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T34 The Fiocruz Collections: Discussing the Preservation of its Photographic Archives

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Abstract

This article is part of a research carried out by the author during her Graduate Certificate in Preservation and Management of the Science and Health Cultural Heritage, at Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, also known as Fiocruz). The article brings to the discussion issues related to the accession and deaccession of archival collections based on the Preservation and Management Policy of Cultural Collections in Science and Health, and the Accession Program, at Oswaldo Cruz Foundation. In this perspective, this article discusses the need to balance objectivity and subjectivity in the application of the evaluation and selection criteria of collections, valuing transdisciplinary work as an alternative to the problems caused by this natural duality.

Fiocruz is a government institution linked to the Brazilian Ministry of Health. It works in the health area mainly in the production of vaccines and in the support to the Brazilian Unified Health System, SUS. Fiocruz's headquarters are located at the institution's original historical site: Manguinhos campus, Rio de Janeiro. Wrapped in a preserved green area inside the campus is the most important historical building of the institution, the Moorish Pavilion, built in 1905 to be its headquarters.

Still at the Manguinhos campus, but on the other side of Brasil Avenue, is the Expansion Building, added to the Fiocruz campus in the 1980s. This building houses a few of Casa de Oswaldo Cruz's departments, a scientific-technical unit responsible for guarding the documental, bibliographical, museological and architectural heritage of Fiocruz. One of these departments is the Department of Archives and Documentation - DAD, where I have been working as a conservator since the end of 2014.

The Department of Archives and Documentation – DAD was created in 1989, soon after the creation of the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz, in 1986, in order to safekeeping the documentary heritage of the institution. Currently it holds the largest collection available in the country on the history of science and public health. There are 108 archival fonds and collections corresponding to 1,200 linear meters of textual, iconographic, cartographic, sound and filmographic documents that cover the period from 1803 to 2008. Among these archival fonds are Fiocruz's collections, as well as personal collections and other institutions collections.

DAD aims to gather and preserve this collection, and to be a center of reference and information. The Department's primary activities are research and technical consultancy in the field of memory, training, preservation and organization of collections, as well as management and dissemination of information that portrays a period that extends from the end of the 19th century

until the present time.

Upon joining Fiocruz, I was assigned to work with a set of photographic documents previously selected for disposal by a specialist due to its advanced state of deterioration, and infeasibility of restoration and maintenance as a document. The document's gathering was based on the project "Preservation of the iconographic, sound and audiovisual memory of public health", which began in 2002 and was concluded in 2004 (sponsored by the Vitae Foundation) in which all the iconographic, sound and audiovisual collections of Casa de Oswaldo Cruz underwent a conservation state diagnosis, and after its cleaning and enclosing they were separated into three groups according to their conservation state. The documental group focus of the present study consists of one of these three groups, separated for a later reevaluation of its conservation status due to the limited time of the project.

This set of documents was presented to me in two drawers, which contained glass negatives and flexible ones of several techniques, records corresponding to the moment of creation of these images and a small number of photographs. Initially, the work consisted in finalizing the discarding process of this previously selected set and in order to do that it was necessary to know the institutional policies and practices regarding the discard of documents. However, at the beginning of the work, I realized that many of the documents gathered there could be restored as a document because they allowed for good image recognition and presented a good support structure.

Two institutional documents related to the disposal of documentary assets in Fiocruz were studied. The first document studied was the Preservation and Management Policy of Cultural Collections in Science and Health, published in 2013. The Preservation Policy was created to be the basis of an integrated management of all cultural heritage under Casa de Oswaldo Cruz's custody, which in general covers architectural, urbanistic and archaeological, documental, bibliographical and museum collections. Periodic evaluations and reviews of this Policy are foreseen at maximum intervals of four years.

Its main objective is to "establish general principles, guidelines, responsibilities" with medium to long-term actions, and guide "the development of specific policies, programs, plans and procedures" for the "preservation of the cultural collections of the sciences and of health under the care of Casa de Oswaldo Cruz." (OSWALDO CRUZ FOUNDATION, 2013. p.7. Translated by the author.)

The Preservation Policy briefly describes the collections covered by it, related to its specific objectives, guidelines and norms, besides indicating those responsible for its safekeeping. It indicates the principles that guide the maintenance of its collection, preservation and accessibility to future generations.

In order to attend the specificities of each collection described in the Preservation Policy, further documents are being prepared. One of these documents is the Accession Program, published in 2015. It was written by a commission of Casa de Oswaldo Cruz employees linked to the various areas of its activity and its various collections.

Its goal is:

"[...] to guide the identification of new assets for the collections of the technical unit; establish the responsibilities, criteria, and forms for accession and deaccession of the collection, aligned with the ethical codes of national and international agencies, with the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz mission and the Collections Thematic Lines from Casa de Oswaldo Cruz defined by the Standing Committee for Collections." (OSWALDO CRUZ FOUNDATION 2015, 3. Translated by the author)

The terms “accession” and “deaccession” were created to account for the scope of the document in relation to the various types of collections dealt within the program and, in the case of the archival collection, the term accession means "entry or acquisition of archival documents on the archive", and deaccession, “deletion, disposal or purge of documents”. The deaccession could be made by donating the document to other archives or schools as a prototype material for learning. (FIOCRUZ 2015, 1. Translated by the author)

Considering the purpose of the Accession Program and aiming at a complete understanding of the subject, some definitions are necessary to allow a pertinent discussion about the actions proposed by it. This is the case of Casa de Oswaldo Cruz’s mission, which consists of

"producing and disseminating historical knowledge of biomedical health and sciences; preserving and enhancing the cultural heritage of public health; educating in their action field and disseminating science and technology in public health, so as to contribute to scientific, cultural and social development". (*Casa de Oswaldo Cruz's* website. Translated by the author)

The importance of knowing the mission of an institution lies in the fact that it is the guiding instrument for the institution's performance. In the case of collections’ evaluation, Casa de Oswaldo Cruz's mission is one of the pillars of the critical assessment that will be applied to the selection process of these collections, both for accession and for their deaccession.

Regarding the thematic lines of Casa de Oswaldo Cruz’s historic archive, the Accession Program has the following definition:

"The constitution of the different collections under the custody of the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz is guided by the action field of Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (Fiocruz) throughout its history. Therefore, accessed and preserved items should have relevant expressions in the following thematic lines: history of the sciences and health; health education; scientific divulgation; life sciences (health sciences, biomedical sciences, biological sciences). (OSWALDO CRUZ FOUNDATION 2015, 3. Translated by the author)

The Accession Program cites two important committees in the evaluation of documental collections. One is the Standing Committee on the Appraisal of Archival Documents, appointed by the president of Fiocruz, to follow up the classification and forwarding of the documents over their lifecycle, from the active collection of the institution to the condition of semi-active record, to the inactive or historical collection or its elimination.

The other aforementioned commission relates directly to the case study, which already belongs to the department's historical collection. The Standing Committee on Collections deals with the revision of the thematic lines used as basis for the expansion of collections generally safeguarded by Casa de Oswaldo Cruz, as well as evaluating and addressing issues related to the accession and deaccession of these collections. A proposal for accession or deaccession to be evaluated by the Standing Committee on Collections must be accompanied by a dossier with a technical report on the historic and scientific relevance of the property in question and evaluation of the conservation state, storage, risk, and cost criteria involved, in addition to any and every necessary or interesting complementary documentation. According to its bylaws, this committee should be made up of eight members: amongst them five representatives from each of the collections under Casa de Oswaldo Cruz's responsibility, as well as a member linked to the area of research in History of Sciences and Health and another linked to the Program of Graduate Studies in History of Science and Health.

The Accession Program dictates actions of accession and deaccession of archival assets based on criteria established by it.

Criteria for the accession of archival collections

- Conservation and legibility: it requires evaluating each item's condition and ensuring it is in good state. In cases of biological or chemical contamination, the accession is conditioned to the possibility of recovery, in order to ensure its legibility and safety of professionals, users and other documentary collections.
- Originality: accession will only take place to original documents; copies will be examined exceptionally.
- Relevance: archival fonds from extinct institutions, personal archives and collections that are pertinent to the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz Collection Thematic Lines may be acquired. The relevance of the set will be evaluated as the primary source for research.

Criteria for deaccession of archival collections

- Conservation and legibility: documents that are illegible or represent a danger to users, professionals and other collections due to their conservation state and / or biological or chemical contamination can be eliminated, as long as they are not recoverable.
- Relevance: documents whose content do not present any relevance to the rest of the archival fonds or collection in which they are inserted and that have no relation with other archival funds under the custody of Casa de Oswaldo Cruz may be undergo deaccession after careful analysis.

Although not necessarily exclusive, the deaccession criteria mentioned above might create difficulties in the evaluation of some specific cases, such as documents that have thematic relevance, but whose state of conservation requires such a costly and time-consuming action that

makes it unpractical. A need that will be imposed by the future practice of the Accession Program will be the prioritization of one of the criteria over another. It is easy to imagine that in the extreme case of a document of great historical value in an advanced state of deterioration, the relevance criterion used in its accession prevail over the legibility criterion, guaranteeing its maintenance in the historical collection, even if its preservation is initially seen as not feasible due to its conservation state. Moreover, it is important to highlight that the conservation state assessment of an heritage object and its relevance to the collection's thematic lines are criteria that carry a great deal of subjectivity, dictated in great part by the academic formation of the professional involved in this evaluation, and the purpose for which this evaluation is being made.

Subjectivity is a characteristic of the field of conservation. Since the advent of Scientific Conservation, there has been an attempt to suppress subjectivity in favor of more objective and correct actions. But the complete elimination of subjectivity is not a real or beneficial option for the field. When it comes to the attribution of values—in this case heritage, historic, cultural, etc.—subjectivity is the basis of this activity, which is the foundation of the conservation activity. As said by Muñoz Viñas (2002, 29) "(...) conservation itself is no longer regarded as a neutral activity, especially with regard to symbolic objects. The very act of conserving an object is expressive of our positive attitude towards it. Communicating that the conserved object is appreciated for its symbolic value is also a function of conservation."

However, the subjectivity present in the judgment of those responsible for the application of conservation policies may generate complications for this action that goes mainly through the discussion of the importance given to the meaning of the object from the point of view of several agents. The area of activity and the focus of the work of the professional responsible for the evaluation in the accession and deaccession of collections strongly influence the final decision on what should or should not be kept in the collection. In this sense, the stakeholders' views must be taken into account. It is them who give value and meaning to the historical document, as presented by Muñoz Viñas in his book *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (161). In the case of the historic documents maintained by the DAD, the stakeholders are represented by the researcher who accesses the collection, the collection manager who knows its aspects and their interconnections, and any person who is interested in the form and content of the documents, in the present and in the future. The conservator must have the final word in a conservation action, but he must take into account the point of view of the stakeholders involved. (MUÑOZ VIÑAS 2005, 163).

This point of view may be seen in figures 1 and 2. If we make an objective assessment of this glass plate negative, we will come to the conclusion that its support is greatly impaired by breaks and losses, and its emulsion is severely compromised by a brown color, characteristic of silver deterioration.



Fig. 1. Glass plate negative from the Fiocruz Collections in separated pieces.

However, from a subjective point of view, the countryside with houses and building materials can be clearly seen. At first, it is not possible to identify the exact location of this landscape and what it means, but that is where the importance of the stakeholders makes a difference, they may identify what this landscape is related to and its relevance in some historical research of the image theme.



Fig. 2. Glass plate negative from the Fiocruz Collections with pieces placed together.

In this sense, the institutional documents of Fiocruz, especially the Accession Program, can be considered to be the adequate way of a correct evaluation of its collections in terms of its accession and deaccession. As a deaccession evaluation is to be discussed by a committee in

which there are representatives of all the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz-held collections and as the participation of experts and external consultants is foreseen in this evaluation, one can notice openness to stakeholder participation. However, it is necessary to reinforce the importance of this participation in the application of the objective criteria presented by the Accession Program so that the maintenance as a document of the evaluated objects is valued by the stakeholders and reinforced by them throughout the history of the object in that zone that should no longer be set as "experts zone" but recognized as "trading zone" by Muñoz Viñas in his book *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (163).

In addition to that, a correct evaluation of collections should be based on the work of a transdisciplinary commission, and not a multidisciplinary one as presented by the Accession Program, since multidisciplinary provides for simultaneous work among various areas, without working the relationships between them. On the other hand, transdisciplinarity provides for an organization of thought around the various fields involved in the discussion—conservation, research and management of collections—beyond the simple collaboration between them, relating the knowledge through the transposition of the limits of each field, in which the professional understands the work of the other and knows in fact what is accomplished, to be able to carry out actions that are more correct and in accordance with the whole.

Finally, the disposal of documents is an action that must be thoroughly studied before implementation. Once the disposal is implemented, it is very unlikely to recover the document's materiality and information. However, as a collection's approach, the disposal action may be considered a preservation strategy. Discarding documents that do not comply with the pre-established criteria may be an alternative for generating safekeeping conditions for the collection as a whole. It is well known that storage space is a limiting factor for the safety of collections. Deaccession may generate an expansion of storage space available for the remaining of the collection; thus ensuring its integrity and avoiding losses and deformations caused by inadequate storage condition. In conclusion, deaccession of documents that do not meet pre-established criteria ensure efficient management of collections by allocating resources for conservation strategically.

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