

Comment on RiC- CM from the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand (ARANZ)

### **Background and context for comments**

The Archives and Records Association of New Zealand (ARANZ) is an incorporated society, established in 1976, with the aim of promoting the understanding and importance of records and archives in New Zealand. ARANZ members include archivists; recordkeepers; librarians; and other information managers; genealogists; historians; teachers; museum and art gallery curators; religious groups; professional associations; historical societies; businesses; local and central government agencies; and many others interested in the preservation and use of archives and records.

New Zealand has few large archival institutions, and the majority of the organisations that hold archives in this country have only one or two staff; sometimes only one part-time employee or even a volunteer looks after the archives. Archives in New Zealand use a range of descriptive systems, including the series system, varieties of multi-level descriptive systems, and some of the archives' own devising.

Until the 1990s it was not possible to study in New Zealand for a qualification in archives and/or records management at an undergraduate or post-graduate level; those who wanted a qualification had to travel to Australia or undertake distance learning from an Australian institution. Many sole archivists are self-taught, and apart from their own reading, will have learned their practice from workshops and short courses provided by ARANZ, Archives New Zealand, or another source. It is entirely possible that some of them have never read or even heard of ISAD(G) and the other ICA standards.

The following comments on behalf of ARANZ are made by Dr. Susan Skudder, presently Research Librarian at the Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), a collecting archives. I have also worked in local and central government archives, in Archives New Zealand, and with a range of small archives, mainly local government but also some religious and school archives. In my review of the document I have tried to keep in mind ARANZ's wide constituency and to think about how they might use the document.

### **General comments**

First, I would like to congratulate the expert group on this work and on taking on the immensely challenging task of developing consensus on descriptive practice internationally, across different cultural traditions, systems and practices.

This is an exciting development and I am particularly excited by the opportunity RiC-CM will provide for more finer-grained description, and the use of Linked Open Data.

The introductory discussion is a great overview of the development of archival practice, and a very good way of providing the context for the conceptual model, not to mention possibly a useful brief introduction for users new to archival practice.

I welcome the use of the W3C RDF technology, and the focus on interrelationships between archival entities to explicate the broader contexts of archives. I also appreciate the separation of the Record Set and the Record, and the rationale for doing so.

I welcome the incorporation of the four existing standards into one. I cannot imagine the discussion and negotiation that must have taken place to ensure that concepts from the series system and classic multi-level hierarchical description system have been melded so that the baby has not been thrown out with the bathwater, so to speak. I do not envy the committee its job, and I would hope that the useful aspects of both approaches have been and will be maintained.

The institution I work in, and others I have worked in or with, will be able to work with this model, although I think they and other archives would appreciate a crosswalk between the existing standards and RIC-CM. I think this would also assist those with less experience in working with standards.

I understand why the entities and the entity properties have been expressed in tabular form. I and many of my colleagues who work in larger institutions are comfortable with reading and working with metadata schema. I think, however, that many of ARANZ's members who are not used to this format may find it initially off-putting and daunting to read. Possibly an explanation of the format might help.

I found some of the examples in the entity tables confusing and not explicatory of the definition and scope notes of the entity (which is surely what they are for), and I think more work needs to be done with these examples. People naturally gravitate towards examples if they are unsure of the concept itself, and will use them as models.

There should be more examples of the types of archives found in collecting archives. This model applies to personal papers as well as to the papers of agencies, institutions, etc., and it will help those users who have those kinds of archives if they can see examples to which they can relate their own collection material.

There should be more examples of digital documentary forms, particularly as at least part of the argument for this new conceptual model rests on the development of new digital documentary practices in a networked environment.

I note that in the entity properties, not all examples fields have examples. Every examples field should have at least one example. If the experts group cannot think of an example of a property of an entity, then surely there is an issue with the conceptualisation of that particular property.

### **Some specific comments**

#### *Concept/thing*

I cannot imagine the discussion that must have gone on about this particular entity. I understand that at present RiC is only a conceptual model, but I do think that more work need to be done on the scope notes so as to make clear what this entity is. Those of us who work in institutions with a practice of assigning authority terms to descriptive records will have no trouble understanding 'concept/thing'; others may struggle.

### *Place*

A geographic area, a jurisdiction, and an administrative area are *not at all* the same and should not be lumped together into the place entity. Having them all in a portmanteau term will, I believe, obscure some aspects of contextual entities that could be better described if there were separate entities.

### *Obligation*

I would like to see some thought given to which entities and which properties of entities are mandatory, optional or contingent. A standard surely has to say what is the 'minimum standard' of description, or there is no point to it.

I look forward to the next iteration of this conceptual model.

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