

# Code of Ethics of Catalan Archivists

## Archivists Association of Catalonia

*Juren vostres mersès Senyors Archivers que se auran ab tota rectitud e fidelitat en mirar per la custòdia e bon ordre de dit Archiu e scriptures de aquell y tindran segret tot lo que faran y convindrà als drets de dita ciutat tenir secret.*

*(Do you honourable Archivists swear that you will proceed with all rectitude and fidelity in keeping custody of that Archive and its documents in good order and that you will keep secret all that you do and all that is in the interests of the rights of this city to be kept secret.)*

Oath of the archivists of the city of Tortosa. 1579

### Preamble

Archivists have the social function of ensuring and permitting the use of archive documents and the information contained in those documents for legal, administrative, informational, cultural and scientific purposes. Thus, archivists contribute to improving the operation of organisations, to safeguarding the rights and obligations of individuals set out in those documents, to preserving the collective memory and to allowing scientific research and the dissemination of culture.

This function requires not only competent professional action, but also the use of that competency in ways suitable to society's characteristics and needs. The expression and feasible efficacy of this ethical commitment to society requires the recognition of certain rules of conduct freely accepted by the profession as a whole and based upon its experience.

In professional practice, decision-making often involves ethical dilemmas for archivists and can also lead to conflicts of interest between professionals and between professionals and society. The establishment of a code of ethics provides a reference framework that strengthens the autonomy and independence required by archivists to deal with ethical dilemmas and to avoid and resolve potential conflicts of interest.

Thus, the Archivists Association of Catalonia, an organisation representing the professionals practising in the sector in Catalonia, proposes the approval and publication of a Code of Ethics accepted and applied by all Catalan archivists.

### General Provisions

The Code of Ethics of Catalan Archivists accepts the Professional Code of Ethics approved by the General Assembly of the International Council of Archives at its 13<sup>th</sup> session, held in Beijing (China) on 6 September 1996, while extending and adapting it to the social and archival circumstances of Catalonia.

### Objectives

The objective of the Code of Ethics is to recognise certain professional duties arising as a result of application of the principles of general and professional ethics to the discipline of archives, to serve as guidelines for professional ethical conduct and, in complementing technical and legal regulations and knowledge, help archivists to carry out their professional tasks properly and responsibly.

The definition of the ethical principles and professional duties of archivists specifies their commitment to and assurance of professional action at the service of society's interests. The Code of Conduct also serves to inform society of the function of archivists and of the rights that they guarantee to their clients.

### **Scope**

The Code of Ethics is applicable to all archivists practising in Catalonia, both in public service and the private sector, while providing for the specific characteristics of both those sectors. It can also be applied at the individual level to all archivists who are members of the Archivists Association of Catalonia, regardless of whether they practise in Catalonia.

### **Definitions**

For the purposes of this Code of Conduct, the following terms are used with the meaning given here:

**Archivist:** a professional holding a university degree who defines, implements and maintains a system of document management and archives management to organise and safeguard documents, for the purpose of facilitating access to and consultation of those documents.

**Archives:** a body or institution performing specific functions of organisation, safekeeping, management, description, conservation and dissemination of documents and collections of documents. The term also applies to the records and *fonds* held by such a body or institution.

**Fonds:** the organic body of documents accumulated in a natural process and created or received by a public or private individual or corporation through their existence and in the exercise of their corresponding activities and functions.

**Record:** any expression in oral or written language, in images or sounds, either natural or codified, recorded in any medium, recording the existence, activities or functions of any individual or organisation, with the exception of published works forming part of bibliographic resources.

**Records management system:** the set of operations and techniques forming part of general administrative management and based upon the analysis of production, processing and value of documents, with the aim of planning, supervising, using, conserving and eliminating or transferring the documents to an archive and with the objective of rationalising and unifying the treatment of records to achieve effective and profitable management.

### **Structure**

The Code of Conduct groups the principles and duties guiding the conduct of archivists in their different areas of relation into five sections. Each of these sections states the corresponding ethical principle and defines and specifies collective, individual and professional duties stemming from and facilitating the application of that principle.

## **1. Towards society**

1. Archivists contribute to the development of society on the basis of respect for human dignity and equality and action at all times in accordance with justice, upholding the basic rights and freedoms related to archives, records and information. In this respect, archivists, in their professional practice, shall:
  - 1.1. Act in accordance with current applicable law and ensure observance of that law.
  - 1.2. Uphold the right to information to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to take part and join freely and fully in social life.
  - 1.3. Facilitate and promote the right to access to records as a guarantee for the legal security of relations between individuals and institutions, for administrative transparency and for supervision of administrative activities.
  - 1.4. Contribute to ensuring that the exercise of the right to information and access to records does not contravene the right to personal and family privacy, thereby guaranteeing the protection of personal information.
  - 1.5. Conserve and disseminate existing records in order to guarantee their cultural value and contribute to the preservation of the collective memory.
  - 1.6. Promote and carry out activities in the area of cultural dissemination to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have access to culture.
  - 1.7. Facilitate and promote scientific research as a basis for society's social and cultural advancement.
  - 1.8. Recognise and respect legitimate copyright in connection with intellectual production and creation.
  - 1.9. Duly inform society as to the nature of and requirements arising in connection with the management of archives and records.
  - 1.10. Co-operate with public authorities to develop all policies contributing to improvement of the management of archives and records.
  - 1.11. Promote and support the development of regulations and policies ensuring the efficacy of the foregoing duties.

## **2. Towards the profession**

2. Archivists carry out their professional activity according to their conscience and their professional competency, thereby guaranteeing the responsible exercise and quality of the profession. In this respect, archivists, in their professional practice, shall:
  - 2.1. Know and observe the principles, standards and methods generally recognised by the professional community.
  - 2.2. Strive for systematic and continuous updating of the knowledge, technical standards and legislation required for the practice of the profession.
  - 2.3. Use their best efforts to contribute to the development of archives through activities of innovation and research, with ongoing evaluation of their work, disseminating and sharing their experience and achievements.

- 2.4. Maintain a permanent critical attitude and scrutiny in connection with their own professional actions to ensure ongoing improvement in all their professional activities.
- 2.5. Apply their knowledge and professional experience to attain the greatest possible efficiency and diligence.
- 2.6. Use the resources at their disposal appropriately and in accordance with the needs of users.
- 2.7. Maintain an independent professional position in response to any pressure from interests opposed to the objectives of the profession, regardless of the nature of such pressure.
- 2.8. Refrain from any activity that may be detrimental to their professional integrity or impartiality.
- 2.9. Carry out their activities with objectivity, rigour and truthfulness, avoiding any arbitrary action.
- 2.10. Refrain from carrying out any activity that may lead to conflict of interest between their professional and private activities.
- 2.11. Ensure the professional confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of the practice of their profession and limit use of the information to the corresponding professional objectives.
- 2.12. Document all of their actions in connection with their archival work in a clear, precise and reasoned manner.
- 2.13. Contribute to upholding the dignity of the profession and duly assume the responsibilities and competencies corresponding to the profession.

### **3. Towards *fonds* and records**

3. Archivists safeguard the preservation of *fonds* and the integrity and authenticity of records with the aim of preserving their full value and usefulness for the various needs of society. In this respect, archivists, in their professional practice, shall:
  - 3.1. Safeguard the integrity of *fonds* to ensure that they constitute a reliable record of the activities of the institution generating the documents.
  - 3.2. Apply archival procedures that consistently ensure the preservation, integrity and authenticity of records so that their legal, administrative, informational, cultural and scientific value remains unaltered, without prejudice to the elimination of records through technically and legally established procedures.
  - 3.3. Apply scientific criteria to the archival work, with the ultimate objective of facilitating the preservation of all records in the archive and their consultation by users.
  - 3.4. Foster the maintenance of *fonds* and archival records and, where appropriate, their return to their original institutional and regional context.
  - 3.5. Define and implement policies on the compilation of *fonds* in accordance with professional and ethical criteria with the ultimate objective of constituting a set of *fonds* that reflect the social reality in which the archive performs its functions.

- 3.6. Respect the conditions agreed upon at the time of the accession of the records and *fonds*.
- 3.7. Reject the acquisition of illicitly obtained records.

#### **4. Towards users**

4. Archivists carry out their professional activities through application of their professional knowledge with the aim of meeting users requirements. In this respect, archivists, in their professional practice, shall:
  - 4.1. Ensure equitable treatment of users and avoid any prejudice or discrimination based on any grounds of difference.
  - 4.2. Provide the best possible service to users, ensuring equanimity, interest, dedication and professional honesty.
  - 4.3. Acknowledge the bounds of their competency and the limitations of their techniques and under no circumstances create false expectations that they cannot fulfil professionally.
  - 4.4. Provide the best possible instruments, services and information to facilitate access to and consultation of records by users.
  - 4.5. Handle with maximum discretion all information on users obtained in the course of providing archival services.
  - 4.6. Refrain from disclosing, using for their own benefit or the benefit of users, or using for illicit purposes, or using in a way that would prejudice a person or organisation, any information kept or obtained in the course of their activity.
  - 4.7. Report on the existence of convergent research, with the prior consent of the users involved.
  - 4.8. Use all means of communication and dissemination that ensure maximum informational coverage to specify the origin, content and conditions for service of the archives under their care.
  - 4.9. Provide appropriate information on the different actions that they carry out within their institutions.
  - 4.10. Foster policies for the ongoing improvement of service provided to the public.

#### **5. Towards archivists and other professionals**

5. Archivists maintain relations with their colleagues and other professionals in accordance with the principles of solidarity, respect and co-operation. In this respect, archivists, in their professional practice, shall:
  - 5.1. Work for the social recognition of their profession, defending and upholding the rights pertaining to their profession.
  - 5.2. Refrain from any action that may discredit themselves or the profession.
  - 5.3. Acknowledge and respect the work of their colleagues and refrain from discrediting them or causing them personal or professional inconvenience, without prejudice to scientific criticism.

- 5.4. Facilitate and provide guidance and orientation in a disinterested manner to colleagues that request it.
- 5.5. Respond to queries from colleagues with the greatest possible diligence.
- 5.6. Create an atmosphere of trust to foster teamwork with the aim of ensuring quality of service.
- 5.7. Evaluate their own work and the work of their co-workers in a loyal and respectful manner, in accordance with objective criteria.
- 5.8. In the event of work in conjunction with other professionals, endeavour to attain the necessary co-ordination to ensure that objectives are met.
- 5.9. Co-operate with other archival and records management institutions to ensure greater efficacy and the optimisation of resources.
- 5.10. Promote the exchange of knowledge and experience with all colleagues and other professionals in related fields, with the objective of mutual enhancement.
- 5.11. Co-operate on a interdisciplinary basis with other professionals having similar objectives, with the aim of attaining greater efficacy, without prejudice to the functions of those other professionals.

#### **Additional Provision**

The Archivists Association of Catalonia shall endeavour to ensure the application of the Code of Conduct.

The Board of the Association shall submit to the General Assembly a proposal for regulation of the resolution of potential conflicts, in accordance with the provisions of Article 11 of the Association's Constitution.