Knowledge Organization Systems as Accountability Tools in Archival Science

Abstract:
Transparency and accountability are two important concepts in democratic societies which development parallels the evolution of knowledge organization. In archival science both can be found in classification schemes – understood as knowledge organization systems - that can be perceived as a mirror of the entity’s functions and structures. In this paper, we present an ongoing research project that aims to discuss knowledge organization systems as accountability and transparency tools in archival science.

1.0 Introduction
This poster presents an ongoing research project that aims to discuss knowledge organization systems as accountability and transparency tools in archival science. In this initial phase, we aim to confirm that a classification scheme, understood as an archival knowledge organization system, can offer a better comprehension than legal provisions (i.e., access or transparency laws) to accountability and transparency because it reveals an action that has occurred, while legal provisions cover situations that may occur.

2.0 Discussion
Records are a necessary and required product for the functioning of any organized entity, playing an important role in the transparency of actions, especially in democratic societies that are committed with administrative and historical accountability. Menne-Haritz (1994, 541) attests that “no law can be strong enough to make people do something that has no meaning for their activities. They create records because they need them, not because someone ordered their creation”.

Recently, there has been a fertile ground for accountability discussions on archival science. According to Dirks (2004, 32) “[…] for organizations, this accountability has meant a need to meet effectively and efficiently their mandates within the legal, cultural, and political climate in which they operate. For the public, this has meant a call for greater transparency, spawning the passage of freedom of information, protection of privacy, and other sunshine-oriented legislation”.

Accountability is an intersection point between archives and democracy. Miguel (2005) defined two axes of the concept: horizontal accountability, which means the control the established powers have over each other, and vertical accountability as the need of the representative to account and to be submitted to people’s verdict.

In this context, the archives play a central role in these mechanisms for controlling and ensuring accountability, representation, and responsiveness of representatives. If, from the principle of legality, we have that “the Public Administration can only do what the law allows” (Di Pietro 2014, 65) the records remind us “that a law does not act; it is only a real human being who acts” (Hegel 1991, 178).

Transparency and accountability are, therefore, two important concepts in democratic societies which development parallels the evolution of knowledge organization (Smiraglia 2014). The latter holds in its core classification as a fundamental activity perceived as a process of distinguishing and distribution kinds of "things" into different
groups (Hjørland 2017), relying on structure to reveal the relationships that govern an ontological reality (Smiraglia 2014).

In the archival domain, a classification scheme – understood here as a “knowledge organization system designed for organizing knowledge and information, and making their management and retrieval easier” (Mazzochi 2018, 55), must be built according to the network of relationships between the record, its creator, the activity that created it, and the other records belonging to the same documentary set.

These relationships when represented in a classification scheme based on the entity’s function or structure elucidate what Duranti (2015) calls the archival bond (or what Smiraglia (2014) called ontological reality.

Therefore, a function-based classification scheme can go beyond the established relationships between records because it goes deeper, revealing the links between the record and the competences and activities of its producer. In other words, a classification by function is based on the context of a record’s creation and use, rather than on the content of the record itself (National Archives of Australia 2003).

The following is an example of a function-based classification scheme elaborated by The Public Archives of the State of Rio de Janeiro (APERJ). In the example, the classification scheme goes down to the record’s level, due to the use of a methodology called archival identification, which allows the archivist to get to the level where the activities are accomplished.

13 – **Competence**: To coordinate the Government planning and budgeting
13.01- **Function**: Human resource management policies
13.01.01 **Activities**: To analyze employees rights and benefits
13.01.01.01 **Records typology**: Statement of position accumulation
13.01.01.02 **Records typology**: Request for salary allowances

In the example above, the classification scheme is used as a transparency and accountability tool once it shows how the records are connected with their creator and how they are a product of the relationships between competences, function and activities.

Therefore, archival knowledge organization systems occupy a privileged position concerning accountability, since they shed light on the relationships between the record, the set it belongs to, and its producer.

### 3.0 Conclusion

Based on preliminary results, this poster aimed to discuss how archival knowledge organization systems, specifically classification schemes, could be conceived as a tool for transparency and accountability in democratic societies.

The main idea was to demonstrate that legal provisions could not be thought apart from knowledge organization systems once archivists have the methodological tools (Menne-Haritz 1994) to make evidence and information accessible, ensuring that the context is represented in a way it could be used to ensure accountability.

### References


