

Chapter 8

After the Mergers Wave: Change Management and the Building of the Intesa Sanpaolo Group Archives

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Images: Intesa San Paolo Group Archives



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Intesa Sanpaolo (Italy)

Intesa Sanpaolo – Turin

Intesa Sanpaolo is a leader in domestic banking in Italy; with subsidiaries, branches and representative offices spread throughout the world. A direct branch was established in Tokyo in 1972. The Intesa Sanpaolo Group has recently published a historical map on the Internet that includes 250 pre-existing banks of different types such as: commercial banks, savings banks, public chartered credit institutions, regional and local banks. The Group's earliest foundation dates back to 1539 and refers to the Banco di Napoli, which acted as an issue bank as well.

Group Archives, Intesa Sanpaolo – Milan

The Historical Archives started as an office in Milan in 1984 for Banca Commerciale Italiana's records collections relating to international banking, credit, and the promotion of culture (since 1894). Nowadays the documentary heritage of 4 banks are managed directly while an additional 17 historical archives are scattered in various Italian locations. The Group Archives is in charge of coordinating historical information services and the overall safeguarding of documentary heritage. The Archives are frequently used for scholarly reference (over a hundred users annually in the reading room) and for inquiries from both inside and outside the banking Group.



Image 1 – Exterior of
the Intesa Sanpaolo
Group Archives

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Introduction

Change has invested the world and human lives. Interactions in the global economy have affected the way businesses perform their activities. Information and communication technologies have changed know-how – the way we do things – and have powerfully contributed to remove a sense of continuity with the past.

In the banking sector, the so called ‘merger mania’ has caused the formation of giant banks. The growing size has resulted in simplification in products and services, less specialization (wholesale banks) and less proximity to society, in comparison with the ‘embeddedness’ of traditional small banks like savings banks, cooperative or people’s banks, in their territories.

The new groups are really very important players for the destinies of our communities (local, national, and global). In their efforts to face the challenges of the future, however, many of them may not consider historical roots as a priority, or they simply cannot know in depth the past vicissitudes of a huge number of pre-existing credit institutions.

Therefore, one of the primary tasks of a group archives consists in raising awareness of the rich heritage (both material and nonmaterial), and offering examples of past managerial and banking experiences which can be valuable for present banking business. So the historical archives, the so called ‘historical mission’, has to be proactive both in identifying the records of historical and/or legal value, and in providing services to meet current corporate needs¹.

Many vital records are lost in repositories or inside office cabinets, without inventories. A sound appraisal policy must go on without delay. If not, the archives will not be effective in helping to defend the rights of the Group and in preserving meaningful records.

External communication has become a great opportunity for archivists as well. People,

¹ The Intesa Sanpaolo experience on this issue was shared in 2010 at the International Symposium, “Corporate Memory, a Tool Serving Management”, held in Blois (France), at the Saint-Gobain Group Archives.

clients, do love history and memory, much more than before. Oral witnesses and storytelling are very popular as well. Thus the general perspectives of group archives are brilliant.

Consequently, the daily duties are heavy and various. The new figure of the group archivist must be very well trained and acquire diverse professional attitudes. The two souls of the work (administrative duties, on the one hand, and research and communication, on the other hand) have to be merged efficiently.

Will the group archivist of the future be **less scholar more manager**? Surely. But the core of the profession remains the capacity to assess the historical value of the records. And the final aim remains building a sustainable group archive structure in order to transmit legacy records to future generations, that is: guaranteeing their intelligibility and accessibility.

1. Coping with mergers at Intesa Sanpaolo

The Intesa Sanpaolo Group encompasses 21 historical archives, spread over various regions of the country, created by very different types of banks but all unique witnesses for their territories. Four of the archives are directly managed, an additional five are entrusted to cultural foundations and open to the public. The remaining archives have to be safeguarded in a sustainable way.

For all of these archives there is a need to locate and appraise especially the records of the second half of the 20th century, which are really bulky. Italian legislation protects some of our archives, which have been declared as “of relevant historical interest”, so we are literally obliged to comply with legal requirements.

For our profession worldwide, it is vital to learn from case reports. Not only in order to circulate successful practices or viable solutions to the major challenges but also so that “true stories from our professional lives” can help to enhance the evolution of archival theory as well.

My thesis is that – especially in the case of big mergers – the basis of the profession itself is transformed in depth. We have to learn from recent experiences and to adapt the training of younger generations of archivists to present and future needs.

2. The traditional professional profile of business archivists

If you consider the historical archives of a **mono-brand company**, the archivist acts as the custodian of corporate affairs and values. Top managers see themselves as the followers of former generations and are aware of, and grateful for, the benefit they gain from the efforts and achievements of their predecessors. There is a widespread sense of continuity

from past to present to future. And there is also a shared brand pride, as well as a consensus on corporate values.

In this situation, the historical archives is well-considered, being seen as a meaningful part of ‘corporate values and affairs’. In the job description you will find:

- administrative and legal inquiries in order to meet corporate needs
- records and content surveys
- appraisal – a very hard, intellectual task
- arrangement and description
- managing of non-traditional records
- fixing the rules of the entire life cycle of corporate archives (including current, electronic-born records)
- reference services and outreach
- external communication – a rather easy task, carried out in cooperation with the media relations team.

Corporate (‘mono-brand’ archivists might not be immediately ready for the new challenges presented by a merger as their job description will show radical change.

3. The Functions of a Group Archives

In a **group archives** the archival tasks are manifold:

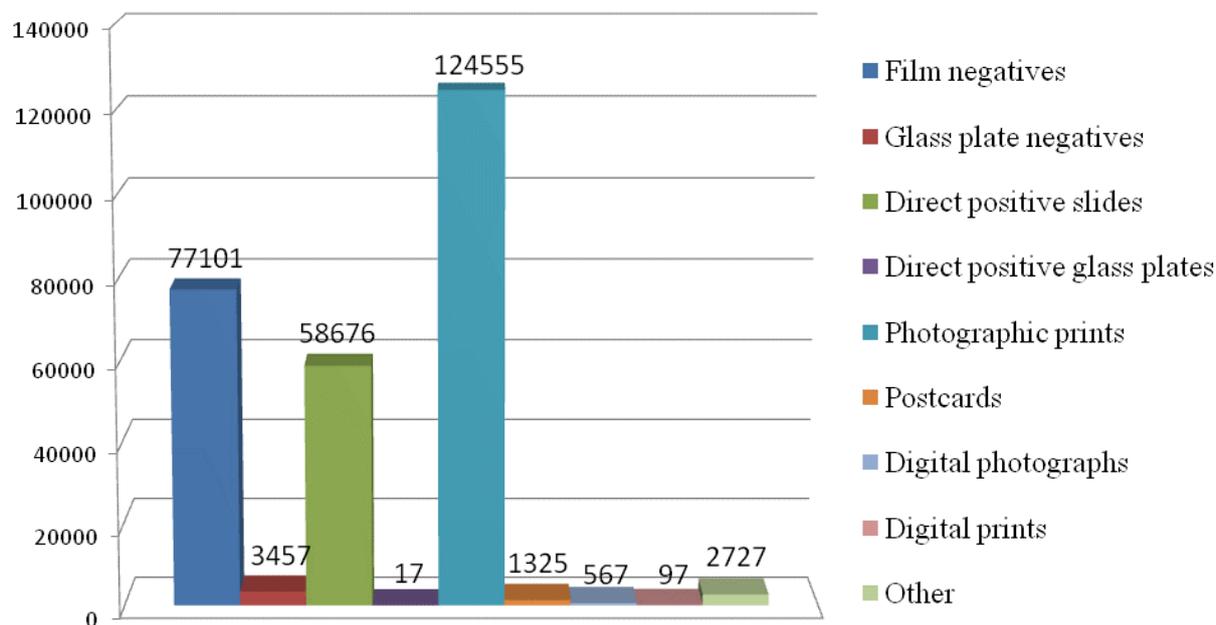
- 1) Your job has become “history in the plural”. Be careful not to privilege just one particular bank, otherwise you might raise jealousies. In general, the archivist must know much more about general history, and about a large number of different corporate stories. Time span, geographic scale and diverse types of credit and savings institutions will require research capabilities as well.
- 2) Contact with the head office can change very quickly because reporting lines are not clear-cut and stable for historical archives. Reporting lines can vary among different parts of the corporate organization: the general secretariat, the external communication, or internal communication and training department, or logistics. In each of these locations, the importance of the archival function might be perceived in radically different ways. In addition, unfortunately many managers, who have entered the group from outside, think that the archives are not a priority to the company.
- 3) Physical and intellectual control of the many tens of miles of shelves will absorb a lot of the energies of the archives’ senior staff. Within the overall documentary heritage of the

group many archives will be included, each one with its own stage of control, very few well arranged and the majority either poorly arranged or not gathered together.

- 4) Time is always very critical. The same can be said with regard to the **size** of each operation and project. Size matters a lot: the size of records storage and also the size of special collections, like the photographic section (currently half a million photos identified) of the Intesa Sanpaolo Group Archives.

Let me illustrate our case report in brief: at Intesa Sanpaolo's Group Archives we decided to promote a special project in order to build some photographic galleries in connection with a thorough general survey of all existing materials. In the near future, we foresee a lot of work in order to process (that means evaluate, discard, condition and catalogue the valuable parts of the heritage), under the scientific guide of our internal archivists, the single-archives curators. So this will not be a purely technical work, but a research venture and we are starting by printing a series of photographic monographs.

Image 2 – Results of the general survey of the photograph collections (2009)



The group archivist, indeed, will spend a lot of effort evaluating, comparing and coordinating, setting priorities, motivating a heterogeneous staff and updating working schedules very frequently: every month, and sometimes every two weeks.

The gigantic size of collections requires decisions, decisions and decisions every day. There is the need to study and identify which parts of the collections deserve an analytical rearrangement and description, or a special project. Simplification in records' processing is

also vital in order to survive (like in the professional debate we have read in the pages of *The American Archivist* in recent years: “More product, less process”).

4. The Group Archivist: A Tentative Profile

In comparison with the profile of mono-brand business archivist, described beforehand, the additional **professional profile requirements** for a group archivist are therefore:

- an open-minded, good historian,
- flexible and energetic, with coordination and team-working skills
- technical training in electronic records and new media fields
- very competent in fixing and applying structural rules.

That means, someone who is fearless and cautious at the same time and who does not have a bureaucratic attitude.

Internal staff training, records selections, cost reductions, budgets, and project management will fill the job description, while the direct processing of collections may be delegated to external or internal specialists.

His or her mission will be labour-intensive and sometimes under-recognized by the employer, but we are all aware that this planning and coordination work, dense with professional choices, is really crucial and meaningful for the entire society, and for future generations.

5. Final suggestions

To conclude, for each country of the world it is very important to strengthen and update the training of business archivists in order to reach a consensus on evolution of the profession in changing and stressful scenarios.

One very important ‘trick’ is to trust in the evolution of corporate settings: you should try to remain confident in positive chances, waiting for the right moment to take (or not to take!) initiatives, in order to not overburden your staff. If you cannot hire professional staff, then external collaborators and sometimes even interns or volunteers can help to meet urgencies or to test new pilot projects.

Even the frequent change of reporting lines will give marvellous opportunities to learn new professional skills (legal, logistic, IT, general secretariat, external or internal communication).

In this way, you will become able to **find internal clients**, that is, to get frequent commissions for historical work from various corporate departments. In our case, such internally-generated projects have become a very important part of our tasks: we have recently built a historical interactive map of the 250 pre-existing banks, to be published on the corporate website, and now we are producing documentary movies on the history of the Intesa Sanpaolo Group, to be used in corporate training of managers.