

Tags: archives records management,

Archiving by design: theory and practice in the Netherlands

Archiving by design is a key philosophy at the National Archives in the Netherlands. It means ensuring the sustainable accessibility of records from (before) the moment of creation or capture.

And while this sounds great, does it actually work? And how do you implement this within public sector organizations?

If you expect this article to provide easy answers on archiving by design, do not read further. Archiving by design is not a quick fix. If however you're looking for an approach to archiving that will deliver improvements over time and ensure a consistent and sustainable approach this article will provide you with a primer to start on this journey yourself.

So what is Archiving by design?

Archiving by design is a method whereby you define measures and requirements during the development of information systems that ensure the sustainable accessibility of the records in the system. It will allow you to manage the records in line with the core principles of sustainable accessibility.

The What: Principles of sustainable accessibility

The core principles of sustainable accessibility are essential in Archiving by design. These principles lead to an understanding of the functions and requirements needed to ensure that we can deliver on these principles. The principles provide the answer to what do we want to achieve with Archiving by design. Archiving by design is the method (how) we can ensure systems deliver on these core principles.

What then, are the principles:

- *Findable*: Can all different users search and find the information they require. And can this be done in a reasonable time and effort.
- *Available*: Is the information available for the user. Is there access to the information? This can be access rights to digital information. But for paper information it might be a reading room with reasonable opening hours.
- *Readable*: Can the user read the information. For digital information this means having the right software to open or view the information. If you imagine microfilm you would require a microfilm reader.
- *Interpretable*: Can the user interpret the information. Is there contextual metadata available. Who wrote this, when? Are there related records? What is the status of the information, etc.
- *Reliable*: Can the user trust the information to be authentic. Is the information integer?
- *Durable / future proof*: Is the information stored in such way that we can still use it in 10, 20 or 100 years? For digital information this may mean using open standards as format, but also regular preservation actions to ensure this over time.

The How: Archiving by design

Archiving by design is a way of thinking more than just one method that you can apply. It requires a change in the mindset of an organization and the people in it.

No longer is archiving an afterthought, the part of what you do with information once you're done with it. Archiving is part of the thinking from the moment of designing a system, ensuring that when you create or ingest information in a system, the information will be sustainable accessible.

To achieve this there are different methods. If possible, make archiving part of the Enterprise Architecture of the organization. This will ensure all systems that are developed and implemented must take the functions and requirements of Archiving into account.

As archivists we should develop the necessary guidelines and measures to support this development.

Another, related step is the participation as archivist in projects to define requirements, and develop or procure it. This gives us an opportunity to bring our requirements to the table and develop those as part of the whole. This will help, not just us, but also the users.

This does require us as archivists to better understand enterprise architecture and Information technology. As a role we should be able to discuss on different levels in the organization to help understand what is needed and why. It also means keeping an open mind, not sticking to outdated concepts, but always relating it to the core principles and core functions, as also defined in standards like MOREQ and ISO 16175.

And we should be able to function as consultants, providing clear and workable advice, which should be based on standards and guidelines. For some of us this does mean we should take up the role to develop the standards and guidelines, at least for our own organization, but ideally also on a larger scope.

Finally, a word on when we're not part of the organization. How can we assist in Archiving by design? At the National Archives we've developed our own methodology for just this case. It's an Archiving by design scan. In this scan we first define:

- the scope of the process,
- the information created or received,
- the system(s) in use,
- the users, specifically secondary users. Users that later require access to the information, not just primary users,
- change management willingness

The next step are three workshops, starting with the users to understand user requirements regarding sustainable accessibility. Then with developers to see what measures and solutions can be defined. And finally with both groups to prioritize the measures. With this approach an organization has concrete, realistic and achievable requirements regarding sustainable accessibility to develop. And the will to make those changes.

«Archiving by design is a theory, a methodology, a way of thinking. Above all though it provides us with an approach to tackle the most common problem: no sustainable accessible information in systems.»

This will mean a different role for us as archivists. We cannot wait on the sideline and just receive information at the end of the lifecycle. We need be proactive and ensure information will come thus us, in a manner that fits our and the user's needs.

This is a continuous approach, not a one and done activity. The results will not always be quick, it requires time to see changes take effect. And to learn and improve.



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Résumé

Français

Cet article décrit le quoi et le comment de l'*archiving by design*. Il fournit un aperçu de la façon dont le lecteur peut appliquer lui-même l'*archiving by design*. Il traite des principes fondamentaux de l'accessibilité durable. *Archiving by design* est la méthode pour y parvenir. Cependant, il n'y a pas qu'une seule approche. L'approche à choisir dépend toujours du lecteur individuel et doit convenir à l'organisation. Cela nécessite une approche continue et demande aux archivistes de jouer un ou plusieurs rôles différents. Non pas sur la ligne de touche, mais en participant activement au développement de systèmes, d'architecture d'entreprise et de lignes directrices.

Deutsch

Dieser Artikel beschreibt das Was und Wie des *archiving by design*. Es bietet einen Überblick darüber, wie der Leser das *archiving by design* selbst anwenden kann. Es geht um die Kernprinzipien eines nachhaltigen Zugangs. Archiving by design ist die Methode, um dies zu erreichen. Es gibt jedoch nicht nur einen einzigen Ansatz. Welcher Ansatz zu wählen ist, bleibt immer dem einzelnen Leser überlassen und sollte zur Organisation passen. Dies erfordert eine kontinuierliche Herangehensweise und verlangt von den Archivaren, eine weitere Rolle bzw. weitere Rollen zu spielen. Sie sollen dabei nicht am Rande, sondern aktiv an der Entwicklung von Systemen, Unternehmensarchitekturen und Richtlinien mitwirken.

English

This article describes the what and how of archiving by design. It provides a view on how the reader can apply archiving by design themselves. It talks about the core principles of sustainable accessibility. Archiving by design is the method to achieve this. However, there's not just one approach. What approach to choose is always up to the individual reader and should fit the organization. This requires a continuous approach and asks of the archivists to play a different role or roles. Not on the sideline, but participating in developing systems, Enterprise Architecture and guidelines.