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Archival Identification and Knowledge Organization: Contributions to Access to Information and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This paper investigates how archival identification, understood as a Knowledge Organization (KO) method, contributes to access to information within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 of the 2030 Agenda. The study constitutes a partial outcome of a doctoral dissertation conducted between 2019 and 2023 within the Graduate Program in Information Science at Fluminense Federal University (PPGCI/UFF), with an empirical focus on the municipal public administration of the City of Rio de Janeiro. Archival identification enables the systematic recognition of records and their bond to the institutional context of creation, producing the structured knowledge that underpins classification and appraisal. Combining a qualitative theoretical approach with applied research grounded in archival identification studies, the paper proposes a classification structure model derived from normalized methodological parameters. The analysis indicates that, by standardizing record denominations and structuring record sets according to functions and activities, archival identification operates as a foundational KO practice with direct implications for SDG 16. The resulting classification structures render explicit the relationships between institutional action and documentary evidence, thereby supporting public access to information (Target 16.10). Their empirical standardization strengthens effective, accountable, and transparent institutions (Target 16.6), while their publication and dissemination foster participatory governance (Target 16.7) and anti-corruption efforts (Target 16.5). The findings thus position Archival Science and KO as an epistemic infrastructure that operates the transparency commitments of SDG 16.

Keywords: Archival identification; Knowledge Organization; Access to information; Sustainable Development Goals; SDG 16.

1.0 Introduction

Access to information is widely recognized as a condition for democratic governance and sustainable development. The United Nations 2030 Agenda articulates this recognition through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which links public access to information (Target 16.10) to broader objectives of institutional transparency (Target 16.6), participatory decision-making (Target 16.7), and anti-corruption efforts (Target 16.5). Yet access to information is not merely a matter of legal provision or technological availability. From a Knowledge Organization (KO) perspective, it depends on the epistemic, organizational, and representational structures that render information intelligible, retrievable, and usable.

Within public administration, administrative actions are documented through records that constitute the primary evidence of institutional activity. These records can only fulfill their evidential and informational functions when they are properly identified, classified, and made retrievable through adequate KO instruments. However, the role of archival KO practices in operationalizing the access to information commitments of SDG 16 remains insufficiently examined in the scholarly literature. While studies in KO have addressed classification systems and documentary representation (Hjørland 2008; Gnoli 2016; Smiraglia 2016), and archival studies have explored records management methods (La Torre Merino and Martín-Palomino y Benito 2000; Rodrigues 2008), these two strands have rarely been brought into systematic dialogue.

Archival identification offers a productive bridge between these domains. Defined as a research-oriented method for recognizing records and the archival bond linking them to their context of creation, archival identification generates structured knowledge about documentary typology and creating institutions. This knowledge enables the standardization of record denominations and their aggregation into record sets, which in turn supports the construction of KO instruments, principally classification structures, that sustain the core archival functions of classification, appraisal, and description (Rodrigues 2013; Faben et al. 2021).

Against this background, the guiding research question is: How do archival identification and Knowledge Organization in archives contribute to access to information within the framework of the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda? The study aims to discuss the theoretical foundations of archival identification as a KO method and to demonstrate how it informs the construction of classification structures that represent both documentary typologies and contexts of records creation.

The study draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives. First, it adopts a strict understanding of KO, following Hjørland (2008), in which description, indexing, and classification are understood as knowledge organization processes (KOPs) operationalized through Knowledge Organization Systems (KOS). Second, it situates archival identification within the framework of archival knowledge, as conceptualized by Tognoli et al. (2019a), who define it as the knowledge produced about a person or entity and aggregated within a fonds. As Hjørland (2016) argues, KO in archival contexts should be considered an integral part of the broader KO field, with the principle of provenance serving as its most important domain-specific organizational principle.

The relevance of this inquiry is reinforced by the growing demand for institutional transparency in both public and private sectors. As Rosa and Cabero (2019, 73) observe, access and transparency are closely interconnected: ensuring access to public information implements transparency, and vice versa. Silva and Corujo (2022, 16) further stress the need for conceptual convergence between KO and Archival Science, arguing that archives should be understood not merely as repositories, but as epistemic infrastructures through which organizational knowledge is constructed and disseminated. Public transparency and access to information should accordingly be understood as long-term processes that require both institutional KO capacities and civic information literacy (Guerra and Carvalho 2019; Nunes et al. 2019, 400).

Methodologically, the research combines a qualitative theoretical approach with an applied dimension. The theoretical component reviews the foundations of archival identification and its relationship to KO, while the applied component mobilizes archival identification studies conducted in the context of the municipal public administration of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as empirical illustrations. The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the normative framework of SDG 16 and its interface with KO; Section 3 details the methodological design; Section 4 examines archival identification as applied to KO in archival contexts and presents the analytical results; and Section 5 provides concluding remarks.

2.0 Access to Information and SDG 16 in the 2030 Agenda

Information recorded in archival documents, as in records, constitutes a strategic asset for both institutional decision-making and for citizens' everyday lives. These dimensions align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, particularly Goal 16, which promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, ensures access to justice for all, and seeks to build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Particular attention should be given to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, where participating countries agreed to establish goals oriented toward sustainable development, replacing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The outcome document of Rio+20, *The Future We Want*, further established that the SDGs should be integrated into the post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda. The 2030 Agenda itself was formally adopted at a United Nations Summit held from 25 to 27 September 2015 in New York, United States (Camillo and Castro Filho 2019).

Since 2015, the SDGs have comprised 17 goals and 169 targets to be achieved by 2030, designed to guide countries toward specific outcomes. Collectively, they represent a comprehensive framework for addressing citizens' needs and rights and reflect a global commitment to sustainable development, an area that remains comparatively underexplored in Archival Science and Information Science scholarship.

The SDGs encompass key dimensions of economic and social development, including poverty reduction, hunger eradication, the promotion of health and education, environmental protection, and the advancement of peace, prosperity, and social justice. Their targets are broad and interdependent, considering the diverse conditions and levels of development across countries.

The relationship between archives and the 2030 Agenda is grounded in the role of access to information in reducing social vulnerabilities, as articulated in the following SDG 16 targets: 16.5 — to substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms; 16.6 — to develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels; 16.7 — to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels; and 16.10 — to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

From this perspective, achieving these targets entails a commitment to access to information, administrative transparency, and public integrity, enabling responsible accountability and contributing to anti-corruption efforts. As Luciana Duranti (1994, 340) observes, records — beyond serving the needs of Law and History — also ensure the transparency of actions, a contemporary expression of the longstanding obligation of accountability in both an administrative and a historical context.

Within this normative framework, the contribution of archival identification as a KO method becomes particularly salient: it provides the epistemic and methodological conditions through which records can be organized, described, and made effectively accessible, thereby operationalizing the commitments embedded in SDG 16.

3.0 Methodology

This paper constitutes a partial outcome of the doctoral dissertation conducted by the first author between 2019 and 2023 within the Graduate Program in Information Science at Fluminense Federal University (PPGCI/UFF), under the supervision of the second author and the co-supervision of the third author. Consistent with the original research design, the study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach and combines two methods: documentary research (Silva 2021) and archival identification, the latter understood both as an object of theoretical inquiry and as an operational research procedure (Rodrigues 2008, 2013).

The empirical basis of the study is the Records Management Program of the City of Rio de Janeiro (PGD Carioca), coordinated by the General Archive of the City of Rio de Janeiro (AGCRJ). The analysis focuses on records and instruments available during the research period (2019–2023), including institutional charters, administrative regulations and records management instruments (classification structures and retention schedules) produced within the Programme. The Records Management Programme of the State of Rio de Janeiro (PGD-RJ) is considered as a methodological reference point rather than as a comparative case.

The analytical procedure follows the methodological parameters of archival identification (Rodrigues 2008, 2013), which guide the systematic examination of: (i) the organizational and functional structure of the records creator; (ii) the legal and regulatory instruments governing its competences; (iii) the norms regulating records creation; and (iv) the records created in the course of institutional functions and activities. The findings presented in the subsequent section synthesize the results of this investigation and demonstrate, through a partial model of a classification structure and retention schedule derived from the PGD Carioca, how archival identification operationalizes the conditions for access to information within the framework of SDG 16.

4.0 Results and Discussion: Archival identification applied to Knowledge Organization in archives

The principle of provenance applies to all archival fonds regardless of temporal origin, though its operationalization may require different methodological approaches. In the case of historical fonds, it is necessary to begin with research on the creating institution, followed by the identification of organizational units, functions, and activities around which records are grouped into documentary series (Heredia Herrera 1991, 33) or record sets. Classification, in this context, constitutes a core KO function, insofar as it re-establishes the internal logic of the fonds and enables information retrieval within existing functional relationships (Tognoli et al. 2017, 69).

The concept of archival knowledge, initially proposed by Tognoli et al. (2013) and subsequently refined through dialogue with Dahlberg's theory of concepts (Tognoli et al. 2019b), provides the epistemological grounding for this study. The authors argue that:

"Archival knowledge can be conceived on the basis of the concept of fonds — upon which all organizational processes operate — characterized through the gathering and analysis of records produced by the same person or institution, grounded in the diplomatic method as methodological support for archival identification" (Tognoli et al. 2019b, 71).

This formulation positions archival identification as the methodological process through which archival knowledge is produced. By systematically analyzing the records creator — its competences, functions, and activities — and the records generated during those activities, archival identification yields the structured knowledge that underpins classification structures and retention schedules. Tennis (2012) reminds us that all KOS are historically and contextually bounded, requiring adaptation over time; archival identification responds to this challenge by grounding KOS construction in empirical analysis of institutional contexts rather than in abstract categories.

This theoretical framework has been applied in two records management programmes in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, one at the state level and the other at the municipal level, which serve as empirical illustrations for the present study. The Records Management Programme of the State of Rio de Janeiro (PGD-RJ) is implemented by the Public Archives of the State of Rio de Janeiro, the archival institution responsible for the programme, and is

informed by the academic research of Rodrigues (2012). Its theoretical and procedural framework adopts archival identification parameters as the basis for the classification and appraisal of records created by the State Government.

The Records Management Programme of the City of Rio de Janeiro (PGD Carioca), which constitutes the empirical focus of this study, emerged from the need to establish standardized procedures for records creation, maintenance, and final disposition. Its objective is to define criteria for the treatment of records that underpin decision-making, legal accountability, and social participation at the municipal level. In both programmes, archival identification serves as the foundational method, demonstrating how the systematic production of archival knowledge translates into operational KO instruments.

As Mendonça et al. (2013, 206) observe, archives in the contemporary context of social oversight are increasingly recognized as active instruments of democracy, overcoming the stigma of the "dead archive" that persists only in states marked by opacity. This transformation depends on archival identification as a method that involves both the recognition of records according to documentary typology and the identification of the records creator, including the functions and activities that generate records.

Table 1 Archival Identification Applied to the Study of the Context of Creation

Method	**Purpose**	**Procedures**	**Outcomes**
Archival Identification	To generate knowledge about the organic evolution of the records creator, its competences, functions, and activities, through the systematic analysis of records named according to documentary typology for the aggregation of record sets	Analysis of organizational and functional structure; examination of legal and regulatory instruments governing competences and activities; analysis of norms regulating records creation; identification of the records created	Organization of archival knowledge; normalization of records creation; standardization of record titles according to documentary typology; empirical basis for classification structures and retention schedules

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Table 1 summarizes the method, showing how archival identification moves from the analysis of institutional structures and regulatory frameworks to the production of normalized knowledge about records and their creating contexts. By identifying records through the actions that originated them, their evidential nature is revealed, and the

principle of organicity, intrinsic to the genesis of archival records, is made explicit through documentary typology. The resulting knowledge constitutes the foundation for implementing Records Management Programmes.

By identifying archival records through the actions that originated them, their evidential nature is revealed. Likewise, the principle of organicity is made explicit through documentary typology. The understanding of each record's specific characteristics, enabled by this method, substantially enhances knowledge of the information created and constitutes the foundation for implementing Records Management Programmes.

Archival identification enables the recognition and grouping of record sets according to standardized parameters. The knowledge produced about the records creator and record sets is recorded in specific instruments, which form the basis for records management tools.

Table 2 Guidelines for Identifying the Context of Creation and Documentary Typology

Element	Records creator	Competence	Function	Activity	Record sets	Documentary type formula
Definition	Entity responsible for creating and accumulating records	Mandate justifying the records creator existence	What is performed to fulfill the competence	How the function is carried out; linked to records creation	Sequential aggregation of records of the same documentary type	Species + Activity + — Object related to the action
Criteria	Based on institutional attribution	Use nouns to initiate formulation	Identify at department or unit level	Use infinitive verbs	Defined by identical type and functional origin	Ensures semantic clarity

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Table 2 presents the guidelines that operationalize archival identification, specifying how each element of the context of creation, from the records creator to the documentary type formula, is defined and standardized. Archival identification thus represents the first intellectual phase of archival methodology: an investigation into the records creator and documentary typology that provides the rigor necessary for aggregating records into record sets grounded in both theory and institutional practice (La Torre Merino and Martín-Palomino y Benito 2000, 14).

The relationship between archival identification and the core archival functions can be understood sequentially. Identification recognizes records and their context of creation through the bonds established by the originating action, producing the archival knowledge

that underpins classification. Classification, in turn, represents the context of creation within the classification structure, expressing the organic structure of the fonds. Appraisal assigns disposition by defining retention periods, and description represents fonds and their subdivisions through finding aids of varying scope. Each function depends on the knowledge produced at the identification stage.

Table 3 Model for Identifying Context of Creation

Records creator	**Competence**	**Function**	**Activity**	**Record sets**
Municipal Secretariat of Infrastructure (SMI)	Implement infrastructure policies for the City of Rio de Janeiro	Management of Public Infrastructure Works	Plan and supervise engineering works and services	Procurement Process for Engineering Works and Services

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Table 3 illustrates how the method works in practice, using the Municipal Secretariat of Infrastructure as a case. The characterization of attributes related to the records creator, its functions and activities, and the way documentary bonds are manifested constitutes the knowledge generated through identification and forms its theoretical basis (Rodrigues 2013, 76). This knowledge, in turn, underpins the classification structure.

Faben and Rodrigues (2019, 406) emphasize that the knowledge produced through archival identification underpins classification, understood as the function that reflects the context of records creation and accumulation and organizes archival knowledge within the classification structure. Table 4 presents a partial model of such a plan.

Table 4 Partial Classification Model (Municipal Secretariat of Infrastructure)

Competence 15 Implement infrastructure policies and guidelines			
Function 15.01 Management of Public Infrastructure Works			
Activity		Record sets	
15.01.01	Plan and supervise public works	15.01.01.01	Procurement Process for Public Works

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026), based on the PGD Carioca.

The publication of classification structures is essential for encouraging access to information and stakeholder engagement, particularly through social participation, thereby fostering accountability. Records management instruments thus demonstrate the applicability of archival identification by enabling responsible and high-quality access to information.

In this way, records management contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, insofar as archival records constitute the documentary evidence required for accountability and transparency.

The analysis presented in this section identifies three specific contributions of archival identification to access to information within the framework of SDG 16. First, archival identification enables the construction of classification structures that render the relationship between institutional action and documentary evidence explicit and navigable. This directly supports the conditions for public access to information (Target 16.10), since records can only be made accessible when their context of creation and functional relationships are clearly organized and represented. Second, by standardizing record sets and grounding KO instruments in an empirical analysis of institutional contexts, archival identification contributes to the development of effective, accountable, and transparent institutions (Target 16.6). Third, the publication and dissemination of classification structures foster participatory governance (Target 16.7) and support anti-corruption efforts (Target 16.5) by rendering administrative actions visible and traceable.

Taken together, these findings indicate that archival KO, anchored in archival identification, operates as an epistemic infrastructure that translates the normative commitments of SDG 16 into concrete institutional practices.

5.0 Final Considerations

This study set out to examine how archival identification, as a Knowledge Organization method, contributes to access to information within the normative framework of SDG 16. The analysis demonstrates that archival identification occupies a foundational position in the chain of archival KO practices: it produces the structured knowledge about creating bodies, functions, activities, and documentary typology that all subsequent archival functions, classification, appraisal, and description, depend upon.

As detailed in the previous section, the analysis identified three specific contributions of archival identification to the targets of SDG 16 (16.5, 16.6, 16.7, and 16.10), reinforcing the argument that archival KO is not a merely technical operation, but an epistemic practice with direct implications for democratic governance.

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The empirical illustrations are drawn from Brazilian municipal public administration, specifically the City of Rio de Janeiro, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other institutional and national contexts. Future research could apply the proposed framework comparatively across different jurisdictions and administrative traditions. Additionally, while this study focuses on classification structures, archival identification also informs appraisal and description. Examining its contribution to these functions through a KO lens would further enrich the field.

In broader terms, this study contributes to the scholarly dialogue between Knowledge Organization and Archival Science by demonstrating that archival KO is not a merely technical operation, but an epistemic practice with direct implications for democratic governance. By articulating archival identification within the normative framework of SDG 16, the paper advances an analytical perspective—archival KO as epistemic infrastructure for transparency and accountability—that warrants further theoretical and empirical development.

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