Contextualising Haystacks with Records in Contexts (RiC)
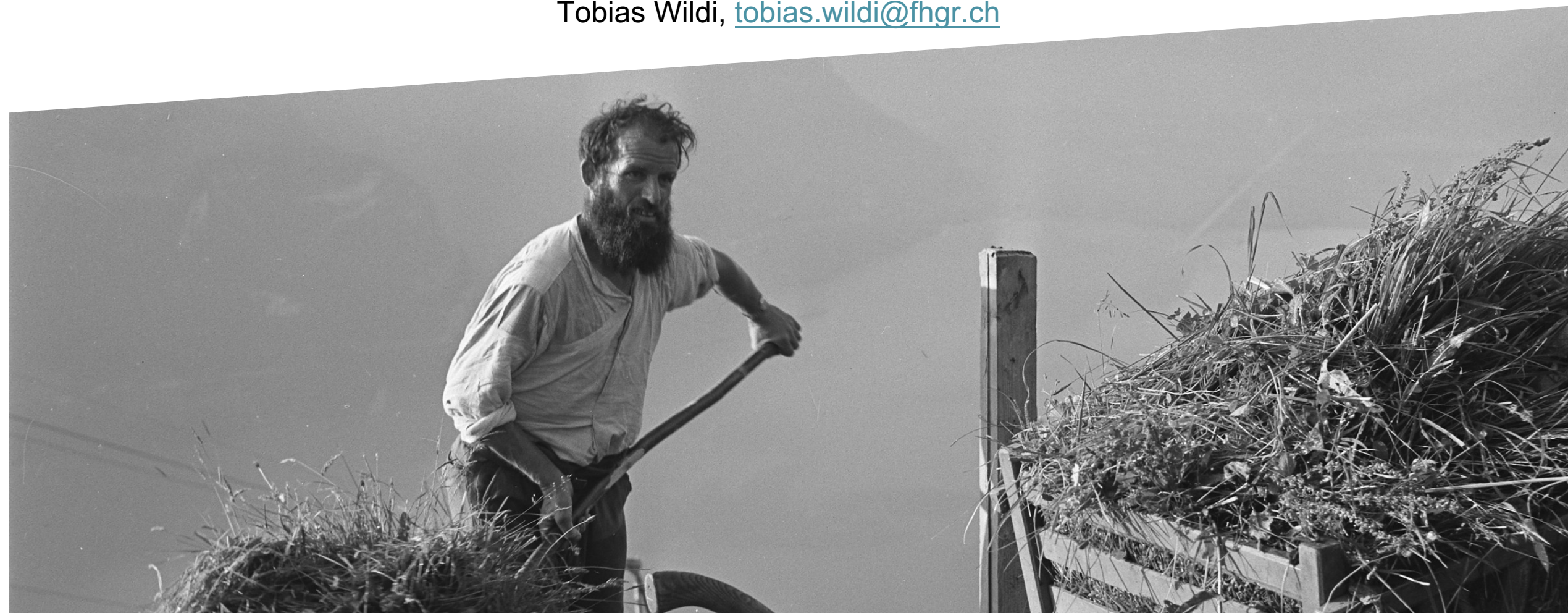
Tobias Wildi, tobias.wildi@fhgr.ch

Werner Nefflen, photographer

Werner Nefflen, Photographer

28.4.1919—1.8.2014

– Photography class at the Zurich School of Applied Arts (Kunstgewerbeschule) 1935-1939.

– Freelance photographer in Baden (Switzerland)

– He took industrial, architectural and landscape photographs for companies as well as for artists, architects and municipalities.

– Built a house and studio in Ennetbaden in 1959.

– Nefflen's photographs were used for numerous book publications.

– His archive is held by the Baden Historical Museum.

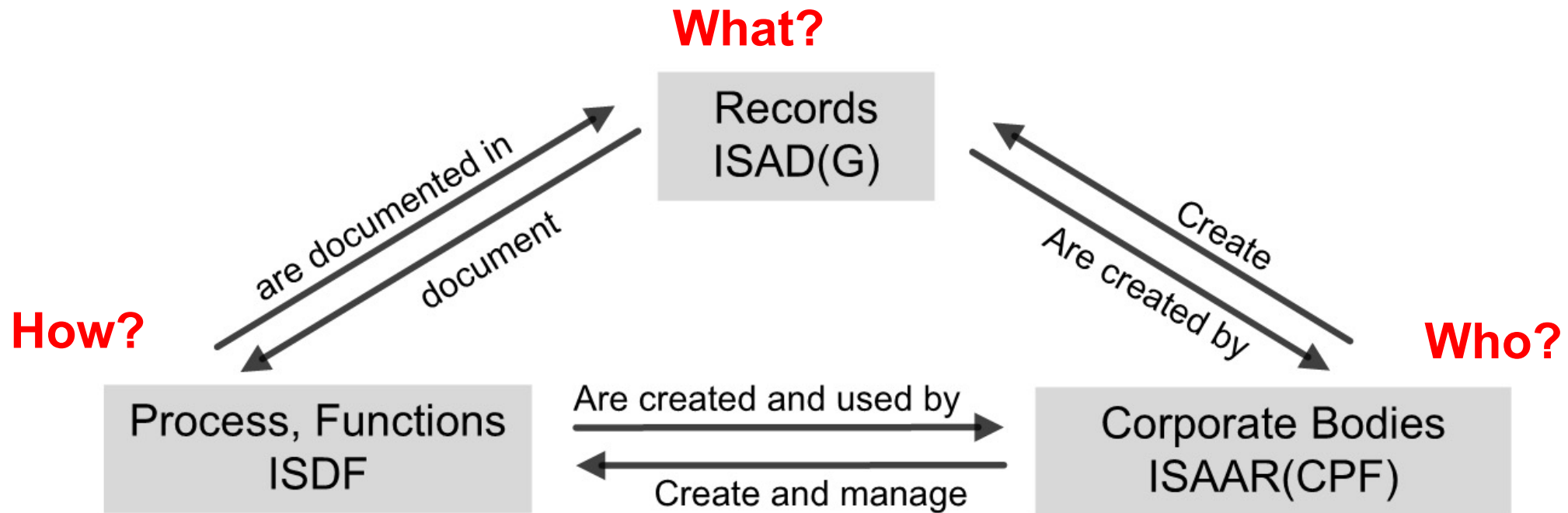https://www.fotostiftung.ch/en/nc/encyclopaedia/photographer/cumulus/3492/N/show/0/

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The status quo of descriptive metadata in archives

...and its problems

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How to describe and contextualise photos?
The status quo in archives

- The content of archives is currently described in ISAD(G), "International Standard on Archival Description"
- The archival standards ISAD(G), ISDF and ISAAR(CPF) have been developped by the International Council on Archives (ICA, https://www.ica.org/)
- ISAD(G) models the content and context of archival material in a hierarchical manner.
- Exactly one hierarchy can be used, thus it's a **monohierarchical model of description.**

What?

How?

Who?

Records
ISAD(G)

are documented in

document

Create

Are created by

Process, Functions
ISDF

Are created and used by

Create and manage

Corporate Bodies
ISAAR(CPF)

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ISAD(G):
Contextualisation + description
within a hierarchical model

https://baden.docuteam.cloud/de/units/38058-q-01-9003d-urner-bergbauer-oberhalb-urnersee-1954

What's the problem with the current archival standards?

General

- ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF) and ISDF were created one after another and were not were not coordinated with each other.
- Apart from ISAD(G), the standards have hardly been taken up by the archives and the software vendors.
- The existing standards leave much room for interpretation. Therefore, it is difficult to transfer metadata from one archival information system to another.

More specific

- Linking to external ressources in one of the other standards or outside the archive is difficult. Each standard behaves like a silo.
- Only one context can be described

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Why not just re-using an existing standard?

- The conceptual models of **libraries (FRBR), museums (CIDOC-CRM) and archives (ISAD/ISAAR/ISDF and now RiC-CM) are vastly different.** The semantic concepts for very basic things like "title" or "authorship"/"provenance" greatly differ between these communities. Therefore it would be dangerous to repurpose classes or properties of existing domain-ontologies to implement the conceptual model of the archival domain. → I've tried to do it and it becomes a mess!

- Archival description and contextualization works through **hierarchies** ("Tektonik" as in geological strata). None of the existing ontologies (at least to my knowledge) can model this speciality with the necessary care. PROV and DC are not capable of doing so, RDA only in a limited and workaroundish way.

- For the **maintenance** of the ontology the archival community should't be dependent upon the goodwill of other communities and groups who maintain ontologies that we later reuse. **We as a community must be able to act and innovate in our own speed.** This concerns only the island of archival description, in all other domains like controlled vocabularies, technical metadata etc. we of course collaborate with other domains.

- Of course it makes sense to define crosswalks and mappings to other standards, ontologies and communities.

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Records in Contexts

Records in Contexts RiC

- Developped by the "Experts Group on Archival Description" of the ICA (https://www.ica.org/en/about-egad)
- The RiC-standard consists of **three parts:**
  - **RiC-CM:** Conceptual Model (https://www.ica.org/en/egad-resources)
  - **RiC-O:** Ontology (https://github.com/ICA-EGAD/RiC-O)
  - In the future: RiC implementation guidelines
- RiC will **replace** the existing standards ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF) and ISDF
- RiC is for **descriptive metadata** only. For digital archiving RiC has to be combined with standards for technical/administrative metadata (PREMIS, EBUcore)
- RiC is based on **semantic technologies (linked data)** and will ensure interoperability between repositories and institutions.

From XML to a graph-structure
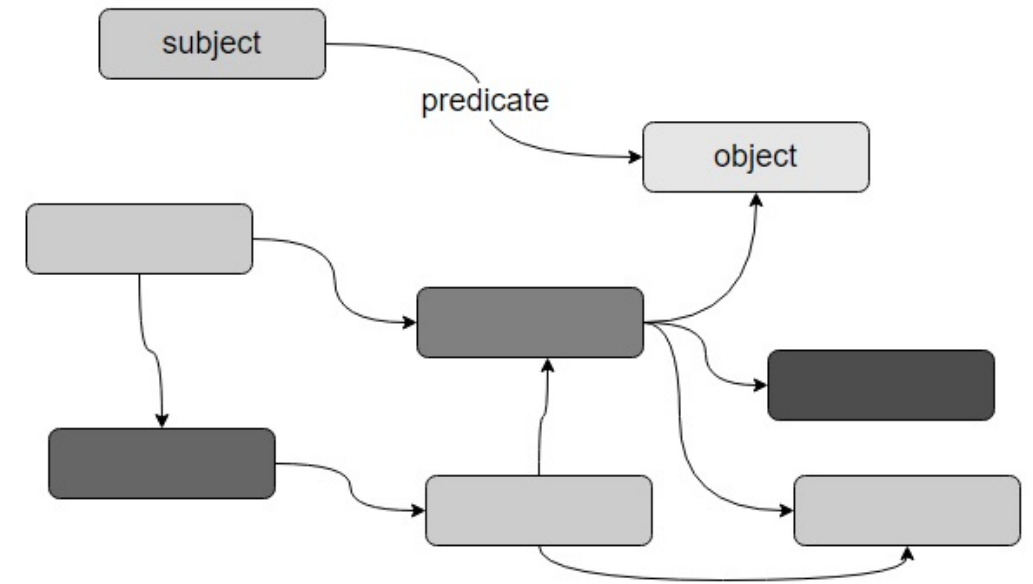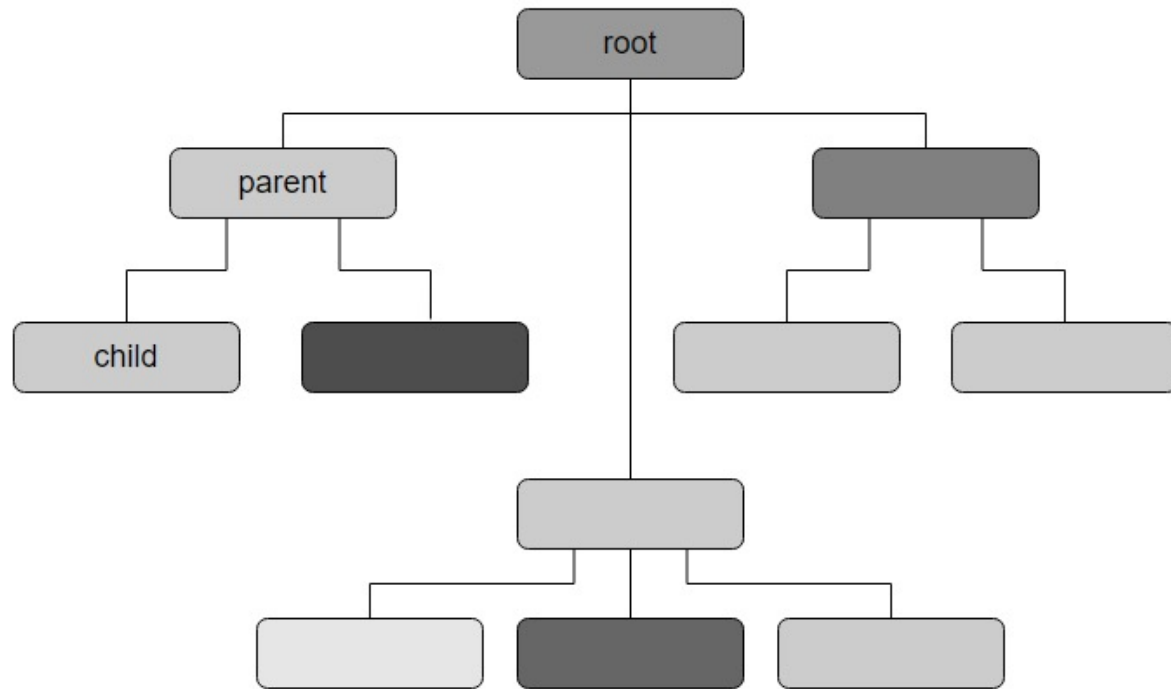
RiC-CM: Records in Contexts Conceptual Model

RiC Entities Hierarchy			
First Level	**Second Level**	**Third Level**	**Fourth Level**
RiC-E01 Thing	**RiC-E02 Record Resource**	RiC-E03 Record Set	
		RiC-E04 Record	
		RiC-E05 Record Part	
	RiC-E06 Instantiation		
	RiC-E07 Agent	RiC-E08 Person	
		RiC-E09 Group	RiC-E10 Family
			RiC-E11 Corporate Body
		RiC-E12 Position	
		RiC-E13 Mechanism	
	RiC-E14 Event	**RiC-E15 Activity**	
	RiC-E16 Rule	RiC-E17 Mandate	
	RiC-E18 Date	RiC-E19 Single Date	
		RiC-E20 Date Range	
		RiC-E21 Date Set	
	RiC-E22 Place		

RiC-CM v0.2 preview: a partial overview

RiC-E02
Record Resource

RiC-E07
Agent

RiC-E08
Person

RiC-E03
Record Set

RiC-R026i
is provenance of

RiC-R026
has provenance

RiC-E09
Group

RiC-E04
Record

RiC-E10
Family

RiC-E11
Corporate Body

RiC-R026
has provenance

RiC-R026i
is provenance of

RiC-E05
Record Part

RiC-R025
has instantiation

RiC-E06
Instantiation

RiC-E12
Position

RiC-R025i
instantiates

RiC-E13
Mechanism

RiC-R033i
documented by

RiC-E14
Event

RiC-R063
regulates

RiC-E15
Activity

RiC-R060i
performs

RiC-R033
is documentation of

RiC-R060
performed by

RiC-R063i
regutated by

RiC-R063
regulates

RiC-E16
Rule

RiC-E17
Mandate

RiC-R063i
regutated by

z

CH AEV, AV 15/7bis Traité entre le duc de Savoie et le Valais., 01.05.1528 (Document)

Archivplan-Kontext

- 🏠 Archives Valais / Archiv Wallis
  - 🗄 Archives de l'Etat du Valais (AEV) / Staatsarchiv Wallis (StAW)
    - 🗄 Archives de l'Etat / Staatsarchiv
      - 🗄 Anciens fonds de l'Etat / alte Bestände des Staates
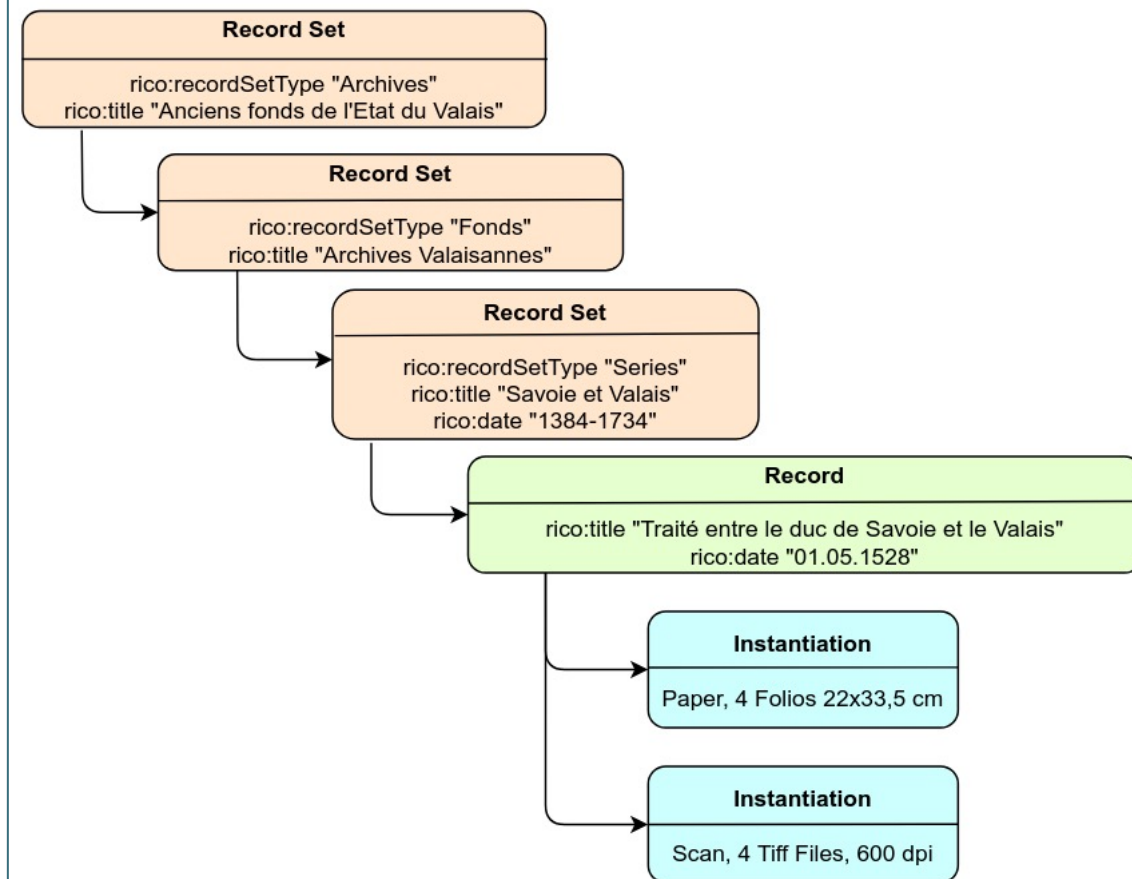   - 🗄 AV Archives Valaisannes
          - 🗄 AV 15 Savoie et Valais. (1384-1734)
            - 📜 AV 15/7 Traité entre le duc de Savoie et le Valais. (01.05.1528)
            - 📜 **AV 15/7bis Traité entre le duc de Savoie et le Valais. (01.05.1528)**
            - 📜 AV 15/8 Addition au traité entre le duc de Savoie et le Valais, au sujet de la remise des reconnaissances au-dessous de la Morge... (01.05.1528)

Record Set

rico:recordSetType "Archives"
rico:title "Anciens fonds de l'Etat du Valais"

Record Set

rico:recordSetType "Fonds"
rico:title "Archives Valaisannes"

Record Set

rico:recordSetType "Series"
rico:title "Savoie et Valais"
rico:date "1384-1734"

Record

rico:title "Traité entre le duc de Savoie et le Valais"
rico:date "01.05.1528"

Instantiation

Paper, 4 Folios 22x33,5 cm

Instantiation

Scan, 4 Tiff Files, 600 dpi

Records in Contexts

Different concepts of "record" exist in different archival traditions and legal systems.

Basically, they are
– registered records
– the tangible physical archival material or the primary data (digital files/data)
– Multi-level is possible

Examples
– A subject dossier: documents from a project
– A case dossier: documents from a serial process (e.g. naturalization)
– An individual item such as a document, photograph, letter

# Records in Contexts – a more expansive understanding of provenance

- RiC sets itself the goal of ensuring the integrity and authenticity (trustworthiness) of the tradition and thus implementing the "Respect des Fonds" principle.

- The "respect des fonds"-principle includes three related concepts:
  - Respect for provenance;
  - Respect for the integrity of the fonds;
  - Respect for original or primitive order.

- ISAD(G): Relationships are modelled **vertically-monohierarchically.** Records are assigned to **exactly one** provenance.

- In RiC, assignments to multiple provenances are also possible.

- RiC attempts to develop a more expansive understanding of provenance by recognizing that records and the people who create, manage, and use them **do not exist in isolation but in complex layers of interrelated, interdependent contexts.**

- A hierarchical representation in a tree as in ISAD(G) is also possible in RiC. The metadata from an existing AIS can be represented in the same way in RiC. This simulates the assignment to exactly one provenance.

What is 'Context'?

An organism, focal event, focal point

is embedded in

an environment (time/space)

Context
Field of Action
Environment (time/space)

Focal Event
Behaviour
Organism

How to draw the
boundaries?
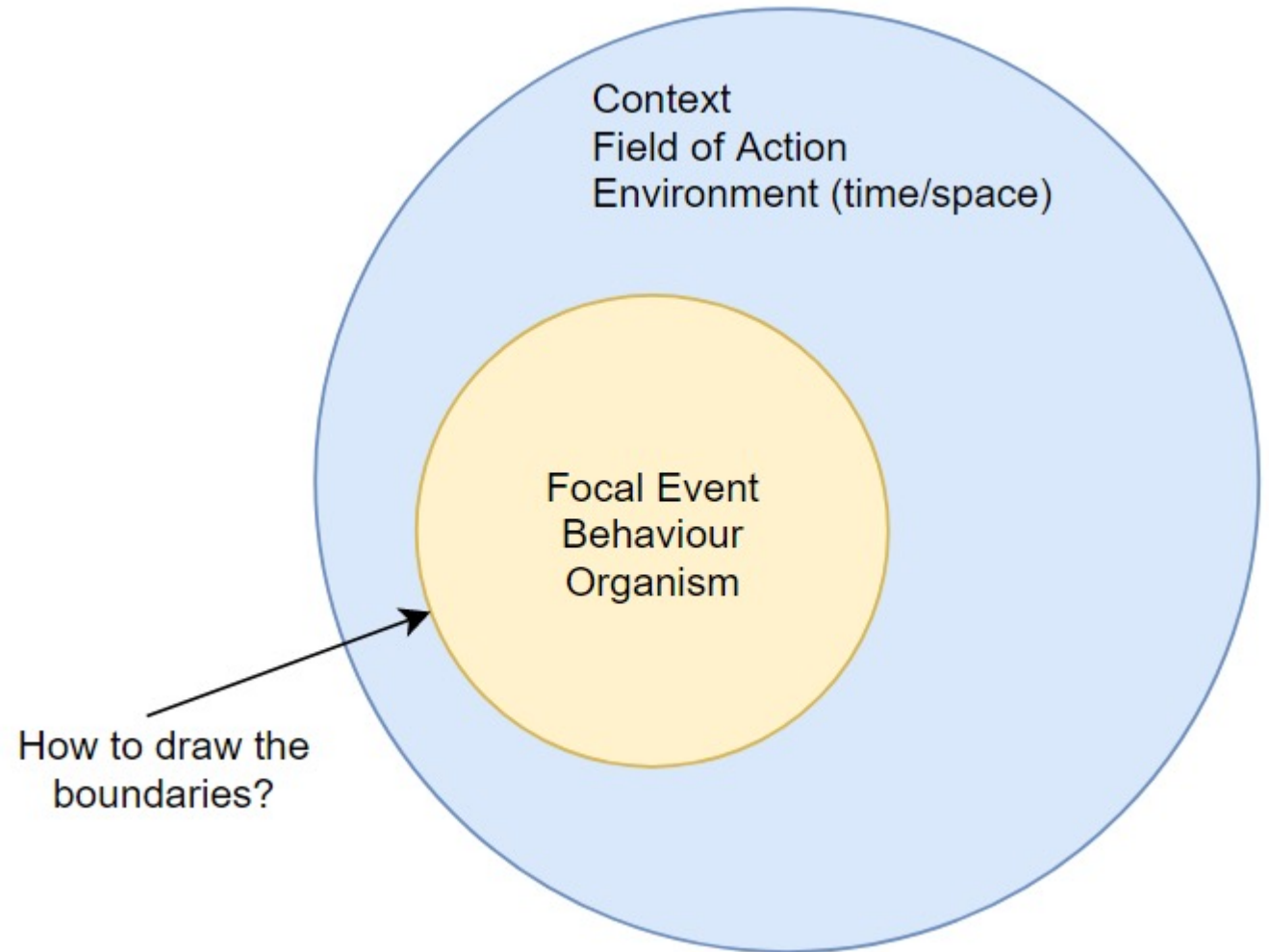
Boundary between focal point and context

Werner Nefflen in 1943. **Where does the photographer start?**

- Is it his mental system bounded at the camera and the handle of the flash?
- Is it a cyborg in the sense of Donnah Harraway (fusion between animal and machine)?
- Are the knobs of the camera the boundary between the photographer and its environment?
- Is a photographer without a camera still a photographer?

We try to explain a given piece of behaviour: **Taking pictures for a living.** To explain this we need:

- the man, his talents and education
- the camera, flash, light, darkroom
- the customers, their needs
- the business model

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Different behaviour, different context

2009: Werner Nefflen is retired (90th birthday) and enjoys his time in the garden.

To explain this behaviour during his retirement, the aforementioned context no longer plays a role.
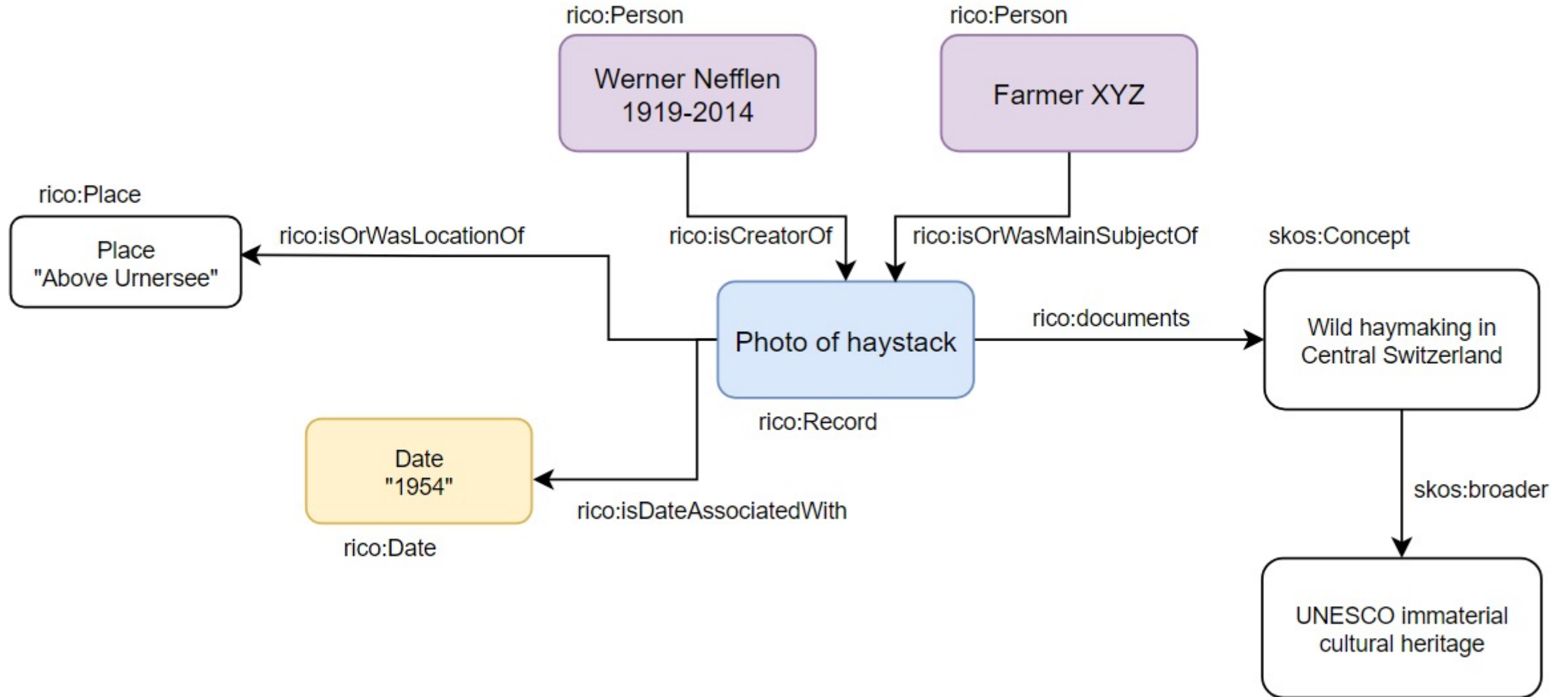
Now it's
– the concept of retirement
– the shovel, the rake,
– the earth, water, sun,
– the seeds, the plants
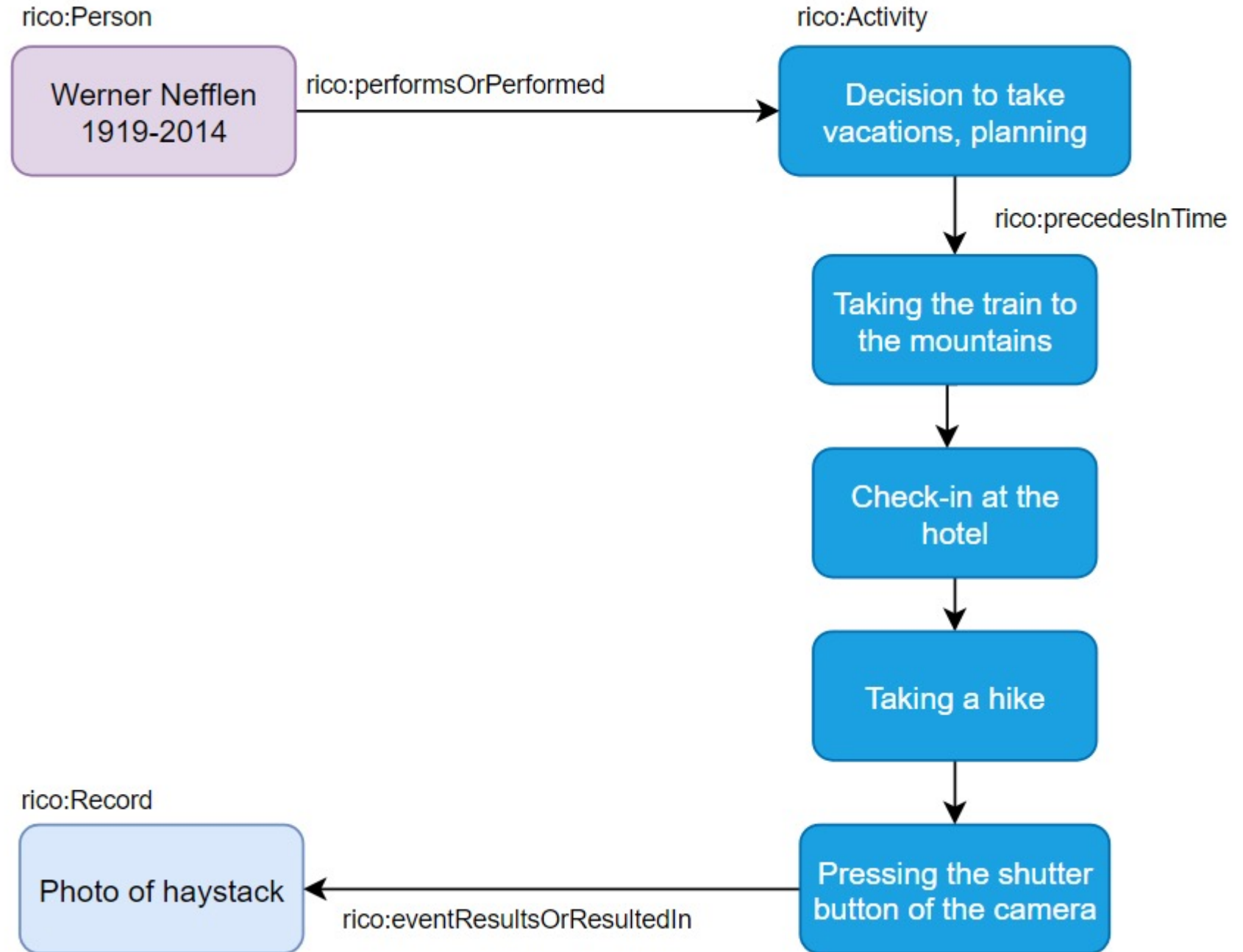that are needed to explain the behaviour of a hobby-gardener.
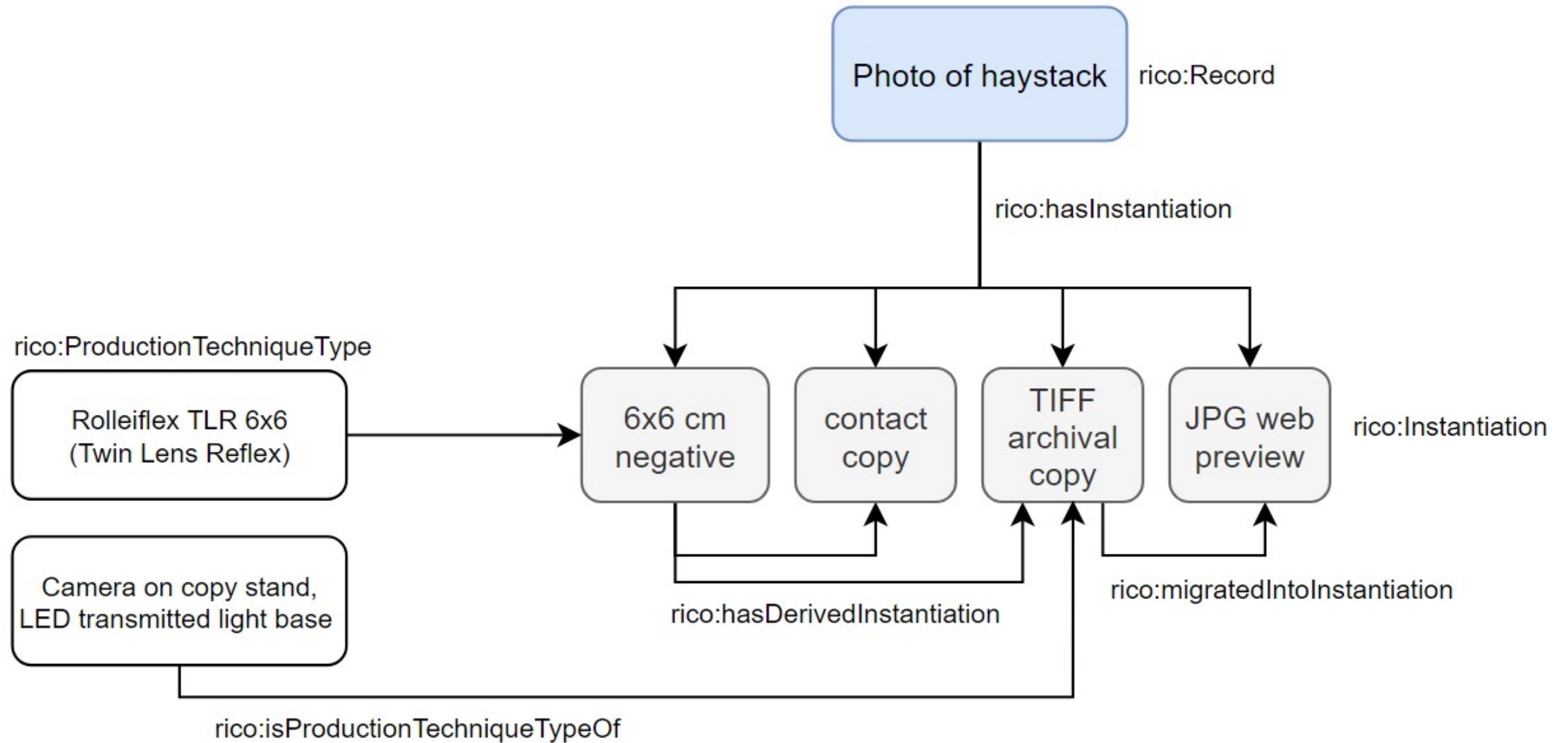
What are the contexts?

Information value and context

Context of creation (Story of the Photo)

rico:Person

Werner Nefflen
1919-2014

rico:performsOrPerformed →

rico:Activity

Decision to take vacations, planning

rico:precedesInTime

Taking the train to the mountains

Check-in at the hotel

Taking a hike

Pressing the shutter button of the camera

rico:Record

Photo of haystack ← rico:eventResultsOrResultedIn
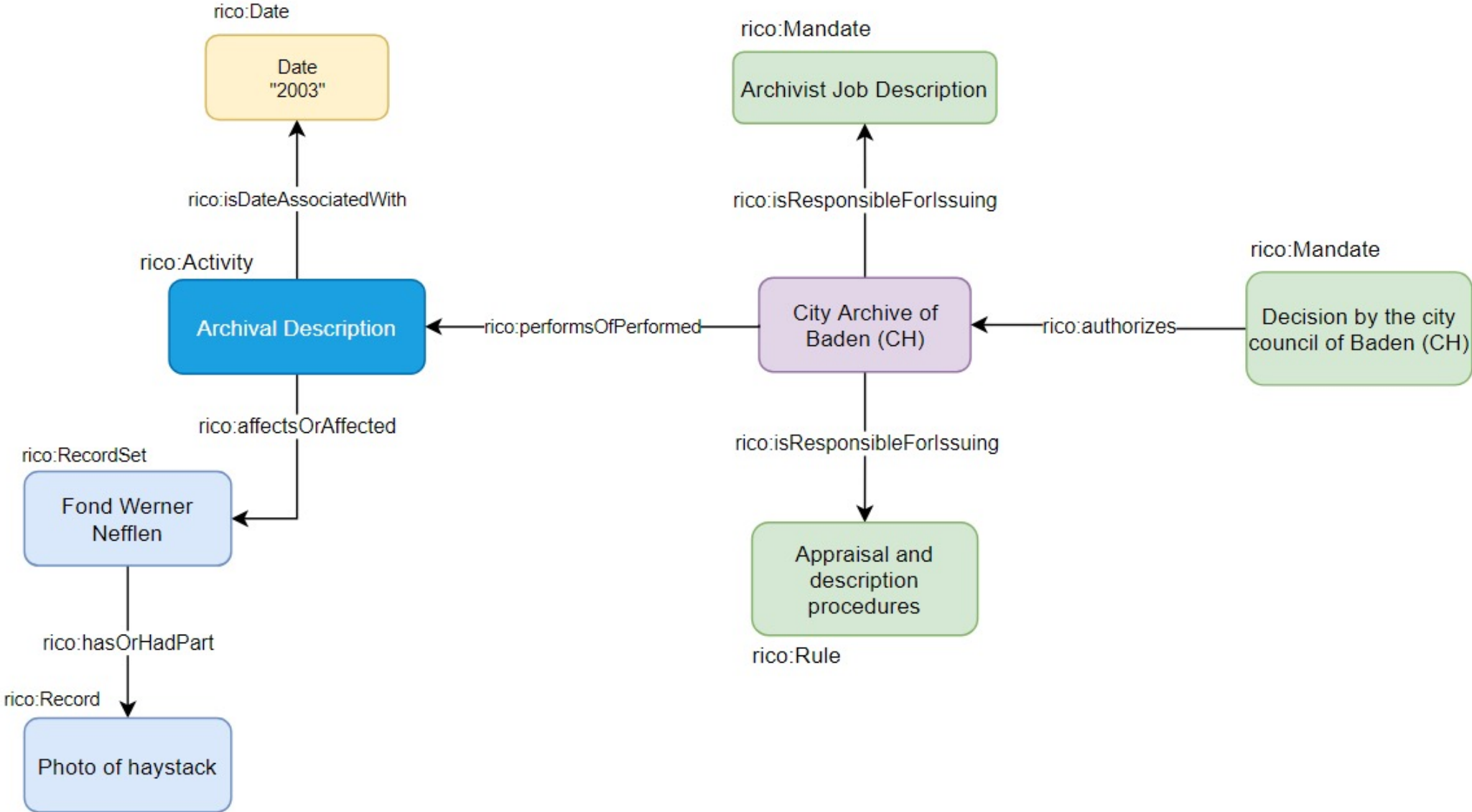
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Materialization context

Archival processing context

Legal context

- During his professional activity as a photographer, Werner Nefflen owns the rights of his work.
- After his retirement, he donates his work (20'000 images) to the city of Baden. The contract states that he will be compensated for the commercial use of the images until the end of his life.
- After his death in 2014, the income from the rights of use will go to the city of Baden.
- To improve the accessibility of the photos, the images were placed under the Creative Commons BY-SA 4.0 license in 2019.

Conclusions

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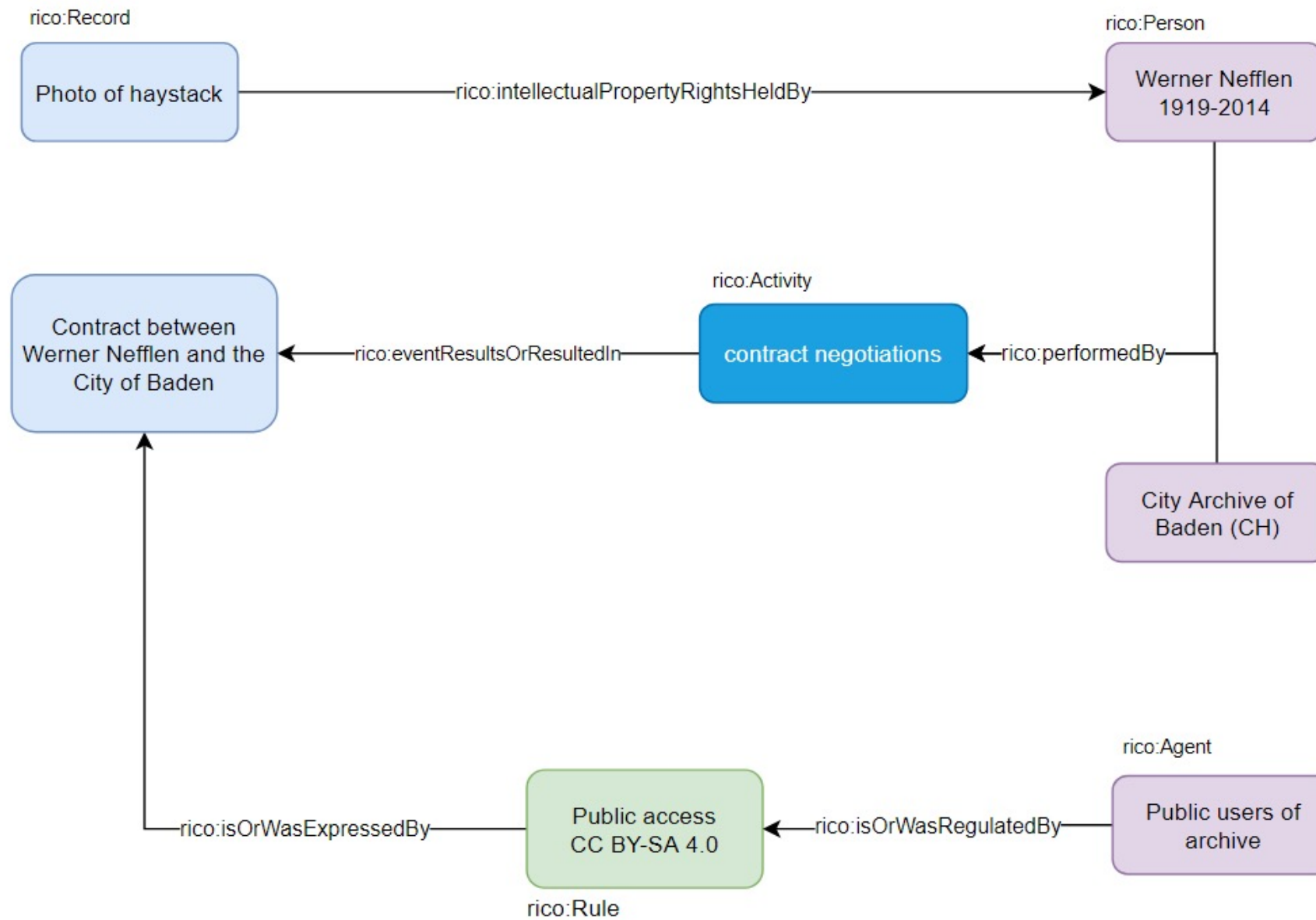
Conclusions

- RiC is a further development of existing standards and not a complete paradigm shift in archival theory.
- With RiC, it becomes possible to comprehensively model the "respect the fund" principle, even though this may be very complex.
- Existing archival metadata can be transferred to RiC as is. The ISAD(G) tree forms one of potentially several dimensions to describe archival materials.
- RiC can be implemented to a limited extent in existing archival information systems. However, its true potential will only unfold with a new generation of tools – which doesn't exist yet.

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Ressources

News about EGAD and Records in Contexts:

https://www.ica.org/en/news-on-records-in-contexts-standard

RiC-CM V0.2 Preview:

https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/ric-cm-0.2_preview.pdf

RiC-O-Repository:

https://github.com/ICA-EGAD/RiC-O

Overview of the RiC-O V0.2-release

https://www.ica.org/standards/RiC/ontology.html

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Thank you very much for your attention.

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