The use of records – a literature review

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Introduction

Archival science as an academic discipline is fairly new and of small proportions, thus academic research within the field has been rare until recently. Nevertheless a growing interest in research issues has emerged lately, partly because of the challenges information technology impose on established practices and fundamental principles. Challenges that have vitalized the theoretical discourse, but also generated problems which require an extension of the field of knowledge. These problems also have a societal interest, for instance long-term preservation issues and the securing of integrity and authenticity of viable information objects. Questions concerning use, users and access have gained less attention, but have been accentuated in public debate during recent years due to political concerns about access and transparency on one hand and privacy on the other. It has for instance brought about initiatives and recommendations within the European Union (*Recommendation No. R*

(2000) 13), and the development of E-government is related to records management and access to public records (*The 24/7 Agency*, 2000). Within the cultural heritage sector vast resources are also invested in digitising and disseminating cultural objects, among them archives. Still, these ventures are rarely based on research findings or theoretical models of user behaviour. The practitioners' experiences are hardly ever documented or evaluated, and the general knowledge of user behaviour is a mixture of common sense, presumptions and prejudices (Duff, 2002; Anderson, 2004). However, this problem has been recognized by some researchers and practitioners, resulting in some R&D projects aimed at providing resources for promoting and evaluating access and use of records. These often take the form of intra-disciplinary co-operation between universities, archives, libraries and museums, e.g. *The Museums and the Online Archive of California II User Evaluation Project (MOAC II)*, the international network of researchers *AX-SNet (Archival eXcellence in Information Seeking Studies Network)* and the project *Developing Archival Metrics in College and University Archives and Special Collections*. The *RLG (The Research Library Group)* is another example, which has mostly been concerned with preservation issues, but also approaching issues of use and access*.*

The conceptualization of the user and the use of records is important since it guides the way users and their needs are received, and influences the design of records management and archives systems and services to users.

The purpose of this study is to give an overview of how users and use of records are conceptualized in modern archival discourse. In accordance with Scandinavian tradition, the author's viewpoint is that

there is no principal distinction between current records and non-current (archival) records, and that records and archives management is part of the same continuum. The ambition has thus been to investigate the conception of use and users of both current and non-current records. The study is based on a literature review of articles covering issues surrounding use, users, access, information seeking and search, reference service and finding aids in widely recognized journals such as *American Archivist, Archival Science, Archivaria, Archives & Manuscripts, Arkiv, Samhälle och Forskning, Information Management Journal, Journal of Archival Organization, Journal of the Society of Archivists, and Records Management Journal,* supplemented with database searches in *Academic Search Elite, Emerald, Eric by Ebsco, Ingenta, InSpec, Library, Literature and Information Science,* and *MLA.* General textbooks and public reports have further been scrutinised. These topics are sometimes treated by related disciplines like Library and Information Science, Information Systems and Human Computer Interaction (HCI) research. Nevertheless, works in these fields have been left out of this study, since the ambition is not to provide an exhaustive and quantitative overview of the literature on the subject, but to highlight some works of relevance which can be assumed to have been accessible to archival practitioners, including records managers, and researchers. A serious limitation is that the literature search only covered English and Swedish works. An excuse may be that the author writes from a Swedish perspective and that English writings can be assumed to have an international impact, even in other language areas. However, this is a deficiency and hopefully it will be corrected to some extent in forthcoming studies.

The use of records

The records themselves and the processes in which they are created lie at the core of archival theory and of archives and records management practice. A certain characteristic of records is that their value is largely potential: it is not possible to fully predict the future value of records (Nilsson, 1983). Records are created for certain reasons, kept for other reasons, and used for various reasons. The ultimate users and their reasons for use are often unknown.

Within Swedish archival discourse, the use of records has often been connected to the democratic control of society in relation to the legislation concerning freedom of the press and access to official documents. During the 1980s several public reports concerning archival issues were published, providing the foundation for the Archives Act in 1990. The starting point was a report from the Ministry of Education (*Ds U 1981:21*), which was supposed to give an overview of the area. On the basis on the current legal framework, the report stated the following purposes of records: control of public affairs, and the agencies' and individuals' need for reliable information sources. The latter also included the researchers' need for pluralistic and reliable sources. The research aspect was further emphasized when the objectives of the public archival institutions were addressed. A special reference was also made to the role of archives in connection to cultural policy: to protect the freedom of speech and to preserve the culture of previous times. The report about municipal archives (*Ds U 1984:6*) claimed four reasons for keeping records: the agency's need to carry out business and to protect its legal rights, the protection of the rule of law and the

control of public affairs. The main reason for long-term recordkeeping was research purposes, including both academic and popular research. (The report referred to the National Archives' policy, where all kinds of information seeking in records are considered as research.) The official report preceding the Archives Act identified three main societal functions of the archives of public agencies: a knowledge providing function, an efficiency promoting function, and a cultural function. The first concerned the citizens' use of information to participate in the political and democratic process and to obtain control of public agencies; the use of records to secure the rule of law; and, to undertake research or satisfy any need of knowledge for curiosity, pleasure or any other reason. The cultural function does partly fill the same needs but the records' function as part of the cultural heritage was further stressed. In this context the author referred to the archives as "the memory of the nation" (*SOU 1988:11,* p. 35). The efficiency promoting function concerned the agencies' ability to fulfil their obligations. Even if individuals' and agencies' needs also were recognized, the perspective was rather comprehensive, emphasising common societal interests. It is noteworthy that *use* as such is not actually considered in these reports. They focused on the purpose of records and archives on a general level, from which use can indirectly be derived.

The purpose of use, or the purpose of records rather than the actual use of them, is also framed in general textbooks. A conceptual framework which has gained wide acceptance and is still influential on both theory and practice is Th.R. Schellenberg's distinction between primary and secondary value. According to Schellenberg (1956) the

creating agencies primarily need records for administrative, fiscal, legal, and operating purposes. The further use of records is for cultural reasons, including research, thus responding to a wider societal need. Records of secondary value are, however, not only of use for external researchers but also for the creating organization, at least concerning their evidential value:

> "For the government they [records of evidential value] are a storehouse of administrative wisdom and experience. They are needed to give consistency and continuity to its actions. They contain precedents for policies, procedures, and the like, and can be used as a guide to public administrators in solving problems of the past or, equally important, in avoiding past mistakes. They contain the proof of each agency's faithful stewardship of the responsibilities delegated to it and the accounting that every important public official owes to the people whom he serves" (Schellenberg, 1956, p. 8).

Schellenberg seemed thus to refer to the records' function as organizational memory, even if not using that expression, and to some extent as a means of accountability. The distinction between primary and secondary value was considered as an absolute divide and a temporal process. Records pass through different phases, and are used in different ways during the life-cycle. Representing another tradition, where the distinct division between primary and secondary value is not acknowledged in the same way, is Sue McKemmish who stated:

> "Records of activity are valued and used by their creators and other individuals and organizations for a variety of current social and organizational purposes. They enable informed planning and decision making, and support continuity, consistency and effectiveness of human action. They are vehicles of communication and interaction. [-

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> --] Records of activity provide evidence of rights, entitlements and obligations, and support the role of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. [---] Some records of activity are preserved because their continuing value to an individual or organization as well as to society..." (McKemmish, 1993, p. 8).

That records have value for individuals, organizations and society as well is clearly stated, and maybe a certain emphasis is held on the value of current records. The quotation shows, however, a certain resemblance to Schellenberg's above, and seems not to deviate noticeably from the traditional life cycle model he advocated.

Possibly also inspired by Schellenberg, Smedberg (1995) discussed the value of records in connection with appraisal. He stated that it is necessary to analyse how records are used for different purposes to be able to establish their value. Like Schellenberg he provided a two stage model, short-term and long-term value (even if the two overlap and short-term could be rather long). Short-term value is primarily the value for the records creating agencies themselves, which Smedberg claimed is a question outside archival consideration. Besides the needs of the agencies, short-term value is also about other agencies' needs of information, the rule of law, and citizens' control of public affairs. To the rhetorical question why records were preserved in the long run, the answer was *future research*. Smedberg did however elaborate the statement further: "The concept of research has a broad definition in archival context. Actually every kind of information seeking in archives counts as research. It is here enough to state that archival material is used for different kinds of research, for information seeking similar to research, and for cultural

purposes in general" (Smedberg, 1995, p. 181, A.S. translation). Another section in the same textbook (Lindroth, 1995) focused on academic research, but made a general reflection about the use of records. According to the author, use can be divided into three groups: the records creating organization's use in ordinary business procedure; the public's use in order to seek information and claim legal rights, often concerning material interests; and finally research. There is a clear relation between the official reports and the views of these authors. Similar wording appears in all the texts. Despite representing the Scandinavian perspective, that there is no difference between current records and non-current (archival) records, the focus lies on research, even if the definition of research is wide.

An entirely organizational perspective is naturally expressed in records management handbooks, for example: "[Records] provide [...] the information needed to transact an organization's business" (Wallace, Lee, & Schubert, 1992, p. 6). However, actual use is even here implicitly defined in the purposes of records, categorised as financial, legal, administrative, research, and historical purposes. The organizational perspective is obviously emphasized in the international Records management standard (*ISO 15489-1*), which gives a comprehensive list of benefits of records to organizations. It can be summarised as follows: records are needed to perform business activities, i.e. for administrative needs, to meet external requirements, protect own and others' interests, to support research, and to provide individual and collective identity and memory. A general model of use was presented by Shepherd & Yeo (2003) in their handbook on records management, where the purposes of using records are condensed into three categories:

- Business purposes to support administration, legislation, public or professional service, economy, or transactions between individuals or organizations.

- Accountability purposes to prove that organizations meet legal or other regulatory requirements. A strong relation between accountability and records' evidential value is presumed.

- Cultural purposes to gain understanding of various phenomena (outside business activities)

These are aiming at society, organizations and individuals, and the categorisation is perhaps a way to bridge the primary-secondary value gap since the categories can occur simultaneously.

All the works cited above discuss the motivations for use, i.e. the actual need for records, but few works deal with use itself. Pugh (1992) made an effort to peg down actual use, distinguishing between direct and indirect use. Direct use means that someone is taking part of a record or obtaining information from it, including reading a document, receiving a copy, receiving information by mail, telephone or in person, or loaning a document. Indirect use is the beneficiary of others' direct use, for instance by studying books or other publications based on records. This implies that persons can use records, without actually dealing with them. Use can further be factual or interpretive:

> "Researchers with factual questions approach archives with closed-ended questions, seeking a particular document, or seeking specific

> information about a particular person, place, object, or event. [...] In contrast, researchers with interpretive questions read comprehensively through a body of material to tell a story, develop a narrative, or test a hypothesis." (Pugh, 1992, pp.13-14)

The records' function as *memory*, primarily organizational memory, has been mentioned above. Records serving as a means to provide (or construct) collective and societal memory has been acknowledged by archival theoreticians in recent years, e.g. Cook (2001), Ketelaar (2001), Menne-Haritz (2001) and Hedstrom (2002). It is not clear, though, *how* records can be used to construct memory, or if any use involving reconstruction of the past can be referred to as memory. In the few concrete comments made about use and users, Hedstrom (pp. 39-40) and Menne-Haritz (p. 61) refer to research and researchers. A more complex and comprehensive view was presented by Cook, who influenced by postmodern ideas stated that

> "[w]hile the maintenance of government accountability and administrative continuity, and the protection of personal rights, are still rightly recognized as important purposes for archives, the principal justification for archives to most users, and to the tax-paying public at large, also reflected in most national and state archival legislation, rests on archives being able to offer citizens a sense of identity, locality, history, culture, and personal and collective memory" (Cook 2001, p. 18).

The notion of memory is however in general rather abstract.

So far use has been discussed a priori, from a theoretical point of view. However, empirical studies of use and users from various perspectives have also been undertaken in recent decades. A central

issue from the archival repositories' perspective is to what extent records actually are used and what kinds of records are requested. Goggin (1986) examined how scholars used archival sources at the Library of Congress between 1971 and 1981, concerning records from organizations of black people and women. One of the findings was that archival material was used to some extent by the majority of scholars in the study, but primarily to support information in published sources. Another finding was that the scholars preferred narrative sources -like correspondence, minutes, newspaper clippings, diaries etc., to other kinds of archival material for example financial records and legal files (i.e. materials that needed processing). Personal papers were also preferred to organizational records. Miller (1986) conducted an analysis of how archival sources were used in 214 articles on American social history between 1981 and 1985. Miller found that use of records were significant in all types of social history research. In 175 of the articles archival sources were cited, and substantially used in 158 articles. Correspondence was the most frequently used material, and private material surprisingly used to a larger extent than public. On the other hand, public material was more intensively used (i.e. of more substantial value for the articles) than private papers. The most significant observation was that process-oriented research (studies of processes, structures, and long term change) was more likely to have used quantifiable data like financial records, census records, and case files, while event-oriented research (focused on special events, persons or institutions) to a larger extent used narrative materials.

Two similar studies concerning Swedish conditions have been undertaken by Staffan Smedberg. The first (Smedberg, 1980) treated academic use of records in general. The findings showed that records were primarily used within historical research, but also, to a lesser extent, in political science, law, literary studies, art studies, ethnology, and Nordic languages. The then generally presumed decline in academic use of records as sources could not be confirmed. However, researchers seemed to use materials outside archival institutions, i.e. still in custody of the creating organizations, to an increasing extent. In Smedberg (1981), he focused on sociology and political science, showing that records were used, but published material was preferred in cases where the researchers used any textual data at all. Researchers in those disciplines also seemed to be ignorant of the characteristics of records, and the differences between records and published materials.

In a more recent study, Tibbo's (2003) findings from the American part of the "Primarily History" project, a survey of 400 historians during 2001 and 2002 showed that contemporary newspapers were the most often used and also considered to be the most useful sources! Unpublished correspondence, diaries, and handwritten manuscripts were also both highly used and valued by the historians.

The conclusion drawn from this brief survey is that the concept of use seems not have been theoretically elaborated in archival discourse. Although the purposes of use can be derived from the outlines of presumed purposes of keeping records and archives, actual use is, with a few exceptions, not discussed at all. The Schellenberg definition of primary and secondary value from 1956 seems to have had a strong influence on later definitions of the purposes of records.

A particular feature of the Swedish works is the emphasis on control of public affairs and the rule of law, seldom mentioned in international discourse. Scholarly research is however put forward by most writers. Empirical studies of use are rather scarce and undertaken from the perspective of archival institutions and scholarly research, usually concerning what kinds of records or other sources are used.

Users and user groups

Who, then, are the users? In archival discourse, for instance in general textbooks and reports concerning archival issues, the use and users of records are often defined in a deductive and perhaps speculative way, not explicitly underpinned with empirical data. In her textbook on reference service, Pugh (1992) broke down the concept of users into sub-groups in order to customise user services. She identified two main groups of users, *vocational* and *avocational* user. The first could be divided into the following: staff (often neglected but one of the most frequent and important user groups); professional users like lawyers, engineers, journalists etc., who use records in the course of their work; scholars using records for academic research; students, like scholars conducting academic research, but perhaps with less skills and thus with special demands for service; and teachers for instance in history and social science classes. To avocational users, Pugh assigned genealogists and amateur historians with various research interests. Duchein (1983) emphasized two broad categories of users: scholars and the general public, where the first was predominant. "Among the applicants for

access to archives, scholars, primarily historians, make up by far the largest and most demanding category" (Duchein, 1983, p. 7). The general public "all those who are neither professional nor amateur historians, nor students, nor interested in archives for professional reasons" (p. 9), on the other hand, is claimed to be a growing body of actual and potential users, primarily interested in genealogical research.

That use has increased and that new user groups with various interests have entered the archival institutions is a common reflection. The statements are seldom corroborated with factual observations, but a few empirical studies supporting the assumptions have been undertaken, although often based on a weak statistical material. A couple of quantitative studies of user demographics was undertaken in the beginning of the 1980s on behalf the International Council on Archives. Roper (1982) surveyed the academic users at the National Archives in Belgium, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Spain, United Kingdom and the USA. The findings indicated a general increase in readers and visits between 1972 and 1976. Roper's conclusion was that during the 1960s and 1970s the academic users clearly exceeded individuals who used archives for administrative, legal or business purposes. However, other important user groups, besides academics, were genealogists and amateur historians. Thus, Roper made a distinction between academic, practical, and popular users. Besides an increase in numbers, the researchers also had broadened their interest to new fields and a wider range of material. An international survey of 200 archival institutions also showed a general increase in archival users (Principe, 1982). Principe's interest was not the academic users, but the "common man". The user categories Principe dealt with were professionals (office workers and

school teachers), labourers, military personnel, retired persons, students, organizations, and others (including housewives). The use was divided into scholarly research (genealogical research & family history, local history, and other), and administrative research (for legal and financial purposes etc.). In general scholarly research was more frequent than administrative research. Of the non-academic users, students turned out to be the most frequent visitors, followed by professionals like lawyers, journalists and architects, teachers and retired people. Working people with restricted time schedules were less frequent, probably due to the archival institutions' limited opening hours. Non-specialists made up a majority of the total amount of users, and more than half of those were casual users.

An interest in promoting user studies was also shown at this time, e.g. Conway (1986a), Maher (1986) and Turnbaugh (1986). To what extent these efforts had practical impact is difficult to tell, but at least Paul Conway undertook a couple of larger studies and published the result. Conway (1986b) performed in 1984 a user survey during four months in four presidential libraries in the US. The objective of the study was not to compare the different institutions, but to identify patterns of users' behaviour. Five distinct user groups were recognized. The largest group, 51 %, was made up by university faculty, the second largest group, 18 %, by professionals like journalists, lawyers, government employees and individuals affiliated with research organizations, followed by students at graduate level, undergraduate students, and finally avocational users like genealogists and amateur historians. In his study of the users of the American National Archives and Records Administration, Conway

(1994) identified four types of users based on interviews of 587 individuals about the purpose of their visit, classified according to their motivation and the scope of the materials sought: occupational users like government administrators, journalists and lawyers; academic users, personal users (the largest group), for instance family historians; and avocational users like "hobby historians", with a wider range of interest than personal matters.

Lately market segmentation techniques have been employed to gain understanding of the use and users of records. At the Public Records Office (PRO), U.K., a market segmentation profile was developed in 2002, in order to customise services (Hallam Smith, 2003). Based on surveys, four key segments were identified by potential need of and interest in the PRO: academics, family historians, educational users like school children, students and adult learners, and finally leisure historians which formed the largest segment.

Identification of user groups, theoretical as well as empirical, is made from the perspective of archival repositories and institutions. However, even within this frame a variety of user categories with different purposes, needs and abilities can be distinguished. Still, the historian in the wider sense is emphasized, but behind this term different groups can also be recognized. Across these studies, the users are categorised in slightly different ways, but similar categories keep recurring. The categories are primarily based on a mix of purpose of research and the users' qualifications, and are thus not entirely consistent. An interesting deviation is Principe's study, because it stretched beyond merely identifying types of users according to the purpose of their research or level of qualification. She was trying to find out *who* the users actually were, at least

according to profession. This approach to establish the social pattern of archival users seems to be unique.[1]

User behaviour

A very interesting field of research, with application to design of user services and information systems, is how users actually behave when searching for records. The use of finding aids and similar search tools is the issue for some research, for example Michael Steven's (1977) now classical study about historians' research in archives. The aim was to investigate how historians located their sources, and if they searched primarily by names or subject terms. A questionnaire was sent to 123 American historians with doctorates at colleges and universities in Wisconsin. The result showed that historians preferred informal sources, that historians used both names and subjects, even if they claimed to use one more than the other. Names dominated over subject terms, yet a substantial use of subject terms was listed. Beattie (1989/1990) examined the use of and attitudes towards archival materials and finding aids for a specific user category, namely researchers of women's history, combining a questionnaire with a reference analysis of published works. The study showed that private manuscripts were the most frequently used materials, with twice as many citations as governmental records. Formal search tools like finding aids were only ranked as good by a fourth of the researchers, two thirds ranked them as fair or poor, and they were

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[1] A greater awareness of social issues seems to be emerging today, for instance the relations of ethnic and other communities to archives, and will probably generate further research.

used less frequently than informal tools. Of the latter, researchers firstly consulted archivists, secondly citations in secondary works, and thirdly discussions with colleagues. However, when ranked according to usefulness instead of use, formal search tools were placed second after consulting archivists.

Barbara Orbach's (1991) study aimed to find out when researchers use archival records, where, how, and why. During 1984 personal interviews were conducted with ten academic historians, chosen because the author regarded historians as *gatekeepers*, even if they were not the most frequent users of archival material. The findings suggested that information seeking was apparently considered to be a part of the research process. The researchers normally pursued less formal and more intuitive ways to find the relevant material, reasoning out were to find it and then corresponding with the appropriate repository. The role of the archivists in facilitating access and locating material was strongly emphasized. A more recent study (Duff, Craig, & Cherry, 2004), was based on the similar assumption that historians are, if not the largest user group, one that has an important impact on society. Data was collected through a survey directed to all historians in history departments in Canada, about current research, the use of archival sources, assessment of authenticity and reliability of archival resources, the historian's demographic, area of specialisation, and experiences with archival materials. Findings suggested that archival sources and archival finding aids were the most common resources for becoming aware of and locating material. However, informal networks including colleagues and archivists were also of great importance.

Duff & Johnson (2002) studied how historians carried out their research, how they made use of finding aids, and how they used the archivist. In-depth interviews were performed with ten mid career historians, selected through history department websites at two Canadian universities. All were experienced researchers, specialised in different research areas and used different archival collections. The results suggested that information-seeking behaviour in archives differed somewhat from information-seeking in general. Four types of information-seeking activities were identified, which could be conducted in a nonlinear way: orientation, seeking known material, building contextual knowledge, and identifying relevant material. Research in archives was thereby identified as an iterative process: "[d]uring the research process questions get reframed or refined, sources get revisited, and finding aids get re-examined as the historians build their contextual knowledge and increase their understanding of the research topic" (Duff & Johnson, 2002, p. 480). Finding aids were identified as crucial in the search process, serving several purposes: as a means of orientation and getting overview, as a source of names, and as secondary sources. Furthermore, archivists played an important role, directing the researcher to the material and supplementing inadequate finding aids.

Experimental studies of information retrieval concerning records have been rather unusual, but there are a few examples. Lytle (1980a) compared provenance based retrieval and content based retrieval in an archival setting. Authentic user requests were presented to four searchers, of whom two had previous experience with the content index used and two had previous experience with provenance based

search methods. To perform the searches descriptions of archival collections and an index based on a particular thesaurus were used and evaluated. The result, however tentative because of the limitations of the experiment, showed no significant difference between the efficiency of the methods. However, both methods had low recall (Lytle, 1980b). Experience with methods seemed to have most impact on retrieval performance, not the methods as such. Prom (2002) studied how users interact with electronic finding aids, in order to examine navigational strategies and how efficient the participants searched different designs. Comparisons were made between computer experts, archival experts, and novices. Findings showed that both archival experts and computer experts showed better results than novices. Browsing strategies seemed to be a preferred search strategy by experienced users, however browsing was also used with some accomplishment by inexperienced users. Expert and novices used the same basic navigation strategies on the collection level, but experts were more subtle in their search. Archival experts tended to gather contextual data as means to find out how materials were organized, and where to find the requested items. Computer experts preferred accessing the search tools available in the system, i.e. using the "find-in-page" option directly, without bothering with organization of the material first. For the archival novices the organization and arrangement of the records were difficult to grasp. Search behaviour was highly conditioned by the design of the websites, for instance users often used a search box if it was available even if that was not the most optimal search strategy. The availability of (too) many options had a negative impact on search behaviour, especially for novices who easily got confused and lost track. Thus, design may encourage inefficient user performance. Deviations from customary search features were also confusing. The

result was, to a certain extent, corroborated by experimental testing undertaken within the LEADERS-project (Sexton, Yeo, Turner, & Hockey, 2004b). A demonstrator application was constructed, containing finding aids, authority records, and image files. A representative sample of users was selected with the help of a user segmentation model (Turner, Yeo, & Hockey, 2004a). Then a testing session with four professional archivists was set up. Different behaviour and opinions about the application were distinguished between professional users and leisure users, and between users who were familiar with archival sources on the Internet and those who were not. Academic users preferred, for instance, to study finding aids before searching, while other users preferred to approach the material directly. Inexperienced users had problems with the finding aids and preferred index-based searching, while academic users found pre-constructed indexes restrained their individual search strategies. Full-text search facility was requested by all categories, even archivists. The study found that design features seemed important for use functionality, and clarifying them appeared to be a much-needed improvement.

In her dissertation Sweeney (2002) addressed the question of the experiences of in-person archival researchers when seeking archival sources. The research sites consisted of three separate repositories: an academic archive, a government archive, and a private archive. A purposive selection of first-time visitors was undertaken, fourteen researchers in all. Each individual was observed during one research episode. The findings showed that the environment was to some extent negatively experienced by the users, particularly the

limitations of opening hours, but also because of unfamiliarity with the situation and the archival system. Knowledge of archival procedures was generally low, but researchers with extensive domain knowledge seemed to cope better with the obstacles they met, like the structure of the search tools. Archivists played a mediating role and novice users in particular were dependent on the archivists' intervention. The more complex the research question the more help from archivists was needed.

Yakel (2002) made a study about how users make sense of archives and access tools, their mental frameworks concerning locating and using archival sources, examining how the users defined an archive, how they identified and used access tools, and how they experienced user education. Twenty-six scholars, from undergraduates to professionals, were interviewed about recent research, methods to locate information, successful means, overall experience of archives and primary sources, use of access tools, training, preparation, use of web-based information, knowledge about finding aids, and their opinion of sources for information concerning archives. Even though historical scholars are considered the primary users of archives, several of the respondents appeared insecure about what an archive actually was and how it differed from other information sources. Library searching and catalogues made up a model for information search, which the researchers carried with them when using archival sources. This resulted in difficulty with understanding archival search tools like the finding aids and users had problems appreciating what the finding aids actually represented. A further elaboration of the knowledge of the users was done by Yakel & Torres (2003). The research question was whether there are certain characteristics that distinguish between new and experienced users, i.e. novices and

experts. Novices had trouble with archival terminology and with identifying the functions of archival search tools. Rules of access and use were also troublesome for inexperienced users and took attention from the research problem. Further, they generally had a more vague idea about the research object, thus limiting their ability to develop search strategies and formulate questions to the archivist, who often overestimated the researchers' ability to understand archival procedures.

The impact of information technology, and the increasing amount of electronic archival resources published on the Internet, has gained some attention recent years. The "Primarily History" project was an international comparative study to explore how information technology impact on the information seeking behaviour of historians. The study was performed by surveys and follow-up interviews. A survey was sent out to 700 historians from 68 American universities, and 800 historians at universities in the U.K., however with a low rate of return, and in-depth interviews were undertaken with a subset of those two groups. Findings from the American part of the study (Tibbo, 2003) showed that the most common way of locating printed material was to follow leads and citations. Printed bibliographies, finding aids, and repository guides were also frequently used. The use of digital bibliographic tools, like OPACs, was less common. Use of archival databases was even less frequent. Printed finding aids were used to a greater extent than electronic aids and informal strategies like asking colleagues and undertaking personal visits to gain assistance were very frequent. The results of the British study (Anderson, 2004) showed that print retrieval methods were most

favoured, followed by finding aids in repositories and informal leads like asking colleagues, while web searching and archival databases were less popular. Nevertheless, more on-line finding aids were requested, as well as more detailed finding aids. Repository websites, electronic bibliographies, search engines, and archival databases were important electronic retrieval methods for unpublished sources.

Few studies relate to "non-historians". A user category quite different to historians is schoolteachers, who usually are not trained to locate or approach archival records. A couple of studies concerning K-12 teachers use of records and digital search systems (Gilliland-Swetland, 1998; Gilliland-Swetland, Kafai, & Landis, 1999) suggested that they were seldom interested in context, and more likely to be interested in the artifactual properties of records,[2] which are attributes traditional finding aids seldom describe. The objective of using records in teaching was usually to illustrate or demonstrate something, not using them as sources for historical studies. Teachers were also less interested in textual material, but preferred pictorial material like photographs, maps, drawings etc. The object of Yakel's & Bost's (1994) study was not the scholarly or educational users of archives, but administrative users. Administrators are, according to the authors, often the primary users of archival services. The setting was university archives and their service to university administrators, clerical staff, and faculty concerning job-related issues. Interviews gave notice that administrative users did not use finding aids or other search tools, but relied on the archivist to find the required materials.

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[2] K-12 teachers are further one of the target groups of the MOAC II project, together with information professionals working with the Museums and the Online Archive of California database of finding aids, and UC academics and students in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Requests were often made by telephone and speed of retrieval was an important factor for administrators.

With a few exceptions the context of the studies above is archival repositories and the subjects are historians. The studies have different aims and scope, and use different methods. Comparisons are thus difficult, and the results are sometimes diverse. A few observations about common trends in the findings are nevertheless possible. These are the users' preferences for informal sources and channels, the role of the archivist as intermediary, and not least, the differences between experienced users and novices.

State of the art – the historian as gatekeeper?

This literature review shows that use and users are not theoretically conceptualized in archival discourse. Use is hardly discussed at all, while users have gained some attention since the 1980s. The literature provides a somewhat abstract view of use and users, not explicitly grounded in theoretical reasoning or empirical studies. Abstraction is a necessary component in the analysis of complex phenomena, but the weakness of several of the cited works is that the concepts are not analytical, but taken for granted without further exploration. This approach may have been motivated by the purpose of some works. Their intention was not to make theoretical arguments, but to provide operational concepts that could be applied in practical archives and records management, which is perfectly legitimate. The point of this discussion is not to criticise the approach employed in these kinds of works, but to put forward the need for a

deeper analysis. The literature review shows, however, that empirical research concerning the issue has been undertaken during recent decades, and perhaps a growing interest can be discerned, but such studies are few and usually of limited scope. The quantitative studies are also often based on insufficient statistical data. Reliable and more far-reaching conclusions are thereby impossible to make.

Some of the empirical studies also have a rather narrow and possibly un-reflective conception of use and users. A particular feature of the studies is that they are almost entirely related to the use of non-current records, primarily in archival repositories or archival institutions. As a consequence, historical scholars have received most interest, since they are considered the prime users of archival institutions. Schellenberg's approach that only records of secondary value are of archival interest still seems to dominate. This is also a fact when it comes to writers within the Scandinavian tradition with its presumed emphasis on access to public records and citizens control of public affairs. Even if use of current records in an active administration is recognized, records are considered retrospectively and the main purpose of use is historical research in some sense. Some authors relate to the assumption that archival institutions in recent decades have attracted other categories of users than scholars: genealogists, leisure historians etc. Those categories are however also performing historical studies, if not necessarily for scholarly purposes. Use of records is thus considered as historical research. This is probably because traditional archival theory makes a distinction between active administrative records and archival records and focus exclusively on the latter, but it is also a manifestation of an archival institutions' hegemony. Prominent participators in the archival discourse, academic as well as professional, are often

representing established archival institutions. A more inclusive and comprehensive view on use is perhaps notable in the discourse about archives and records as means of memory. The concept of memory and its applications are, however, still rather abstract.

A few studies do mention other kinds of use than research, and other categories of users like lawyers, journalists, teachers, administrators and private persons. There is reason to believe that their needs and behaviour differ somewhat from the historically oriented users, which is also indicated by the findings. These kinds of users have more specific requests, and fast and efficient services are often crucial to their needs. Perhaps these kinds of users are more result-oriented than the scholarly users, who to a certain extent are interested in the research process itself as well as the result. It is also possible that these groups include a larger amount of occasional users, who never will gain experience and mastery of finding aids or other tools, thus also bearing the disadvantages of being novices in the field. To model use and uses on historical and scholarly research and to develop tools and services based entirely on their behaviour is thus inappropriate, and will exclude large groups from the use of records. Knowledge about non-historical use is necessary, not least in administrative settings like governmental agencies and other public institutions, where the ordinary man and woman are most likely to approach records.

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