



ARHĪVI

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ACCESS TO ARCHIVES: ASPECTS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PUBLICITY

The main purpose of archives is to store and preserve documents, as well as to ensure public access to them. Of great importance today are public relations in terms of the relationship between archives and the public at large. Public relations at archives must promote dialogue and co-operation between governments and societies. In Lithuania, state archives handle this function by providing access to documents in reading rooms, organising tours, and preparing educational programmes and exhibitions. Access to documents is also provided via the Internet via digital libraries of documents.

Keywords: Accessibility of archives, public relations, dialogue between governments and societies, digitalisation of documents, Lithuanian state archives.

Access to archives involves the political, legislative, cultural and social climate in which records and archives are made available to people across the world. The concept also relates to the practical and intellectual means by which access can be delivered. Archives are not just a leisure-based interest for a tiny minority, they are a vital component of our cultural heritage and the infrastructure of each modern and democratic society in which information and access to it are properly appreciated. Access to public archives is a right, one that should apply to all users, regardless of nationality, status or function. Access to archives is part of the duties of public archive services. Archivists must promote the broadest possible access to archival material as an impartial service for all users.

Some aspects of access to documents are closely related to public relations functions. Let me remind everyone that the main purpose of PR at government institutions is to provide all vital information to society so as to ensure the

transparency, publicity and efficiency of activities at state institutions. The key functions for public relations at government institutions are:

- The constant dissemination of information about the relevant institution's activities;
- Crisis management;
- Promotion of dialogue and collaboration between society and government.

The third of these functions – promoting dialogue and collaboration between society and government – is mostly related to access to documents. This is necessary for the successful development of the institution's activities. It is also an essential means for identifying the opinions, needs and interests of the public at large and groups therein when it comes to the institution. This allows the institution to plan its activities in a prompt way. This kind of information and intercommunication create and consolidate reliance upon and acceptance for the relevant institution, promoting dialogue and collaboration whilst enhancing interest and comprehension in society.

The greatest threat for a public institution is the emergence of negative attitudes about public officials and their reputation. Consequently, they must make maximum use of PR. Relations with society mean relations with members of the elite, the media, governmental and non-governmental organisations, international channels for communications, and the like.

Many communications channels and public relations tools are used to promote dialogue and collaboration, as well as access to documents from government institutions and the archives of the Lithuanian Archives Department. One element here is direct communication with members of society, as well as access to documents in reading rooms. In 2007, 33,749 readers visited Lithuanian archives. This was the most popular way for accessing documents. Activities related to the transfer and sharing of knowledge have also been quite popular as a public relations tool for the Lithuanian archives. This has include tours, educational programmes and exhibitions.

Exhibitions organised by archives can be described as the use of archival material to inform or educate the viewer. Archives can show off their collections and fulfil the broader mission of encouraging public respect and appreciation for past achievements. The exhibitions inspire interest and involvement, and this can result in the donation of records, funds, services or personal time to the archive.

The Internet is another means for distributing information and access to documents. This is an interesting and unusual way for accessing such documents. The Internet site offers a great opportunity to present exhibitions of virtual documents. Seven such exhibitions were posted on the Internet site of the Lithuanian archival system in 2007. This is an inevitable element of exhibitions now and in future. Virtual exhibitions have broad prospects for development, and they can be used to supplement traditional exhibitions. Virtual exhibitions are a valuable element in PR, because they allow the broadest possible range of people to access documents that are of interest to them.

Lithuanian State Archives and the Lithuanian Archives Department have all made use of local and international projects to engage in networking and to shape their image. Collaboration with institutions such as museums and libraries makes it possible to present archives outside of the archival system as such. One major project here was organised by the Martynas Mažvydas National Library, and it was called "Creation of an Integrated Virtual Library Information System." The project was launched in September 2005 together with the Lithuanian Art Museum and the Lithuanian Archives Department. A databank of digitalised cultural heritage objects from libraries, archives and museums is being created as part of the project – 2.8 million pages of original manuscripts, newspapers, books, metrics, chronicles and other particularly valuable and historical documents will be prepared in all. The digitalised documents can be found on <http://www.epaveldas.lt>, and this is an outstanding way for archives to reveal their institutional importance.

Virtual services are available for Lithuanians and foreigners alike. There is no longer any need to visit museums, archives or libraries to see valuable documents, because these are now available via the virtual library. This is of particular relevance to differently abled people who can use the virtual library information system to learn and to get data not only from libraries, but also from museums and archives. Differently abled people can also engage in professional training without leaving their homes.

What has been digitalised already? Old Lithuanian books, press publications during a period when most publications were banned, Lithuanian books in Latin from the 16th and 17th centuries, Lithuanian books in Polish from the 17th and 18th centuries, press publications prior to the 1940s, as well

as legislation and documents of the Republic of Lithuania between the wars (1918–1940). The Lithuanian Archives Department is next going to digitalise the church registers of births, deaths and marriages of the Roman Catholic Church from 1599 to 1930.

The virtual library will contribute toward the improvement of Lithuania's image abroad, because it will help distribute the country's cultural heritage all around the world.

Another very important project is called "Baltic Connections." This is an international effort to deal with specific archives from Baltic Sea countries between the years of 1450 and 1800. The project is aimed at compiling a guide to materials which speak to maritime relations between the various countries, and the information will be available at <http://www.balticconnections.net/>. The guide is focused on subjects such as trade, shipping, merchants, commodities, diplomacy, finances and migration during the stated time period.

All descriptions of archival materials are now available in a database (see Archival Guide). This is a database which offers access to all records that have been stored around the Baltic Sea and that document the region's maritime connections. 982 descriptions of materials from 127 repositories in 10 countries are now available. Each description covers one group of records (archives or collections), beginning with general information about the repository and the group itself. Next it focuses on those materials that concern the Baltic Sea, listing their contents, period of time, countries involved, and languages. Where applicable and relevant, there is also information about accessibility, custodial history, the creator of the record, visually interesting materials, copies, as well as related materials and publications.

Some of the most beautiful and interesting documents which speak to the common heritage of countries around the Baltic Sea have been published in the virtual exhibition. Searches can be based on country or type of document (map, drawing, text). The exhibition was first opened in October 2007. The Web site also presents a general history of maritime relations among the Baltic Sea countries from 1450 until 1800 (see Baltic Sea Trade). It also serves as a crossroads for research, scholarship and other activities related to the history of the Baltic Sea region (see Other Research and Links).

Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and Finland are all participating in this project. It allows access to documents, but

it also helps to ensure international co-operation so that the various countries can present their archives and develop useful contacts.

Archives have two equally important responsibilities. The first is to identify, acquire and preserve records of lasting value. The other is to make these materials and the information which they contain available to those who are interested in them. That's why a planned sequence of PR tools is needed so as to inform the wider community about the collections and services of various archives.

I have divided the target audience into three groups so as to accentuate the various public relations tools that can be used to promote access to the various documents.

Individuals	Small groups	The broader community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An orientation interview; • A basic brochure on the collection, facilities, and terms of access; • Simple handouts (reading room rules, requests for records, copying, special access). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A letter sent to universities, genealogical societies, etc., inviting them to use the services; • Mini classes for beginning researchers; a slide-tape show about using the archives and starting research; • Training for volunteer reading room assistants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A slide-tape or video encouraging use of the archives; • Lending/sale of microform copies of selected records; • Seminars on popular research topics.

In conclusion I might say that it is important to ensure that access policies at archives provides a clear statement of available services and their use. Clients are increasingly likely to access such services from a distance when this is possible – E-mail, Web sites, digitalised aids, file plans and catalogues. Ongoing communications with client groups is as important as any of the purely archival activities in which we engage. Client relations, PR or publicity offer positive consciousness that should initially infuse our work and then be formalised into publicity, interviews and other outreach activities. It is important to build client-centred thinking into the policies and procedures of archival work.

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ARHĪVU PIEEJAMĪBA: SABIEDRISKO ATTIECĪBU UN PUBLISKUMA ASPEKTI

Arhīvu galvenie uzdevumi ir dokumentu krāšana un glabāšana, kā arī to publiskas pieejamības nodrošināšana. Mūsdienās liela nozīme arhīvu un sabiedrības attiecību veidošanā ir sabiedriskajām attiecībām. Arhīvu sabiedriskajām attiecībām ir jāsekmē dialogs un sadarbība starp valdību un sabiedrību. Lietuvas valsts arhīvi šo uzdevumu īsteno, nodrošinot dokumentu pieejamību arhīvu lasītavās, rīkojot ekskursijas, veidojot izglītības programmas un izstādes. 2007. gadā Lietuvas arhīvu lasītavās strādāja 33 749 apmeklētāji.

Pieeja dokumentiem tiek nodrošināta arī ar internetu, tajā pieejamajām dokumentu digitālajām bibliotēkām. 2007. gadā tika izveidotas septiņas arhīva dokumentu virtuālās izstādes. Lietuvā dokumentu un grāmatu digitalizācijai tiek veltīta liela vērība. Šis darbs ir nozīmīgs kultūras mantojuma saglabāšanā. Internetā ievietotās dokumentu datubāzes Lietuvas arhīvu materiālus dara daudz pieejamākus ārvalstu interesentiem. Īpaši nozīmīgs bija starptautiskais projekts "Baltijas saites", ko Lietuva īstenoja kopā ar Dāniju, Zviedriju, Latviju, Vāciju, Nīderlandi, Poliju un Somiju.

Sabiedrības nodrošināšana ar iespējami plašāku pieejamību arhīvu dokumentiem ir Lietuvas valsts arhīvu prioritāte.

Atslēgvārdi: arhīvu pieejamība, sabiedriskās attiecības, dialogs starp valdību un sabiedrību, dokumentu digitalizācija, Lietuvas valsts arhīvi.

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