

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

Anneli Sundqvist

Conceptualisations of the use of records

ABSTRACT

The archival community has an ambivalent attitude towards use of record. In one sense, use could be said to be the ultimate purpose of keeping records, on the other hand, it has not been theorized in archives and records management discourse. The purpose of this study is to contribute to an enhanced understanding of the use of records by an empirically underpinned analysis of the concept. Based on an analysis of theoretical conceptualizations of use and an analysis of data from two major case studies of contemporary public organizations, several dimensions of use covering different aspects of user behaviour were identified. The most important of them were the purposes of use, the objects of use, and the applications, i.e. the actual use. As a result, a conceptual model was constructed. Transformed into more abstract conceptual categories, the findings of the case studies could be applicable in other contexts, and the model used as an analytical framework in different settings.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century the phrase “the archival turn” was coined (Stoler 2002), referring to an increasing interest in records and archives. This phenomenon could be witnessed in humanities and social science, but also in art and cultural life in general. The term was partly used to indicate a new, or renewed, usage of archival records as source materials in research, but considered above all a wider recognition of records and archives as socio-cultural phenomena in themselves, telling stories, bearing evidence and having an impact on people and society. Either way, the archival turn is an expression for the fact that records have become objects of interest for more extensive groups than before; groups that are demanding access to records in different manners, enhanced by the development of information technology. This process has been going on since the later decades of the 20th century, impacting on providers of archival services. Consequently, there is a practical imperative to increase knowledge and get a better understanding of

use. In line with the recognition of records as self-contained socio-cultural phenomena, use of records can also be regarded as a social practice meaningful to study in itself. Still, use of records is an undertheorized area. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the theoretical understanding of use by analysing the phenomenon in theory and practice, and constructing a conceptual model embracing its complexity and various aspects.

The archiva¹ community, practitioners as well as scholars, has had an ambivalent attitude towards use. The core of archival theory and practice is the records themselves and the processes in which they are created. Traditionally, their subsequent use has gained less attention. One reason may be that the value of records to a large extent is potential, thus not entirely possible to predict. Records are created for certain reasons, kept for other reasons, and used for various reasons. The ultimate users and their reasons for use are often unknown. That is not to say that use has been neglected in archival practice or studies. Providing access to records, that is, to make use possible, is a primary archival function, and presumptions of future use have been the primary foundation for appraisal decisions. Contemporary archival theory also includes users as actors equal to records creators in establishing archives, and use as a part of the creation of records (e.g. McKemmish 2001).

During the 1980s a certain interest, however not long lasting, in user studies in archival context could be recognized (e.g. Conway 1986a; 1986b; Maher 1986; Turnbaugh 1986), with a renaissance during the early 2000s (for overviews see Harris 2005; Sundqvist 2007; McKemmish & Gilliland 2013). Nevertheless, theorizing the concept of use has rarely been done, and few robust empirical studies of use have been undertaken. Some attempts to pinpoint the use and users of records can be seen in archival discourse either à priori or based on empirical observations. The focus have mainly been archival institutions and scholarly research, while studies of use of contemporary records in administrative settings have been rare. The studies have, with some exceptions, been situationally bound and usually concerned the kinds of records or other sources that have been used by various user categories in a specific location. The results of those studies have not been connected to any theoretical framework or put in a wider social context. Unfortunately, there is also in some cases a lack of methodological or conceptual rigour. Consequently, there is a lack of knowledge about the ultimate motivation behind creating and keeping records, namely use. What is use, why do people use records, how do they use them and what do they use them for? Even if use have been explored in local and particular circumstances, there are few theoretical models describing use as a social practice on a conceptual, more principal level.

The present study takes its point of departure in conceptualisations of use in archival scholarly discourse. The aim is not to present a complete literature overview concerning use, but to highlight some salient features of the concept that can contribute to a more general framework. To provide a more robust basis for the conceptualisation, empirical

¹ Archival is in this study used as an inclusive concept, embracing both archives and records management.

data from two case studies of contemporary Swedish public organizations, one mid-sized municipality and one governmental agency, has been analysed.² Municipalities are responsible for the majority of public services in Sweden, for instance day care, primary and secondary education, geriatric care, city planning and housing etc. The governmental agency had a national commission and competence within its domain transport and communication infrastructure, a field affecting most citizens as well as trade and industry. Recorded information is one of the most important means of public administration, thus frequently used by the officials. According to the Freedom of the Press Act (SFS 1949:105) citizens are, within some restrictions, entitled to access records from public organisations. Since the functions of both the municipality and the agency could be regarded of general interest to the citizens, it could be assumed that a wide range of citizens would benefit from use of the records from the organisations and require access to them, an assumption that proved to be accurate.

The data collection was undertaken during a more comprehensive study (Sundqvist 2009), investigating information behaviour with focus on records in contemporary organizational settings, and has been re-analysed for the purpose of the present study. Data was collected through interviews, analysis of documentary sources, and complementary observations. In all about 60 semi-structured qualitative interviews of a modal length of approximately 45 minutes was undertaken, primarily with staff members in various positions (located in the central administration and the different branch committees of the municipality, and in the central administration, a regional division, and a local office of the governmental agency), but also with a sample of external users. Written requests of records, call slips and documentation of oral requests provided complementary information about external users, purpose of use and requested objects. Data were coded through an iterative process beginning with a set of a priori defined thematic categories based on a literature overview of conceptualisations of use, tested against the data and modified until a coherent categorization was achieved. As a result, several dimensions of use could be exposed, framed into a conceptual model.

Conceptualisations of use in archival discourse

The motivation of use

The ultimate reason for creating and keeping records is that they are of use for someone for some purpose, and the activities that traditionally have been the core of recordkeeping and the primary objects of theorization – appraisal, arrangement and description, as well as preservation - have to certain extent the objective to enhance use. However, use of records have hardly any value of its own. Records are used because they are needed, and the need for records is motivated by something outside itself. An attempt to conceptualise user needs, drawing on theories from psychology and information science, was made by Hugh Taylor (1984). He suggests that the need for records is a means to fulfil other

² It should be emphasized that the aim of the present study is not to explore use of records in particular organisations. The empirical findings serve a rather instrumental function in this case, corroborating a theoretical reasoning.

fundamental psychological and cognitive needs; the need to know and understand. This reasoning is align to contemporary Library & Informations Science research e.g. Dervin (1983) and Belkin (1980), where the need for, in those cases, information is assumed to originate in a perceived dissatisfaction situation where the individual needs information to make sense of the situation or solve a problem. Also Wilson (1981) asserts that need for information is not an end itself, but a result of other primary physiological, affective or cognitive needs, and functions a means to fulfil those more fundamental needs. These models emphasize basic cognitive and psychological needs as the motivation for information seeking and use, and they also forward an individual, intra-personal perspective with less attention to contextual and social aspects. They further take a rather high-level approach that limits the explanatory scope concerning the need for particular information, not to say records. There is reason to assume several instances between the more fundamental human needs and their manifestations as the need for concrete records. More situated and socially oriented motivations behind the need for information have been forwarded by e.g. Robert S. Taylor (1991), Leckie et al (1996) and Byström & Hansen (2005), who connect information need to work situations and task completion, however without recognising the concept of records.

The reason for use

There are some archival scholars that have aimed at identifying the reasons why we create and maintain records, which can also be regarded as the basic purposes of use. The perhaps most prominent and influential expression of this is Schellenberg's conceptualisation of the value of records and his distinction between primary and secondary value (Schellenberg 1956a). Primary value is based on the reasons why records are created and referring to the value for the originating agencies, while secondary value is referring to the value for other users. These other users could be other agencies and private persons, but the pre-dominant category seem to be scholars of various disciplines. However, the distinction between the two categories of value has also a temporal aspect: "...public records are preserved in an archival institution because they have values that will exist long after they cease to be of current use, and because their values will be for others than the current users" (Schellenberg, 1956a, p. 6). This reasoning is connected to Schellenberg's definition of archives as records that have been selected for permanent retention: "[t]o be archives, materials must be preserved for reasons other than those for which they were created or accumulated. These reasons may be both official and cultural ones" (Schellenberg, 1956b, p. 13). Schellenberg then makes his well-known definition of secondary value as evidential value and informational value. This is not to say that the concepts of evidential or informational value are irrelevant for records of primary value, but since the focus of Schellenberg's analysis is records of secondary value this is left out of the discussion. In the further analysis this temporal mode seem to define the division between primary and secondary value: "For the government they [records of evidential value] are a storehouse of administrative wisdom and experience. They are needed to give consistency and continuity to its actions. They contain precedents for policies, procedures, and the like, and can be used as a guide to public administrators in solving problems of the past or, equally important, in avoiding past mistakes. They contain the proof of each

agency's faithful stewardship of the responsibilities delegated to it and the accounting that every important public official owes to the people whom he serves" (Schellenberg, 1956a, p. 8). This means that the users of records of secondary value not necessarily have to be "others", but can be representatives of the originating agencies as well. The crucial issue is apparently not the users themselves, but the purposes of use, which is more logical and leads back to the basic characteristic of records that they can be used and re-used for other reasons than they were created for. Nevertheless, Schellenberg makes the somewhat simplistic notion that this occur at a specific moment of time, when records have been transferred to archival repositories. This limitation notwithstanding, we can make certain inferences from Schellenberg's conceptual framework: a) the motivations of using records, namely administrative, fiscal, legal, operational, accountability, cultural and scholarly purposes; and b) the functions or qualities of records that are requested, that is evidence and information.³

Purposes and properties

An attempt to deepen the principal discussion on use of records and bridging the primary-secondary value gap is later made by Shepherd & Yeo (2003), like Schellenberg in connection with appraisal and the values records hold. The departure of their argument is the reasons why organizations create and keep records (Shepherd & Yeo 2003, xi f.). These reasons are further elaborated into a model of the purposes of use of organizational records (later developed into a general model by Yeo 2005), where the purposes of using records are condensed into three rather comprehensive categories (Shepherd & Yeo 2003, 155-156):

- business purposes to support administration, legislation, public or professional service, economy, or transactions between individuals or organizations, the «need to recall or prove what was done or decided in the past» (Shepherd & Yeo 2003, xi).
- accountability purposes to prove that organizations meet legal or other regulatory requirements, and for individuals and groups to prove responsibility to seniors and patrons. From the perspective of the external stakeholders accountability is about contesting and holding organizations responsible for their actions. Accountability is thus always a relational phenomenon, involving different parties.
- cultural purposes to promote understanding of organizational history, or to seek information about e.g. historical, demographic, social or scientific facts, in order to gain understanding of various phenomena for other purposes than undertaking actual business activities.

In contrast to, but informed by Schellenberg, the authors make explicit the relationships between the purposes of use and the values or properties sought, that is information and evidence. However, they also contribute to the discussion by adding a third value or property of records, namely being an artefact with physical, visual, tangible and aesthetic

³ Schellenberg's definitions of these concepts deviate from conventional archival discourse and the distinction between them are not entirely consistent (e.g. Menne-Haritz 1998; Sundqvist 2009), but this is of less relevance for the matter of discussion. The point is that he states that records are used for certain purposes, and that there are certain aspects of records that is of interest.

qualities; i.e. records also have material properties that could be the object of user interest. A strong relationship between business purposes and (particularly) accountability purposes, and records' evidential value is presumed, while material characteristics are considered as of most value for cultural purposes. The model is in principle based on the same two-dimensional division as Schellenberg's, focusing on the motivations or purposes for use, and the assumed properties of the records, but more nuanced and reaching a higher level of sophistication.

The actual use of records

Another dimension of use could be anticipated, even if it not is fully conceptualised, in Pugh (2005). With a starting point in primary and secondary uses based on Schellenberg's categorization, she makes an effort to elucidate *how* records are used, at least on a general level. First, she makes a distinction between direct and indirect use. Direct use means that someone is taking part of a record or obtaining information from it, including reading a document, receiving a copy, receiving information by mail, telephone or in person, or loaning a document. Indirect use is the beneficiary of others' direct use, for instance by studying books or other publications based on records. This implies that persons can use records, without actually dealing with them. However, assessing indirect use with any certainty is probably impossible and thus of minor interest here. It can just be established that the benefit of records is much larger than their concrete usage. Of more relevance for the present analysis is her discussion about the types of questions the records are supposed to give answers to: factual questions aiming at a particular fact or piece of information, and interpretative questions that requires reading "through a body of material to tell a story, develop a narrative, or test a hypothesis. /.../ they seek to answer broad questions of motivation, causality, and change" (Pugh 2005, p. 42). A similar distinction was made by Miller' (1986, pp. 375-376), who categorized research as either *event-oriented* concentrating on specific events, persons, policies, or institutions, or *process-oriented analysing* processes, structures and change. This may give an indication that records could be applied in different ways: to provide single facts or to derive more complex processes from. Pugh also includes a third category, which she calls applicational use. That is when a document in itself, its intrinsic value according to Pugh, is of interest for the user. I.e. there is a particular record that is relevant in a particular situation. This is not necessarily related to information content, but could for instance concern material characteristics or to verify legal status. Empirical studies, however few, also suggest that "known-item search" or requests of specific items are frequent in connection with use of records (e.g. Bearman 1989/90; Martin 2001; Duff & Johnson 2002; Sundqvist 2009), underpinning the relative significance of the particular records. From this we can also derive another component of use, namely *what* is used, the content or the record in itself. The concept of records is to some extent an abstraction (concepts *are* basically abstractions), but records have concrete manifestations in the form of documents (the physical entity) and information (the informative content).

An empirical study of the use of records

The need for records and the purposes of use

The overall motive for the organizations that were objects of the study, was to effect political decisions, either established by law and governmental orders, or by resolutions from the executive committees. The findings of study showed that the organizations' primary need for records occurred as a consequence of the internal work processes. The members of the organizations needed records to support the conduct of business: when performing administrative functions as personnel, maintenance or finances; when preparing or executing decisions; or, when undertaking operational work as planning, construction, teaching etc. An often stated purpose of use was to support decision-making and actions, and records were used in the tasks of administering, planning, investigating, deciding, executing decisions and delivering services. But, records were also used in the process of administering the administration itself, for instance to monitor and control the registration of records and actions.

Another purpose was to show compliance with rules and regulations, political decisions and commitments to other parties. This often occurred in relation to the performance of business transactions, which meant that accountability was integrated in the business processes. Occasionally, individual members of the organizations could use records for more personal reasons, often work related, but not directly related to the actual work tasks. This often concerned material benefits for the individual, like consulting personnel files to establish period of employment or wage-conditions, but sometimes to find out who had applied for a new appointment or, more rarely, to be informed of on-going activities or events. These needs were generated by personal interest, curiosity, or a need for control. In the last case the purpose of use could be seen as gaining personal benefits, while in the others the purpose were to get information or enhance knowledge for its own sake. The external stakeholders' need for records, as could be derived from interviews and the user queries, were mainly pragmatic and material, with the purpose to gain personal or business benefits. This was often achieved by establishing a certain status with the help of documents that could be used to ascertain specific rights, often in relation to a third party. This generated a need for copies of school reports, medical records, decisions, permits, and suchlike. Records were also required as operational instruments in activities, either for personal or business purposes. Examples were plans and drawings needed for maintenance and reconstruction work. Contractors, estate agents, academic researchers and journalists etc. needed records or information from records to accomplish their work-processes. A related purpose of use was educational activities, where records were used by students to accomplish special assignments. In some cases records or information from them served the purpose as primary products for sale by agencies that provided specific information to their customers.

In accordance with existing legislation records of public organizations are considered as the primary means to scrutinize public institutions and effect control over their activities. To some extent records were needed for these purposes, but usually in a situated context

rather than as instruments of exercising control on a general level. External stakeholders needed records primarily in the process of controlling an on-going matter or in an appeal, or in some cases to establish misuse of authority and maltreatment. Records were also used to some extent to monitor policy issues or the political decision-making process. The latter could occur in case of certain issues pursued by interest groups, or occasionally in case of (mostly unpopular or controversial) actions affecting large groups of citizens. Records were also needed more continuously by superior agencies exercising control over or auditing the organizations. The purpose of use could also be to gain knowledge and understanding for its own sake, without any ambition of immediate practical application of the knowledge. The need to know could be motivated by a variety of reasons: the urge of keeping track or keeping oneself updated of things, plain curiosity as when requesting information about celebrities, or matters of identity and self-realisation as when establishing ones origin. This roughly corresponds to Shepherd & Yeo's (2003) notion of cultural purposes, however, the term «cultural» does not seem altogether adequate.

The objects of use

Records possess several properties and can serve different functions. In the theoretical discourse referred to above, records at least inherit three fundamental properties: informational, evidential and artefactual value, which are related to their content, context and structure. Records are carriers of information, but what is considered to constitute their “recordness” is mainly their function as evidence of transactions. They also have a material representation, i.e. they are objects. However, these distinctions are to some extent only analytical. In practice, they are intricately interwoven and inherent in actual records, corroborating each other. For the actual user, these properties are rather abstract and rarely the explicit subject of interest. Instead, more mundane aspects of records were requested.

A general observation was that members of the organizations often requested specific items, i.e. particular documents that they could identify or at least presume the existence of, while external stakeholders rather requested factual information, either as individual facts or more comprehensive issues. Members of the organizations, who were more familiar with the administrative and decisive processes and the records generated by those, requested in general specific items and more rarely factual information. They were apparently more able to identify the particular objects, even if they also to some extent requested documents “about” something, that is, non-specific items. However, there was also a temporal aspect involved. In the current situation, performance of on-going matters or other contemporary activities, factual information was generally more often requested. In case of closed matters or older phenomena, actual documents were demanded both of the members of the organizations and the external stakeholders. The majority of the requests that concerned more than ten years old records were usually about documents, and mostly specific items. External stakeholders were, however, less inclined to pin-point the exact items, but usually requested documents “about” something. Users could also, if even rarely, request types of documents, i.e. documents of certain form or genre.

There is, however, reason to distinguish between *request* and the *object of use*. First, the border between use of information and use of documents is fuzzy. In a general sense use of records always implies obtaining information in some way, but in some cases could not the information be detached from the physical object. Nevertheless, there is a point in making an analytical distinction between information (content) and document (carrier). In some cases, users would be benefited with an answer to a question, i.e. factual information that could be mediated without actual access to the record. Still, the users might not want to disclose their actual purpose, i.e. identifying the exact information they want, or their information need was not clearly defined. Consequently, they were requesting certain documents which they assumed could provide the wanted information, not the information as such. In other cases, more complex information needs generated a need to analyse, interpret and make inferences from records, which meant that the users had to process the materials themselves to achieve the desired results. That is, they needed access to the actual documents. Certain forms of information could also be difficult to mediate without access to the actual object, for instance pictorial records, plans and drawings. The primary motivation to directly access actual records was, however, the need for a specific document to solve a specific problem that could not be solved otherwise, for instance using plans and drawings in building and reconstruction work, or when needing a copy of a school report when applying for higher education or a job appointment.

The application of records

Records are carriers of information and information content is an indispensable element in the records' concept. Even if other qualities are sought, use of records involves a transfer of information. However, information and use of information are complex phenomena. A frequently use of records was to obtain facts, i.e. to find concrete answers to concrete, «simple» questions. Information from records was used continuously by the employees of the organizations for planning, performing of operational tasks, investigations, presentations, decision-making and in follow-up activities, either because of their own cognitive and operational needs, or because of requirements from others. External stakeholders often requested facts to find out how on-going matter proceeded, but information from closed matters or other types of records was also requested. Users appeared to request information about persons to a large extent: addresses, civic registration numbers, personal names, and time of birth or death, either for current circumstances or genealogical or historical research. Other areas that generated a significant interest in hard facts were real estate properties, constructions and other specific subjects, and events.

Information from records were also frequently used to *reconstruct* past actions and events. In contrast to basic fact-finding like picking up a date or a name, this involved a more complex processing of information and making inferences from records. What actually had happened and how it had happened was of salient importance in those cases. A recurring motive for using records that was brought forward in the interviews with employees in the organizations was “to see what we did last time” or “to see what we said before”. The reason behind this kind of use was probably to get guidance in the decision-

making process, but also to ensure continuity in the actions undertaken and consistency towards the subjects of the decisions. This means that records often served as basis for decisions and actions, although their use to establish precedents was not explicitly referred to. The process of follow-up of actions and decisions, for instance due to complaints or appeals, or the handling of legal claims also involved reconstruction, or investigations of damages and incidents. Reconstruction was also an occurring element in the external stakeholders' use of records. This could occur in the process of scrutinizing or controlling the decisive procedures, for instance as a basis for an appeal, or to find out the background to certain decisions or agreements. Examples could be procurement, disposal of property, or decisions with a profound impact on the life of individuals, such as adoptions and child-custody cases. Historical research, including genealogy and local history, was further involving reconstruction of the past.

The members of the organizations occasionally used previous matters and decisions systematically to obtain knowledge and regain experience. This could be done by collecting certain types of records, like decisions and agreements, for continuing reference. However, general knowledge enhancement from records rarely occurred. That would require significant knowledge about potential sources, making extracts from several sources and processing of the information, which was considered too time consuming to undertake in connection to ordinary work tasks. Hence, knowledge enhancement was only concerning specific cases or types of matters. External stakeholders also occasionally used records to regain knowledge, particularly in connection with procurement to use competitors' tenders for future reference.

The most significant use was, however, to verify something: that something was said, had happened, was decided, done, or agreed upon. Almost any form of use could of course be said to involve an element of verification, but it was particularly significant in connection with rights and liabilities, and to show accountability. Decisions of public institutions had to be made on an accurate assessment of the circumstances, i.e. they had to be based on documentary evidence. Applications for benefits or home assistance had to be supported with financial statements or medical records. The organizations had to show that they had acted according to the law, executed political decisions and fulfilled obligations to other parties, in answer to appeals and legal claims. External stakeholders used records to a large extent to ascertain that they were subject to certain rights or complied with specific requirements, for instance that they had certain educational qualifications or permits to undertake certain activities, e.g. traffic permits, and building permits etc. Documentary evidence was also required to verify ownership and disposal rights of real property or to establish family relationships for instance in connection with paternity suits, but also to confirm research findings, academic as well as amateur.

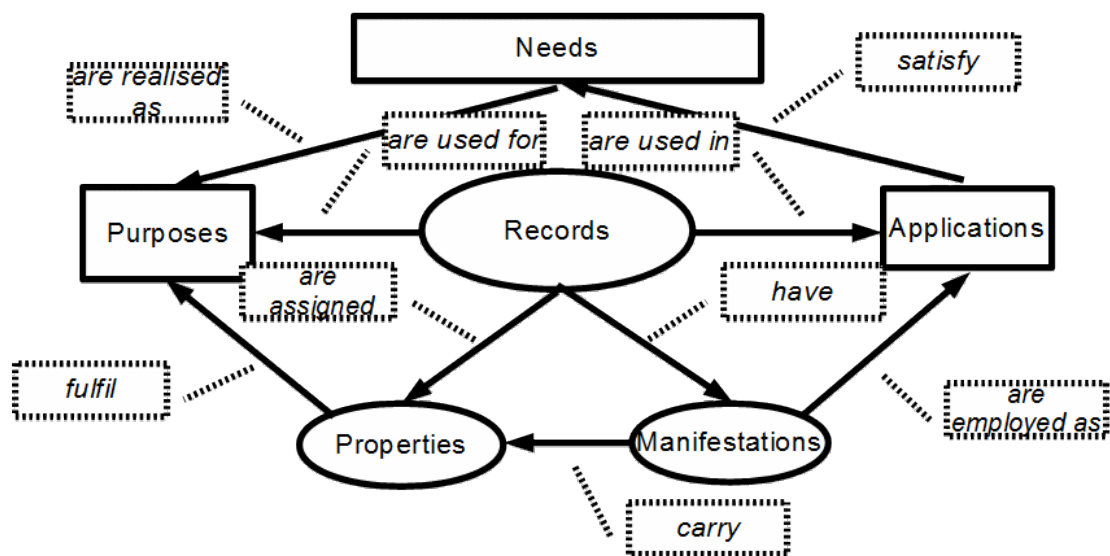
In rare occasions records were also used because of their artefactual properties. Photographs and other pictorial records with specific motifs could be used to illustrate certain themes, and types of documents could be used as examples or illustrations. In

those cases primarily the physical attributes of the records were of value to the users, but the intellectual content and the contextual relations were of less interest.

A conceptual model of use

What can be concluded from literature and underpinned by empirical findings is that use is a poly-dimensional concept, including several components. This could be illustrated in the following conceptual model:

Fig. 1 A conceptual model of use



A trivial, but nonetheless important notion, is that use of records is not an independent activity, but integrated in other social practices that generate a need for records and motivate their use. Use of records have hardly any value of its own, but function as a means to fulfil other accomplishments. Records are used because there is a particular need for them, but it can be assumed that the need for records ultimately is a function of other more fundamental or superior needs, individual and social. In literature, need is often considered as an individual phenomenon, a function of physiological, cognitive and emotional factors. However, need can also be collective and social, and the need of an individual can emanate out of a social need. As a consequence, the users of records could be either individuals or collectives. This is not the place to delve further into this, the aim is just to acknowledge that need is a complex concept in itself. It can be broken down into several instances of more or less concretisation, and embrace both social and individual requirements.

On a more concrete level, need is realised as certain purposes that motivate use of records and use should in general be regarded as a purposive activity.⁴ The purposes of use have been outlined by some archival scholars as described above, however as *à priori* statements. Empirical findings suggest a more nuanced picture: records are used for *material purposes*, to ascertain the users' benefits and rights; for *operational purposes*, to provide input in practical activity either personal or business related; for *accountability purposes*, to maintain control of finally, for the purpose of *knowledge-enhancing* or *self realisation*.⁵ These purposes could be fulfilled due to the basic properties or values of records that could be derived from archival theory: informational and evidential value, but also their material properties as stated by Shepherd & Yeo (2003). That is, records have different properties that can be *of use* for different purposes. The properties are materialised in the concrete manifestations of the records, that is as information or as documents. These manifestations are the concrete realisation of the more abstract concept of records. The actual use of records, their application (not to confuse with Pugh's applicational use), is not conceptualised in literature other than as vague examples, but is a significant component of a more comprehensive analytical framework. As the findings show, records could be used to provide discrete facts, to re-construct past actions and events, to re-gain experience or knowledge, to verify something, or illustrate or exemplify something. It is in their manifest form that records are employed for a certain application, which aim is to satisfy the underlying need.

Concluding remarks

The result of this study shows that use of records is a complex concept. The model sets out from scholarly writings about use, but takes the conceptualisation a step further by showing that use could be broken down into several distinctive, but interrelated, components. Components that are addressing different aspects of user behaviour. Particularly the distinction between the purposes of use and the actual use, the application of records, is emphasized. However, it is not possible, neither is it the aim, that from the findings of this study establish any clear and exclusive correlations between the components, i.e. between the properties of records and the purposes of use, the objects of use (information or documents), or the applications. This can to some extent be contributed to the fact that the concept of records is an abstraction and its assigned properties are analytical rather than concrete. Even if records are primarily used as information sources or as illustrative artefacts irrelevant of the originating context, their authenticity may be of value. This means that even in such cases, the evidential properties may be highly relevant. At the same time records are always carriers of information, either as content or as structural attributes, i.e. the use of records as evidence

⁴ As Pugh suggested, use could be indirect and thus not always conscious. This aspect of use will not be treated here. However, even if use in those instances could not be considered as purposive, it would probably in most cases be part of another purposive activity.

⁵ However, the motivations of individual users (persons or collectives) can in reality be complex. One fundamental need can be realised as several purposes, and the purposes can be overlapping, that is use of particular records can fulfil several purposes at the same time.

or as a “thing”, always involves a transfer of information. In practice the different properties of records are inseparably intertwined, augmenting each other.⁶

Nevertheless, a potential correlation between the components of the model cannot be discarded, at least not in local circumstances, and this could be a subject for further research and contribute to the understanding of use. A deepened analysis of use and a further elaboration of the model would also be a possible contribution. Since the purpose of the present study is to provide a conceptual model of *use* in particular, the presentation is simplified and leaves out certain elements that in reality are unexpendable: first of all the users, who are mentioned but not conceptualised, but also other subjects and tools that are involved in mediating the operations of identifying, accessing and processing the records. A conceptualisation and categorization of those could complement the model.

It can be argued that use of records is a highly context dependent phenomenon and that the present results only reflect the actual cases. However, by transforming the empirical findings into more abstract conceptual categories and relationships, they could be applicable in other contexts. The resulting model can be used as an analytical framework for empirical studies and to assess current practices: for example as a diagnostic tool or as a basis for the development of user services or search interfaces.

⁶ This was recognized already by Schellenberg (1956) and has later been subject to a more nuanced analysis, e.g. Yeo (2007).

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