Chapter 8
Assessing Strategies of the International Council on Archives:
Section on University and Research Institution Archives Re-Opening During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Nkholedzeni Sidney Netshakhuma
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0673-7137
University of South Africa, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The research aims to assess strategies and planning of the International Council on Archives/Section on University and Research Institution Archives (ICA/SUV) members on the reopening of their archive's repositories during COVID-19. A qualitative method was used to collect data from ICA/SUV members. The research found that most of the respondents had not yet developed an effective strategy and plan on reopening of archives, limited provision of access to information. There were resources allocated for the archives program. COVID-19 provides opportunities of archives institutions to raise awareness on archive programs.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 crisis affected the provision of archival materials to researchers and the community by the International Council on Archives/ Section on University and Research Institution Archives (ICA/SUV) members. ICA-SUV, the Section on University and Research Institution Archives was established in 1992 at the ICA Congress in Montreal as a community of practice of archivists all over the world.

The spread of the COVID 19 pandemic provides opportunities for the ICA -SUV to migrate from paper-based systems to an electronic environment to enhance access to information. Most of the universities suspended in-person archives services in March 2020 due to the spread of the pandemic. From March 2020 many governments across the globe declared a state of emergency by shutting down access to archival material physically due to the COVID-19 outbreak, universities have been closed to slow the spread of the virus. The closing of universities and research institutions has taken place widely across all ICA / SUV. This means that the 2020 year will be remembered as both an unprecedented one for higher education and also one of great change, not only because the COVID-19 pandemic forced universities to rethink using the manual paper-based system to provide access to information. ICA/ SUV is to adapt to a hybrid model of providing online archives services. A hybrid model involves a combination of a manual and electronic records management system.

Universities worked to ensure the safe reopening of archives repositories. The study conducted by Anderson, Mckee, and Mossialos (2020) considered reopening strategy the broader health, economic, and public policy implications of COVID 19. While recognizing the uncertainties inherent in discussing any timeline for returning to pre-outbreak normality, governments have striven to layout key considerations and measures for reopening of universities. In any event, the gradual return of ICA/ SUV is dependent on the provision of information during the pandemic.

Most of the universities resolved to reopen universities in phases. The decision to reopen most of the universities in phases was aimed at ensuring control and manage the spread of COVID-19. It appeared the ICA/ SUV has sought to increase the researcher's sense of safety about returning to universities by putting in place strict biosecurity measures and allowing operation of university activities at smaller capacities.

The structural changes made due to the pandemic created broad possibilities for wide blended online services (Saraç, 2020). This implied universities to develop strategies on the provision of access to information by establishing coronavirus committees. The strategy also required collaboration with the Ministry of Health to provide advice on health-related issues. The health of all academic and administrative staff and that of the students entrusted to the department of health services is at the center of decision-making processes. The objective of the study was to assess the strategies of the ICA/ SUV members on the provision of online teaching, accessibility of archives, level of awareness, and resource allocation to provide online services. The strategic choices that a university makes regarding technology, skills, services, and processes have a significant influence on the university's ability to provide online service to university communities.

BACKGROUND

The spread of COVID-19 has exposed weaknesses of the ICA / SUV members' information management system to disseminate information to various stakeholders. This is so because a manual archiving system does not provide multiple uses of archival material by different archives users unlike the online archives system (Fabunmi, Paris and Fabnmi, 2006). It appears that most of the archive's users are not aware of the significance of using an online platform to disseminate information (Netshakhuma, 2019). Most of the ICA/ SUV members lack strategies on online archives services. The absence of a strategic plan to provide online records; low awareness on archives management to support organizational efficiency and accountability; poor archives keeping systems and organizational framework were cited by Katuu (2016)

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