Towards the new era of archival description – the Finnish approach

Jaana Kilkki, Director of Collections Management Division, National Archives Service of Finland,

Outi Hupaniittu, Development Manager, National Archives Service of Finland &

Pekka Henttonen, D.Soc.Sc., Researcher, School of Information Sciences, University of Tampere

Abstract:

National Archives Service of Finland started at the beginning of 2012 a project (known as AHAA) whose goal is to develop common descriptive services for the Finnish archival sector. A part of the project is to develop new approaches to archival description. The project that will be executed 2012-2014 includes the development of a description tool (information system) to implement the new description model.

The current situation is in many ways unsatisfactory. The current Finnish rules for archival description are close to ISAD(G). They have been created to guide description of traditional records in an archival institution. Thus, they do not take into account metadata of electronic records which is created before the records are transferred to archives. They ignore the description of many types of records, especially those that are born in electronic environment, like databases. They do not properly suit the item level description of digitized items. Finally, they say nothing about user-created descriptions and folksonomies.
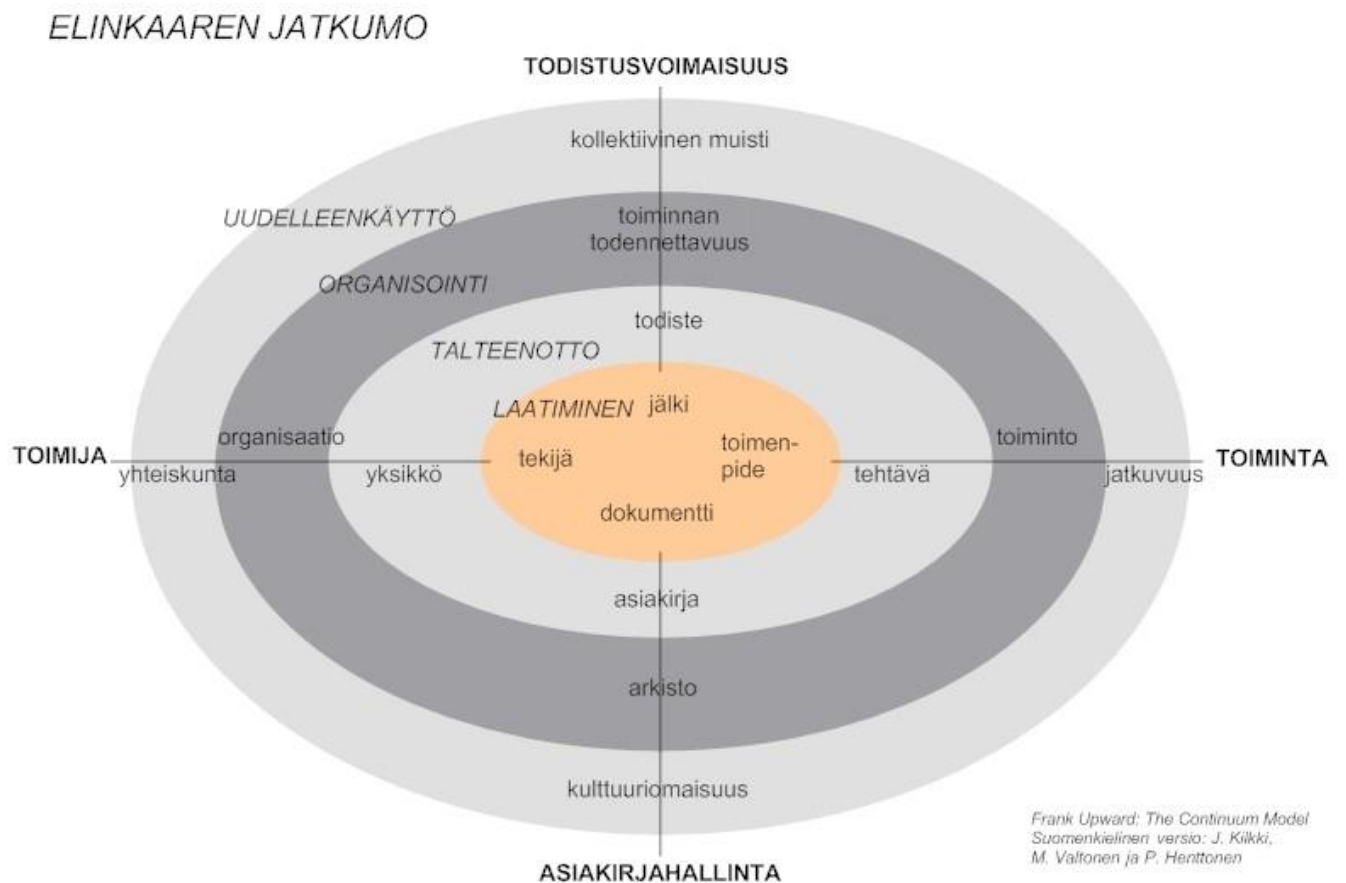
To answer these challenges a new conceptual model for archival description, similar to FRBR in the library world, is being created during 2012. The new national description standard, aiming to be compatible with the ICA standards, will be based on this conceptual model. The presentation describes the premises and results so far of the project.

The background of the project lies in the Finnish approach to recordkeeping. The national implementation of the life-cycle and continuum (by Frank Upward) models with postcustodial principles are used as a framework of the recordkeeping and archival practices in both traditional and electronic records keeping.

Figure 1. Elinkaaren jatkumomalli - The Continuum Model.
Frank Upward, translated in Finnish by Jaana Kilkki, Marjo Rita Valtonen and Pekka Henttonen (Published in Jaana Kilkki: "*Suomalainen erikoisuus – asiakirjojen elinkaaren jatkumomalli*". In Arkistoviesti 1/2007, 21–23.)

ELINKAAREN JATKUMO

TODISTUSVOIMAISUUS
kollektiivinen muisti
UUDELLEENKÄYTTÖ
toiminnan todennettavuus
ORGANISOINTI
todiste
TALTEENOTTO
LAATIMINEN jälki
organisaatio   toimen-   toiminto
TOIMIJA   tekijä   pide   TOIMINTA
yhteiskunta   yksikkö   tehtävä   jatkuvuus
dokumentti
asiakirja
arkisto
kulttuuriomaisuus
ASIAKIRJAHALLINTA

Frank Upward: The Continuum Model
Suomenkielinen versio: J. Kilkki,
M. Valtonen ja P. Henttonen

The praxis is based upon the statutory authority the National Archives Service has to issue binding regulations to the public organizations on their registration and cataloguing of records and on their permanent preservation. To fulfill the regulations, the organizations are required to keep an archives formation plan which guides the creation, usage, preservation, appraisal and disposal of the records.

Consequently, the Finnish approach is based upon the theoretical continuum model and implemented with the archive formation plan and registration.

Thus, the records keeping and archival practices are not processes carried out separately but a joint process that starts when documents are created. The process is not carried out only in memory organizations as it starts when documents are created and continues throughout different phases of life cycle. Nevertheless this concerns mainly the records and archives of the public administration and thus alongside it there is plenty of other archival material acquired and described "more traditional" terms.

The current Finnish rules for archival description date back to late 1990s, and therefore they do not meet the present requirements. The current Finnish rules for archival description are close to ISAD(G). They have been created to guide description of traditional records in an archival institution. Thus, they do not take into account metadata of electronic records which is created before the records are transferred to archives. They ignore the description of many types of records, especially those that are born in electronic environment, like databases. They do not properly suit the item level description of digitized items. Finally, they say nothing about user-created descriptions and folksonomies. Also they are primarily applied for the material of the National Archive or public records as other archives use their own guidelines that might or might not be based on ICA or IS standards.

The re-evaluation and renewal of the methods and guidelines for description of the archival material are current also as the project National Digital Library is improving the availability and usability of the material Finnish memory functions (archives, libraries, museums). The project develops national electronic services and infrastructures by creating joint solutions. One of the key functions of the project is the common public interface, which will be taken in use gradually from this year onwards. This increases the demand for more compatible archival description within the archival sector.

At the beginning of 2012 a project (known as AHAA) was launched to develop common descriptive services for the Finnish archival sector. The project is led by National Archives Service of Finland, and four other archives participate in it with the IT Centre for the Science Ltd. The project has dense connections to the co-operation network of the Finnish archival sector, which links together 11 publicly funded archival institutions.

AHAA Participants:

1. National Archives Service of Finland

2. Finnish Literature Society

3. Archives of the Organizations of the National Coalition Party

4. Archives of the Center Party

5. Swedish Central Archive

6. CSC – IT Center for the Science Ltd

Archives Sector in the National Digital Library:

1. National Archives Service of Finland (AHAA)

2. Finnish Literature Society (AHAA)

3. Finnish Jazz & Pop Archive

4. Central Archives for Finnish Business Records

5. National Audiovisual Archive

6. People's Archive

7. Institute for the Languages of Finland

8. Society of Swedish Literature in Finland

9. Finnish Labour Archives

10. Finnish Social Science Data Archive

11. Yle - Finnish National Public Service Broadcasting Company

A part of the project is to develop new approaches to archival description. The project that will be executed 2012-2014 includes the development of a description tool (information system) to implement the new description model.

The aim of the project is to harmonize the description of different types of archival material:

- records and other types of archival material

- traditional and digital archival material and description

- digital archival material in different phases of lifecycle

The context of the National Digital Library and the varying materials of the different kinds of archives make it impossible to conceptualize the material solely as records. Thus in the project the archival material is defined as material that is managed by archival principles, in other words by the contextualization of the material and provenance.

The project also looks to the future and visions the development of the information services context. The parallel projects such as Finnish National Digital Library and Europeana have already sifted to focus on to the archival information services that are provided as web service by shared interfaces. The data and metadata are provided as open linked data which allows users to build services at will, and the users are regarded as active participants in the archival description.

The existing recordkeeping metadata standards and archival description standards are not compatible as they treat different kinds of archival material separately, but they are used as sources in the creation of the new common conceptual model that will approach the description of the material regardless of its form or type, phase of lifecycle or custodial institution. As the background of the organizations and materials are variable, the project is not aiming at the creation of a common metadata model or standard. The common conceptual model will harmonize the practices but simultaneously be versatile enough to meet the requirements of the archival organizations.

The theoretical background of the conceptual model lies in the notion of parallel provenance. The provenance is not a one-to-one relationship between the material and the organization that has created it or has custody over it. Instead, the provenance is seen as a more complex relationship on the one hand between archival material and the functions it documents, on the other hand between the material and the agent participating in its "creation". On the latter is taken into account the role of the custodial institution and the role of users in different phases of lifecycle in the archives formation.

New model for archival description in Finland

The new archival description is defined as a conceptual approach to material regardless of its form and type, phase of lifecycle and custodial institution. The description builds upon a conceptual model that describes the main entities of archival description and their respective relationships. It separates the description of material from the description of its context (compare with the description of the material cultural heritage) as well as description of context from the description of content (entity *subject*) (compare with the description of the bibliographic material).

The conceptual model connects different metadata models for the description of archival material in different phases of its life-cycle, and for bibliographic and museum materials. It takes into account the ICA standards ISAD(G), ISAAR, ISDF, as well as the ISO (SFS) standards 23081 and 15489. The national specifications and guidelines used are Sähke2 and JHS 143 which concentrate on electronic material. Of them, the JHS 143 has close connections to the British eGMS and Australian RKMS standards. There are also links to the standards concerning material or bibliographic cultural heritage, Cidoc CRM and FRBR.

As the archival description is defined as a conceptual model, the material can be described according to several metadata models, which makes the model flexible and adjustable to the variable needs and materials of different archival organizations. The definitions of the main entities will, nevertheless, enable the harmonizing of metadata models and description practices in different archival organizations.

Besides the conceptual model, the AHAA project will produce common rules for description and cataloguing of archival material in custodial institutions. The rules will base on ICA models but acknowledge the national characteristics, specifications and guidelines, and they will include the definitions of the attributes of the entities and guidelines for their use. A prominent part of the project is the development of a description tool (information system) to implement the new description model. The tool will be the first step in renewing the archival database VAKKA, which is nowadays in use beside the National Archives Services in the archives of the Finnish Literature Society. It will also start the sift from many parallel systems, databases and interfaces within on archive towards a one compiling information system which will be able to treat archival material regardless of its form, type or age. In the case of the electronic material, the information system can be taken in use also in the custodial organisations or it will get the required metadata directly from

the original information systems within the phase of capturing and transferring of the material to the National Archives Services. It will also be directly linked to the shared public interface of Finnish memory function, which will be the web service provided the National Digital Library. In the first face the new information system will be taken in use in all five AHAA archives, but in future is expected that the other archives within the National Digital Library consider it as well.