the primary entities and RiC relation attributes to describe the connections. This would mean adding

37 Canadian Council of Archives National Archival Accession Standard Working Group, *Canadian Archival Accession Information Standard*, version 1.0 (n.p.: Canadian Council of Archives, May 2019), https://archivescanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CAAIS_2019May15_EN.pdf; National Best Practices for Archival Accessioning Working Group, "Archival Accessioning Best Practices" (circulation draft for community feedback, February 2024), https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BKBK-GTXh1Fa1T9ZbD0Zx9OSJmOh3mLz5NpHiYIe2oE/edit?pli=1#heading=h.yuq3eaacufrf.

quite a few new relations (e.g., *has or had name*, *has or had identifier*). But RiC-O already goes down this path with its expansion of classes and properties.[38] Alternatively, RiC-CM could itself prescribe sets of sub-attributes – e.g., Name (A28), broken out into Name Type, Name Value, Name Dates, and Name Note.[39] Both approaches likely have benefits and drawbacks. Hopefully, the RiC application guidelines will cover this ground in more detail, but for now, implementers are left to decide for themselves.

Narrative and Structured Data

It was suggested above that archivists in a RiC environment should be able to "toggle" between the production of narrative descriptions for human readers and of structured data for machine processing. In some cases, RiC supports both modes. The History attribute (A21) provides for a narrative presentation of data that can also be organized into multiple RDF triples using RiC relations. But in other cases, RiC seems to shunt archivists into one or the other. Conditions of Access (A08) and Conditions of Use (A09) are cast as non-repeatable, implying a single block of narrative text, and there are not enough relations available to represent the information in the form of multiple rights statements. Here, it is all narrative and no structure.[40] On the other hand, you can only express the physical extent associated with a Record Resource by listing the Instantiation Extents (A23) and Carrier Extents (A05) of its related Instantiations; however, there seems no place to sum these up (e.g., at the fonds level) or to provide a succinct narrative account that gives the migration or format history of the whole ensemble of records and Instantiations. Perhaps one way to look for gaps

38 RiC-CM acknowledges that the distinction between entity and attribute is often a matter of perspective and that implementers may want to treat some *RiC* attributes as entities in their system design. ICA-EGAD, *Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model*, 39–40.

39 This would follow the practice in PREMIS, the metadata standard for digital preservation. PREMIS works with a model of four main entities: Object, Agent, Event, Rights Statements. Attributes are called "semantic units"; where they repeat, they are structured as sets of "semantic components" – e.g., an Object can have multiple *objectIdentifiers* (1.1), each of which consists of an *objectIdentifierType* (1.1.2) and an *objectIdentifierValue* (1.1.3). Most "attributes" in PREMIS are structured as repeating sets of sub-attributes. Interesting for the example being used here, PREMIS allows Agent names to be repeatable (3.2) but does not in this case specify a set of components, as one might expect.

40 RiC provides one relation for *is or was holder of intellectual property rights of* (R040). But this does not cover the range of rights statements needed, e.g., Creative Commons licenses, unidentified third-party copyrights, donor-imposed restrictions, restrictions arising from legislation or from an institution's ethical or policy considerations.

in RiC is to see whether all the aspects of an entity captured by RiC attributes and relations are offered both narrative and structured data possibilities.

Repeatability

RiC designates almost half of its attributes (20 in total) as non-repeatable, but it would benefit, I think, by opening more of them – maybe even all of them – to repeatability. History (A21) and Scope and Content (A38) are two examples. Both are non-repeatable as it stands. But this means enshrining one account – the one provided by the archivist – as canonical. It is precisely here, however, that RiC could meet the call to open description to other voices. Making these attributes repeatable would allow space in descriptive systems for histories and record descriptions produced by record subjects, communities, and researchers – who may have quite different perspectives on certain records – and the agents, activities, and events that generated them.[41]

Hierarchy

RiC's commitment to the hierarchical principle adds to the complexity of the model and seems somewhat at odds with its emphases on open-ended, multi-directional relations. Why not a single Agent entity – with a Type attribute governed by controlled vocabularies to differentiate the kinds of Agent – instead of the current set of Agent plus six sub-entities? Similarly with Record Resource and its three sub-entities. The number of attributes that apply uniquely to the sub-entities is small. Perhaps some precision would be lost; I am not sure. But if the scope of entities were expanded to take in the domains of other archival functions, it may be beneficial to have simpler, flatter entities.

Entity-Specific Relations

The hierarchical presentation extends into RiC's treatment of relations, where it leads RiC to establish multiple relations that differ only in the entities involved

41 How would this work in practice? One would need at least a Type qualifier (e.g., History Type = Archivist supplied / Subject supplied / Community supplied / Researcher supplied). Multiple Histories and Scope and Contents could also support versioning in interesting ways. Reparative description has made clear that archival descriptions (especially relating to these two attributes) are themselves historical artefacts freighted with political and social meaning. Systems need ways to remove offensive or harmful language from current descriptions while retaining records of the old ones and making them available to researchers who are interested precisely in archivists' and institutions' historical biases.

rather than in the nature of the relation itself. So, we have seven *is associated* relations, one for each of the of second-level entities, and one general *has or had part* relation (R02), with six "narrower" versions for various sub-entities. It feels somewhat arbitrary which entities get their own relations and which fall back on more generic ones. And is there really any gain in precision in saying *SFU* ***has subdivision*** *SFU Archives* (R005) rather than just *SFU* ***has part*** *SFU Archives* (R002)? The entity-specific relations inflate the number of relations in RiC-CM, which in turn feeds the even-greater complexity of RiC-O. An alternative would be fewer, flatter, more generic relations that could take whatever entities archivists see fit to pass to them.[42]

Back in Canada

None of the comments in the preceding section amount to a sustained argument. But they do perhaps suggest an alternate vision of the RiC universe – one with fewer, flattened entities that are broader in scope (if they take in the various entities on the edge of description); with attributes that are more repeatable and better structured for repeatability; and with fewer, more generic relations. Would this still be RiC? I think so, or at least, it should be mappable to RiC and capable of generating RiC-O RDF. It might also be easier to present and learn as a framework for reworked content standards. But above all, these remarks reinforce the need for archivists to start "using" RiC themselves – trying it out on existing descriptive data. Only by testing the RiC model in this way will archivists be able to concretely identify gains, gaps, and problems and begin to devise practical solutions – hopefully amid debate that allows consensus to emerge. RiC 1.0 may represent at last a finalized version, but it seems more a starting point than an end.

Canadian archivists were the first to establish a national archival descriptive standard, the *Rules for Archival Description*, whose first chapters appeared in 1990. Canadians were involved in developing the ICA standards, and a joint Canada–US project (CUSTARD) attempted in the early 2000s to create a single North American standard aligned to ISAD(G) and ISAAR. CUSTARD did not succeed in this, but out of it emerged both *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*

42 A point made by Artefactual in its RiC response. Gillean, "Artefactual Response to RiC-CM Draft."

(DACS), adopted by the SAA in 2005, and RAD2, a broadly similar document circulated for consultation but withdrawn in 2005, as CCAD settled for a much more minimal RAD revision in 2008. This has now left RAD to some extent outside the mainstream of archival descriptive standards, and it is no accident that RAD has subsequently stagnated and become in effect a fixed and finished document.[43] By contrast, DACS has undergone several revisions and remains an active project. The SAA's pause in implementing RiC is mainly about taking their time and subjecting RiC to community assessment in line with their own processes.

The appearance of RiC 1.0 presents an opportunity for Canadian archivists to re-engage with our descriptive standards. We can do this on our own terms at the national level or – in the spirit of CUSTARD – seek participation in the SAA process. Or both. If we are still waiting for RiC, it is not for lack of things to do.

43 Or maybe not quite. In 2024, the Canadian Council of Archives reconstituted its standards committee and put out a call for volunteers to take up the question of RAD revision. The committee will "consult and consider how and if a distinctive Canadian standard should be updated, leaving control within the Canadian archival system, or if we should build on the work that has already been undertaken around the world." Jo McCutcheon (Executive Director, CCA), "CCA Update – Standards Committee / Mise à jour du CCA - Comité des norms," email to the arcan-l maillist, May 8, 2024.

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