



Summer activities at the Plant.

## SPAIN

### NEW PERSPECTIVES ON BUSINESS ARCHIVES

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There are two reasons that highlight the need for the reopening of the debate on the state of corporate archives. The first is about the publication, a few months ago, of the third edition of the report by the International Council of Archives - Section on Business Archives (edited by Alison Turton, 2021, downloadable from the ICA website); the second, a few weeks ago, is the impulse of Miguel Ángel Álvarez Areces, of INCUNA, who invited the author together with Roberto Marini of Virginia Studio Associato to Asturias in Spain for a short but intense visit to company archives and companies with archives. The idea is the creation of a future network between sub-

jects such as those indicated and, more generally, between company archivists.

Returning to the first reason, it is impossible not to highlight how, despite the great merit and effort of the publication, for at least for the two countries involved in this first moment of analysis, Italy and Spain, the data published in the report are quite distant from the reality. Italy especially is much more in favor of continuing with the enthusiastic and interventionist phase of the first days of the discipline, the business archives which, in the Bel Paese, took its first steps in the late 70s and the first half of the 80s, consolidating itself also with the birth of a series of institutions in the sector for the whole of the following decade. This phase, positive and proactive, then dissolved, in the opinion of the writer, and merged with the more consolidated disciplines of classical archival science and economic history, losing, in this way, the character of its own; a character which is the result of a multiplicity of sensitivities, starting from archivistics and history and arriving to economics, geography, engineering, architecture and sociology.



Arvida company town in 1945, Picture Lalime, Particular Collection (NHS, 2012)

The first point of contact on these topics with INCUNA dates back to 2015, when the Jornadas proposed *El Legado de la Industria: Archivos, Bibliotecas, Fototecas de empresas* as their theme. *Fábricas y memoria*. On this particular occasion, there was a strong call to the multidisciplinary that originally must pervade the heterodox archivist, the business archivist. Only in relation to Italy and Spain, we can find works (The management, conservation and enhancement of business archives; the case of Trentino in the Italian horizon, by the author, and *Los Archivos de empresa en Asturias y España* by Edoardo Núñez Fernández, that starting from the same original considerations, discussed in the aforementioned SBA ICA report, are being updated, so as to understand whether or not there has been progress in the discipline.

The issues that can be summarized and extended to other communities are the following ones:

1. Is there an updated survey on the state of company archives, on the

practices of description, management and enhancement of the same and on the attitude of companies towards this type of heritage? The data, for example those reported in the aforementioned report, seem dated and based more on an aspiration than on the actual state of affairs. Knowledge of the state of the art is essential for a timely intervention that cannot ignore the particular situation of each country.

2. Together with the precise knowledge of the cultural context, it is advisable to analyze two further aspects: the first is the juridical one (the rules that regulate, or not, this particular type of heritage) and the second, closely linked to the first, is that of the functioning of the archival administration. We have observed how the functioning of the latter is, for example, different between Spain and Italy, while understanding it is fundamental for the implementation of any archival project, even in the private sphere.

3. Going into the specifics of the archive and the figures who work in it (and who operate in a cultural and legal context that must be known),

it is necessary to understand how the archivists are formed, who they are and what are the characteristics of their background and, among them, who are the corporate archivists and how they differ from the classical archivists. Furthermore, a great help could be the investigation of the context in which those figures were formed and the possible form in which they are organized, both regarding their own activity and also regarding any forms of category organization.

4. Again, what is the reference of the archival tradition? How are the archiving phases and archive interventions understood? Are international descriptive standards applied? In which way phases, interventions and standards are applied to documentary realities of industrial origin? Is there the possibility of a basic, common and shared vocabulary and of an agreement on the descriptive tools to be adopted up to a common software application, that allows the greatest interaction between originally different subjects (for example Atom of the ICA)?

5. How to integrate the activities of enhancement of the archival heritage with those more related to archive interventions (such as digitization) up to the more lateral ones (such as industrial tourism) with a scientifically correct archival practice and without the latter bowing to instances oriented to marketing only?

6. Is it possible to imagine, without prejudice to the particularity of the different national and local cultural and archival environments, a typical archival intervention from a methodological point of view? In other words, a standard that allows a scientifically correct practice,

which is substantially understandable and shared between archivists and scholars of different traditions and countries?

Having said this, is it possible to set up a permanent working group that promotes the conservation, description, enhancement and management of company archives and that functions as a critical mass both towards the companies producing archives and also to the institutions that should regulate their existence?

Furthermore, is it possible that the same group promotes training actions for archivists that enhance the right sensitivity and multidisciplinary approach typical of those who deal with industrial heritage and which, very often, is not in the DNA of the classic archivist?

INCUNA is taking its first steps in this direction by bringing to common reflection those who deal with a series of business archives located in Asturias (Hunosa Historical Archive, Duro-Felguera SA Company Archive, Historical Archive of AsturianaDe Zinc SA) and with the directly coordinated digitization intervention of a small archival collection relating to the Fábrica de Mieres; a part of the broader and more important documentary heritage of Hunosa, among other things recently opened to the public. It is a pilot project that can become the testing ground for a more general discussion which, we hope, will begin from today within TICCIH.

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