Overview

- What archivists describe, how they describe it, and why they describe that way
  - Gavan McCarthy, Director, eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne/member of EGAD

- Overview of EGAD mandate: developing a conceptual model for archival description
  - Daniel Pitti, Associate Director, Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, University of Virginia/chair of EGAD
What is Described

- Intergenerational transfer of knowledge
- Via Records - Published, Artifactual and . . . that stuff we create to help us do things
- Archivists deal with the detritus, the ad hoc, the ever changing, the systemic, the systemless - the fragmentary evidence of what actually happens
- Archivists have more in common with Archaeologists, Forensic Scientists and System Analysts than Librarians
- Archival descriptive or documentation systems have to deal with all variants that creative humans produce (the messiness of life)
How

- Records in Context
- Foremost: Principle of Provenance
- Describing records as a set, sets of sets: fonds ... series ... files ... items
- Frequently individual items are not described (Scandalous!)
Why

- Because of the nature of what is described: fragmentary evidence of what actually happens

- Describing at item-level would make many and perhaps most records beyond understanding
  - Separating them from the context in which they are organically interrelated
  - It is the interrelations that make them meaningful, understandable

- Describing all items in detail would obscure
Why

- Economy also a factor
  - Complex graph would probably be best, but economically not feasible
  - Hierarchy an economic, efficient alternative
  - In the end, like our allied professional colleagues, we have to be practical!
ICA EGAD

- ICA is the international professional organization for archivists
- Develop standards for the archival community
- Standards for Description
  - 1990-2008
    - Committee on Best Practices and Standards: ISAD(G), ISAAR, ISDF and ISDIAH
  - 2012-2016
    - Expert Group on Archival Description
      - Conceptual Model for Archival Description
      - Records in Context (RIC)
Historical Context

• Since at least mid-19th century, cultural heritage communities
  • Reimagine description in relation to emerging and new communication technologies
  • Trend
    • Separate the components of description
    • To efficiently and more effectively create prevailing access tool (e.g., book catalog, archival guides)
    • At the same time, enable new tools, new perspectives, new paths, based on recombining the components
  • Four ICA standards reflect this trend
  • Though the separation and new perspectives not realized
Current Technologies

- Network, of course, and Markup (XML), and Database (SQL) ...
- XML and SQL have dominated but ...
- Emergence of Graph technologies: RDF, Semantic technologies and Linked Open Data
  - More expressive, but also more challenging: complexity, quality ...
- Opportunities: separation, recombinining, interrelating, opening domain borders, new perspectives, new paths ...
- Conceptual model for archival description intended to reposition community to take advantage of the opportunities
Work of EGAD

- Three teams, two products
  - RIC Ontology (product)
    - High-level: world as perceived by archivists
    - Foundation for interrelating archival community with library and museum communities (CIDOC CRM/FRBRoo)
    - CRM/FRBRoo consulted: mature, detailed, thoughtful ...
  - RIC Conceptual Model (product)
    - Subset of Ontology
    - Recognizable as the heir to the four current ICA standards
- Principles and Terminology
  - Ensure that RIC is grounded in established principles
  - Ensure terminology is as unambiguous and clear as possible ...
  - In many languages, particularly English and French (ICA official languages)
Current Status

- **Ontology**
  - High-level classes including high-level descriptive entities
    - Agent, Record, Record Set, Function, Mandate

- **Conceptual Model**
  - High-level descriptive entities
    - Agent, Record, Record Set, Function, Mandate
    - Detailed comparison of ICA standards and Australian, Finnish, and Spanish models
Next Steps

- Ontology and Conceptual Model
  - Date and Place, Topics, Relation (Event, Action, Transaction ...)
  - Detailed properties of each descriptive entity

- Next meeting: Girona, Spain, 15-17, October, 2014

- Both Ontology and Conceptual Model drafts available for comment early 2015