

Reviewing in a few pages the Reading Room of the National Archives under the pathetic title *Poartă deschisă spre istorie* [*A Gate Opened to History*], Diana Joița presents it in the same Romantic note, inviting us to a museum visit: “Once you enter the Reading Room, you do have the feeling of crossing a temporal threshold...” Indeed, once you entered that room with old and dusty furnishings, lacking any equipment and many times cold beaten, you had the feeling of living in the 19th century, away from the civilised world. Despite all that, the Reading Room custodians, interviewed by the author, complain here and there of the work conditions, but recount that our organisation is member of the International Council on Archives and that the staff members are sent annually to training courses or professional gatherings abroad. In addition, great contemporary historians are cited to have studied in this Room: Dan Berindei, Gh. Buzatu, Florin Constantiniu. Why only these people? Again, we have no opinions from other researchers, and this makes the author’s approach futile and inconsistent.

The ending of this paper is rather triumphant: *Arhivele Naționale – identitate în diversitate* [*The National Archives – Identity in Diversity*]. It relates to the international relations policy of this organisation, participating in various international events in the name of the European integration perpetual propaganda, but neglecting the pitiable state of the Romanian Archives.

We are not aware whether the authors of this book received an order to write it or whether it was of their own accord. Regardless of the situation, the untold truths and the embellishment of the Archives’ image as perceived by the Romanian society at that moment, the lack of any harsh and realistic criticisms transform the approach of the two authors into a writing-style exercise for the 175th celebration of the National Archives.

Mirela-Daniela Tîrnă

Review or Polemics? A Doubtful Beginning for Each...

The review by Mirela Tîrnă wished to open a polemics column in *Revista Arhivelor* (*Archives Review*). We have been long waiting for such a column which needed to unfetter judgements. The real debate initiated a year ago by a few “brave people” through the Romanian Archivists Federation forum had to find eventually an official setting within the publication edited by our organisation.

Since the column is only incipient, this should perhaps excuse the publishing of such notes springing from the mind of a frustrated archivist. **Not that the authors of this book would not be pleased by an initiative that seems to have been revived from “clinic death” since the popularisation of their ideas in the reviewed volume.** For those who have not thumbed the book yet, it must be first specified that the materials utilised were papers presented within reunions, scientific sessions, or meetings. Enjoying appreciation, they were also edited in publications issued by the National Archives, the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform, the Faculty of Archival Sciences, and further on gathered within a single volume. We question why these materials were not

given a similar “attention” by the reviewer at the time they were issued, when they were endorsed by the editorial office where they were initially published...

Well... we are going to enlighten ourselves if we follow the “locker exercise” proposed by Mirela Târnă in the beginning of her review... and return to a veritably “Romantic” age – we agree with Ms Târnă in this matter!... – where some “abnormals” assumed by their own will “the fight against the wind-mills”, refusing the omnipresent indifference and contempt state, marked by an unimaginable professional cowardice for an intellectually pretentious environment. Even the conventional language taken from the “organisational culture” of Archives and sometimes compromisingly used, as well as a peculiar self-censorship – all of these were necessary to smooth the harshness of this phenomenon known in sociology as *change resistance* of employees accustomed to the routine of a distinctive working style and professional language.

In other words, **the comments made by Mirela Târnă do not consider the context in which the reviewed materials were published** and, incomprehensibly, they not even value positively the ideas presented, which at that moment were thought to be opportune and, moreover, are still implemented to this day. In change, reproaches flow on matters for which we, the authors, had no decisional prerogatives so as to change. In fact, our colleague, who back then happened to be a quality management adviser, is to be known as not contributing in any way to the improvement/development/evolution of the professional and institutional environment of the National Archives. Not to mention that no counter-arguments or solutions were made two or three years ago when the two authors were maintaining their views.

A quick superficial reading of the volume could be the explanation to Ms Târnă’s lack of notice that many of the issues raised by her had been answered in the chapters she overlooked in her review. We do not believe that ignorance or unawareness of current archival practice determines the reviewer to forget for example that the questionnaire applied experimentally to archives creators in the County of Covasna and ridiculed in the review had been used for a long time by colleagues at the Head Office in their relation with other archives services.

The pleading related to the subordination of the National Archives to the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform is not only the opinion of the authors of this volume, but also of the majority of employees working within the archival system (any statistics exercise for those interested could prove this fact). The table annexed by the authors to the reviewed material was not a study undertaken by themselves, but an official research conducted by the organisation. We question though, in the context of this review as well, if abjuring a certain stability offered by MIAR to our organisation and its staff (in terms of positions and wages) in favour of conveying the National Archives to the Ministry of Culture and Cults could be the **decisive factor** in ensuring a convenient change for the Archives’ organisational culture...

The stance of the two authors as related to the alternative legislative recommendations is presented in a totally distorted and fierce manner; in particular the one concerning the staff recruitment in relation and proportion with the languages the documents were written in. An honest connection with the proposed draft clearly shows that those provisions did not stipulate that staff recruitment in the Archives should be

made according to the language command criterion, but only according to the ethnic criterion.

Paradoxically, Mirela Târnă overlooks with a rather academic carelessness the material where the authors present the efforts made for the foundation of the Romanian Archivists Federation, an NGO where archivists gradually found an alternative way to express themselves, evolve professionally, and which also sponsored the publication of the reviewed volume.

The PR presentations are commented by Ms Târnă with an amazing amateurism, which does not feature her. Any individual with an elementary knowledge of this field knows that “relationism” is responsible of “polishing” the communication between an organisation and the different components of society/community. This is not “subjectivism”. **A PR adviser will never go out “advocate” the dysfunctions of the organisation before the public.** A “relationist” can *signal* such “gaps” to the organisation management, but the decisions for their solution are not the responsibility of the PR department!... In particular cases, the messages addressed to the public, which reveal the “weaknesses” of an organisation, are carefully structured within a press campaign, carried out on the deliberate accord of the managerial team with the view to gain something in favour of the organisation (solidarity, public assistance, raising a public polls wave). This working style afore mentioned is recurrent in the materials that reflect the activity of the two authors at that time – some abstracts are destined to the National Archives management (and they underline **the vulnerabilities of the organisation at that specific moment!**), while others were meant to reveal to the outer public the activities performed by the archivists and the organisation. Moreover, in terms of promotion, “the expertise of other archives”, which we came into contact with at the International Congress on Archives in Vienna, represented one of the theoretical and practical grounds, but also an ideal for the entire PR activity carried out so far by the National Archives. What is the meaning of obsessive analogies with other foreign archives services, if no *concrete* effort is made in order to evolve to the level of these archives?...

There are also failures, which the two authors assumed punctually throughout the book, where they considered them necessary. Let us take for example the fact that a survey should have been conducted for the users of the National Archives before drafting the image promotion Plan of the organisation. Apart from the fact that Diana Joița admitted this failure herself, it should be stressed that this aspect represented from the very beginning a big concern (being included in the image promotion plan of the organisation), immaterialised due to the lack of financial and human resources (see also the initiative to cooperate with David Ogilvy Faculty of Communication and Public Relations of the National School of Political and Administrative Studies). Considering the above, **the PR strategy of the National Archives was based on three premises:** 1. the professional expertise of the two authors in several departments of the National Archives, which implied a direct contact with the multiple beneficiaries from the activities performed by the organisation; 2. the constant cooperation with colleagues from different departments of the National Archives and the County Branches so as to gather updated information on the expectations of the various types of publics; 3. answers to questionnaires sent by the management to the County Branches of the National Archives

through the Department of Methodology, Guidance and Control. As for the public polls practice, and questionnaire practice respectively, we invite Ms Mirela Tărnă to read the article "*Considerații privind sociologia arhivistică*" [Considerations on the Archival Sociology], in *Revista Arhivelor* no 4/1994, as well as several other articles signed by Mr. Ioan Lăcătușu, which present conclusions drawn in some practical sociological research studies undertaken by him along the years.

It is interesting that during 2005 the PR activity of the National Archives was closely monitored by an expert in this field, Ms Alexandra Zbucea, senior lecturer at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies – David Ogilvy Faculty of Communication and Public Relations, who was drafting at that time her doctoral thesis on "*Politici de marketing utilizate în valorificarea patrimoniului cultural național*" [Marketing Policies Utilised to Valorise the National Cultural Heritage] dedicating an entire chapter to our organisation. Using the same materials that Ms Tărnă is reviewing, this expert considered that "*de la începutul anului 2005 se constată o dinamizare a activității comunicaționale a organizației [...], creîndu-se astfel premisele unei activități eficiente. Publicul este în permanență informat cu privire la noile acțiuni și servicii, se construiesc relații stabile cu mass-media, se urmărește atragerea și altor categorii de public* / beginning with 2005 one can notice a galvanisation of the communication activity of the organisation [...], thereby creating the premises of an efficient activity. The public is permanently informed of the new actions and services, stable relations with mass-media are built, other types of public are envisaged to be enticed". Assessing the situation of the organisation, **the objectives on the National Archives image promotion plan** for 2005 were appreciated as being "*într-adevăr, coordonatele majore care trebuie să ghideze activitatea promoțională a Arhivelor Naționale [...], exemplul Arhivelor Naționale putând fi preluat și de alte organizații de tip arhivă* / the truly major coordinates which were meant to guide the promotion activity of the National Archives [...], an example that could have been followed by other organisations in the field". At the same time, "*o premisă foarte constructivă de la care pornește acest program este posibilitatea transformării activităților tradiționale și în mijloace de îmbunătățire a relațiilor cu diverse categorii de public, respectiv de îmbunătățire a imaginii organizației, [...] de sporire a accesului pentru categorii de public din cele mai variate și de eficientizare a activității. [...] Ținându-se cont de contextul nefavorabil arhivelor românești, s-a ales strategia pașilor mărunți, iar treptat s-a trecut de la o strategie defensivă la una ofensivă. Astfel se încearcă distrugerea imaginii negative și contruirea cu consecvență a uneia pozitive* [emphasis mine] / a very constructive premise of this programme is the possibility to transform traditional activities in means of improving the relations with different types of public and the organisation image, [...] of increasing the access for varied types of public and of making this activity efficient [...]. Given the unfavourable context of the Romanian archives, it was chosen the *small steps strategy*, and the *defensive* strategy was gradually replaced by an *offensive* one. Hence the attempt to destroy the negative image and consistently construct a positive one". Ms Zbucea equally showed that "*este practic imposibil ca o singură persoană să facă față numeroaselor solicitări, atât din interior cât mai ales din exteriorul organizației și să deruleze campanii complexe în domeniul promovării* / it was basically impossible for one single person to be in charge of a great number of requests, coming from within and

mostly from outside the organisation, and also to conduct complex promotion campaigns”.

Here are some considerations on “*The Archives’ Week*”: “[...] *care a avut o amploare neobișnuită în anul 2005. [...] Deschiderea spre exterior, noua politică urmată cu consecvență în prezent de către Arhivele Naționale a fost încă o dată subliniată prin includerea în program a manifestării Porți deschise, care a permis reprezentanților mass-media să se familiarizeze cu activitatea Arhivelor Naționale și cu valoarea și importanța deosebită a patrimoniului deținut și gestionat / [...] which enjoyed an unusual wide spread in 2005 [...]. The outward opening, the new policy followed consistently at present by the National Archives, was once more reinforced by enclosing *The Open Gates* manifestation in the programme, which enabled mass-media representatives to become acquainted with the National Archives activities and with the value and importance of heritage preserved and managed”.*

Ironically, after Diana Joița’s maternity leave in January 2006, Mirela Târnă became in charge with most of PR activity. This is how the author of the caustic accusations had herself the opportunity to transpose into practice ideas that... apparently “came to her mind” only now. Or is this a mere confirmation of the proverb “after the war [read: the change of managerial team] many brave souls show...”?

As a conclusion, the first to become aware of the limits of this reviewed paper are the authors themselves. The volume did not attempt to give an exhaustive account of the current issues of the National Archives, or to give final solutions to problems that emerged over the years. The aim and objective of the materials are explicitly presented in the *Argument* to the volume. They attempted from the beginning to “*stimula [...] conceperea, dezbaterea și găsirea ideilor celor mai potrivite prin care generația noastră să-și materializeze contribuția la bunul mers al unei importante instituții a societății românești / stimulate [...] the creation, debate, and search of the most appropriate ideas so that our generation materialise its contribution to the good governance of an important organisation of Romanian society*”. *It is in this respect that the two authors “practiced their writing style*”. And whether there was at any time an imperative to put on paper the ideas presented in this volume, it was represented by the “command” of their own conscious.

A professional review has the obligation to be balanced, which is far from featuring the attitude displayed by Mirela Târnă. If we called it “polemics”... it should be reduced in this case to the following statement “affirm yourself ridiculing your colleagues”..., which unfortunately diminishes the hope that “new people for new times”.

Diana Joița, Ioan Lăcătușu

Editorial note:

The editorial staff of the *Archives Review* has opened a new column “*Addenda et Corrigenda*” aiming at the promotion of debates on various subjects from the field of history and archives sciences. The editorial staff considers that the lack of a democratic exercise within the National Archives, so much conspicuous over the past years, requires

the creation of such a forum. This objective – of free debates – makes the publication of the right to retort be a justified and assumed right. Certainly, aiming at openness and transparency, the editorial staff relies on the academic exercises of the participants in polemics to avoid the sin of plunging into abuses and offences, a very common feature of many indigenous scientific publications.

In hope to transform open dialogue into a natural communication means for all our contributors, we appeal to them to participate without hesitation in ensuring a long life to the new column.