

## THE ROLE OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE): A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

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### **Abstract**

*National Archives of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has gained sixth place in the world ranking due to its modern tools and technology adoption so as to achieve its mission in forty years. The study focused on identifying the objectives and best practices of the national archives in the UAE. It is one of the oldest and largest archives in the country and Arabian Gulf Region too. It collects precious cultural and historical documents in UAE and the Arabian Gulf states. The study concludes that the national archives follows the best practices of ISO approved standard, security and eco-friendly to achieve its strategic goals. The new digitization project "Arabian Gulf Digital Archive" between the country and UK is available for both view and download.*

**Keywords:** *National Archives; Record Keeping; Record Management; United Arab Emirates.*

### **Introduction**

National archive serves as primary sources for historical and cultural memories of any nation for the public access. Past events are the most powerful and important elements which empower the citizens to track back the roots and origin. Rhoads stated that the archives comprise a massive amount of information about people, culture, organizations, environment, events, social and economic developments from the precious primary source materials<sup>1</sup>. The sources of archived national history could influence in developing the people's understanding and creating awareness of the national identity. Bahmer discussed that the national archives do archive the rare materials relating to outstanding cultural and historical aspects<sup>2</sup>. According to Onuoha, the national archives refer to the officially-recognized records of the government bodies, people, organizations or citizens, historical in nature, forms as well as materials appearances which are no longer needed for conducting the day to day business and activities<sup>3</sup>. Such activities are considered as evidence of origin, functions, activities or formation as important with regard to the information. It can therefore be deduced that archives are records of information about an entity, carefully selected for preservation since they possess enduring value and importance. With this understanding, a national archive can be regarded as a collection or a store of organized records of a nation that have been selected for preservation since they possess value and importance to the nation.

## **History of National Archives**

Since the ancient periods, people valued their history and culture. Connor noted that the United States had passed the Act in the year of 1934, to establish a National Archives for the purpose of preserving non-current records of the government documents in central repository to provide access to the government bodies in the service of scholarship. Before the establishment of the United States national archives, all documents and information related to the nation were kept and stored in various basement stores, attics, federally abandoned building and other storage facilities<sup>4</sup>. After the establishment of the national archives, the staff members begun the work of surveying the federal records, sorting and categorizing the documents based on the information stored therein and transferred the documents to the newly established national archives in Washington D.C. From a single building in Pennsylvania, the national archive today owns more than 40 facilities worldwide. Some of the main national archives in the United States included the field archives, the federal records center, and the national historic publications among the others.

## **National Archives in The UAE**

National Archives was established in 1968 as per the orders of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan in the name of "Documents and Research Bureau" and it was administered by many government bodies in different names since its inception. The center was renamed as "National Achieves" in 2014 with a mission to assemble the information and records touching on social life, history, culture and politics of the Arabian Peninsula and the gulf region<sup>5</sup>. The primary sources were to be obtained from foreign and Arab countries with an emphasis based on information related to the Emirates and Abu Dhabi. The bureau has given the mandate of translation and documentation of the collected documents and was renamed in 1972 as Center for Documentation and Research (CDR). In 2008, a Federal Decree No. (7) led to it being renamed as the Center for Documentation and Research. Later, in 2014, the Federal Decree No. (1) resulted in the Bureau being renamed as the National Archives. Since then, various Government agencies have managed the National Achieves including Al Diwan Al Amiri of Abu Dhabi between 1968 and 1971; between 1971 and 1975, Abu Dhabi's Ministry of Presidential Affairs; 1978-1983 the ministry of Foreign Affairs and between 1983-1999, it was managed by the Cultural Foundation. The President's Diwan then took over before the Ministry of Presidential Affairs took over from 1999 to the present day.

National Archives has cut its niche as the only unique establishment in the Middle East within a period of forty years since its inception. It is also ranked sixth globally as adopted the most recent technologies to succeed in carrying out its mandate. The national archives is the biggest documentation and oldest cultural center in the Gulf Region of Arabia. Apart from archiving and documentation, the National Archives offers scholars with a diversity of literature which contains accurate contemporary and

cultural topics in heritage and history. The national Archives has a valuable collection including historical materials related to the Arabian Gulf and the United Arab Emirates. The collected materials are documented, indexed and translated before publishing in a particular historical study. National Archives also organizes and hosts local, international and regional symposiums and conferences. It also holds associated exhibitions both in Emirates and also abroad. Dennehy<sup>6</sup> noted that major new digitization project between UAE and UK provides 250,000 priceless archives which are freely available. Franks and Bernier noted that the archives publish a good number of volumes related to historical topics and biographies of nation's key leaders in both of Arabic and English<sup>7</sup>.

National Archives' vision is to provide guidance of unique documentation, research and archival services. Mission is to conserve the documented culture to provide the public and decision makers with credible figures and to increase national identity and civic spirit. The core values are "Privacy, Trust, Ease of access, Quality and Team Spirit".

### **Objectives of the National Archives**

The main objectives of the national archives are to provide access for the accurate nation's historical and cultural information to the public. The main objectives of the UAE national archives are defined in five categories as follows:

#### **Objective is to "build a contemporary national archiving system"**

- To offer training and consultation services to the ministries and other government bodies.
- Developing experts for manual and electronic archiving system.
- Promoting archiving performance in government entity.
- Establishing an accredited center in governmental records management systems.

#### **Focus on "integrated intellectual research and services"**

- Developing database for the UAE tribal lineages.
- Organizing seminars and workshops for providing consultation services in UAE history.
- Build integrated archives of oral history.
- Issue indigenous researches particularly relating to UAE and the Gulf Countries history.

#### **Third, ensure the "holding & enhancing archives accessibility"**

- Collecting, organizing, preserving and restoring documents relating to UAE and GCC counties.
- Archived materials are technically processed with the best practices according to the international standards.

- Adopted best application and policies to enhance the national archives holdings accessibility.
- Facilitated with equipped storage spaces for the different types of archived materials.

#### **Fourth, enhance “corporate and community outreach”**

- Enrich external strength, trust and employee loyalty.
- Strengthen the partnerships with educational organization.
- Enhancing effective use of marketing tools for national archives promotion.

#### **Fifth, provide and develop “distinctive working environment”**

- Attracting, motivating and retaining the specialist.
- Provide and implement systematic administrative and financial facilities.
- Facilitate holistic infrastructure solutions.
- Ensuring risk management, information safety and security.

### **Duties and Responsibilities**

The core duties and responsibilities of the National Archives of the UAE are to collect, organize and preserve documents as per scientific archival techniques for the welfare of the general public. It provides access and awareness to the researchers of the country and region’s cultural and historical matters. According to Millar<sup>8</sup> that responsibilities of archives or archivists are not just handling the daily activities and also advise to oversee the legislation policies too.

#### **Duties of the National Archives are**

- Collecting primary sources of historical and cultural documents and materials of the UAE, Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC).
- Organizing and managing the recent developments of the UAE and GCC countries records.
- Preserving collected administrative documents from various UAE government bodies, ministries and companies that necessary legislation for the preservation and proper usage.
- Developing different types of specialized research studies relating to history and culture of the gulf region and publishing output of local and international venues.
- Providing access for the digitized archival materials through internet.
- Organizing workshops, Symposiums and conferences for the purpose of promoting research and enrich the cultural life in the UAE and as well endorsing academic interaction with other Arab Countries.
- Promoting scientific research materials and activities among young minds to seek higher academic qualification and improving their effectiveness in various activities.

- Offering information and related documents of the various government bodies, ministries and research center's needs.
- Improving the performance and increasing the number of activities internationally to promote national archives prestigious position outstanding academic and cultural structure.

### **Departments and its Responsibilities**

National Archives comprises the major five departments under the top management. Each unit has its unique duties and responsibilities to ensure the smooth functionalities.

### **Top Management**

- a) Director General's Office consists two units: First unit provides consultation services by four senior advisors for Archives, Law, Media and research. Second Unit Strategic Planning Office targets to enhance and develop the excellence of national archives administration and dissemination practice.
- b) Executive Director's Office supervises the following four units, namely: archives, research & knowledge services, corporate & community outreach and support services.

### **Strategic Planning Office**

The strategic Planning department prepares Strategic Plan for the national archives and operational plans for the other departments as well for the purpose of smooth functionality. This unit also identifies the new opportunities and assesses the staff performance for the improvement. As well, this section assesses the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to measure the outcomes of the department's level to ensure the quality standards.

### **Archives Department**

- The Archives department collects and records historical documents, manuscripts, contemporary photos relating to the UAE and Gulf countries from the government bodies and international archives. The unit validates, preserves, archives and to provide access to the public as per international standards.
- This department encompasses five sections which includes the archives of Historical, Government, Digital, Presidential and Preservation & Restoration. Each unit carry outs the process of record keeping of hard-copy, Soft copy, and indexing them for easy and quick retrieval and access to the researchers, Scholars and students.

### **Support and Services Department**

- This department supports the National Archives in terms of Finance, administration, human resources, information technology and central archives unique requirements.
- The support services department comprises of five sections: 1. Information Technology; 2. Human Resources and Career Development; 3. Finance and Purchasing; 4. Logistic Support; 5. Central Archives.
- The department prepares national archives budget, list of activities, general services maintenance requirements, progress reports, statistics and operational schedules and submits those to the Director General. Also sets HR policies & procedures and recommends policies and procedures for the national archives development.

### **Research and Knowledge Services Department**

- The department conducts research, translates, publishing books and journals as per international standards and also assesses and publishes research papers on the history and culture of the UAE, GCC and Arabian Peninsula.
- Research and knowledge services department consists of four sections such as: 1. Research and Studies; 2. Translation and Publishing; 3. Oral History & Genealogical Studies; 4. Emirates Library Section.
- The department examines and recommends researches presented by the school students of elementary and higher secondary for the Educational awards such as "Khalifa Award for Education" and "Young Historian Award" to encourage young Emirati researchers.

### **Corporate and Community Outreach Department**

- Corporate and community outreach unit's main responsibilities are to connect the user community to promote the national archives services through media, marketing, and public relations activities.
- Sets strategies for dealing with agencies, end-users in both private and public to develop educational programmes as per the standards.
- Uphold the strategic partnerships with government and private organizations to create awareness campaigns, exhibitions, and events.

### **Technology Integration**

National archives pledge to facilitate unique documentation and archival access to the user community through the integrated management system and granted certificate ISO 9001:2008 for quality services, for security line with ISO 27001:2013, OHSAS 18001:2007 for health and safety and ISO 14001:2004 for environmental protection.

Information Technology (IT) unit supports software, hardware, websites, security measures, electronic archiving and other communication gadgets for providing

technical expertise. Central archiving section archiving with international standard by encoding all the corresponding materials with the use of unified electronic record management system on daily basis in temporary archiving system. This temporary archive will be moved into the permanent archival system on Weekly and/or Monthly basis. The central archiving unit's responsibilities are to safeguard the archived materials against the loss or damage and recommending the disposal items to the disposal committee as per the policy and procedures.

### **Partnership and Achievements**

UAE Archives has a membership and partnership with many international bodies; the noteworthy to mention which are: "International Council of Archives (ICA), Arab Regional Branch of International Council on Archives (ARBICA) and Secretariat General for Centers of Documents and Studies of G.C.C. States".

The national archives attained first and pioneer status as in the Middle East due to the technology adaptation and sixth position in worldwide. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized and granted a certificate of appreciation to the national archives for being the first center for the proper archiving and publishing them in Arab countries. Archives won 6 excellence awards in the twelfth international business awards held in Canada for the year 2015 for the category of "People's Choice of Non-Profit Government Organization; Best Media Campaign; Best National Exhibition; Best Website; Best Application respectively. AlRaisi<sup>9</sup> stated that around 3.5 million documents between 1507 - 1991 were copied by the national archives from the international records and those were being translated for the use of Arabic community users.

### **Conclusion**

The national Archives in United Arab Emirates collects, organize and preserve unique and rare documents from the country and Arab region and provide access to the public through its integrated management system. It follows the best practice of ISO approved standard qualify services, security, health and safety and friendly environmental protection. The national archives encourage staff members to execute of existing strategic plan to ensure the legal regulation, reduce waste generation, energy conservation and safe working environments. The center encourages the use of electronic documents to avoid frequent handling of original ones that may lead to damage. Key Performance indicator (2015-16) report shows that historical archives sections' acquisitions reached in 2,613,381 in the year 2016. Around 3.5 million documents related to UAE and Arab countries were copied from international records and translated to Arabic for local archives

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