

## **BRIDGING THE GAPS BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND THEIR MEMORIES: COMPARING COMMUNITY-BASED ARCHIVES IN FIVE COUNTRIES**

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### **Abstract**

While there is a developing international discussion on the topic of community archives in different parts of the world, there has not been any sustained attempt to study community-based archives within a comparative framework. The aim of the article is to initiate a more systematic and comparative discussion of the different realities of community archives internationally (measured against and perhaps critiquing the descriptions and definitions offered by the dominant Anglophone literature on the topic). This article draws upon the authors' presentation at the ICA's Rome 2022 conference of their comparative analysis of the contexts, form and operation of community archives in five different countries (Brazil, China, Poland, Portugal and the United Kingdom). The authors also put forward an initial set of six criteria they believe are useful for future international comparative approaches to understanding community archives: terminology and definitions; typologies and characteristics of the archives; recent history and social structure of the country/region; relationships with external entities; funding and support; law and national archival and heritage systems.

## Introduction

This article draws upon the authors' presentation at the ICA's Rome 2022 conference of their comparative analysis of the contexts, form and operation of community archives in five different countries (Brazil, China, Poland, Portugal and the United Kingdom). This work emerges from our shared recognition that while there is a developing international discussion on the topic of community archives in different parts of the world, there has not been any sustained attempt to study community-based archives within a comparative framework. Through our networks we are aware of discussions about community archive-like practices across Europe, the Americas, Australia, Asia and in Africa but at present much of the existing academic and professional literature is dominated by English-language writers, particularly from the United States and the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> The latter literature and those writings relating to community archives elsewhere which we are aware of has informed our understanding of community archives internationally but the authors of this article believe that a more systematic and comparative discussion of the different realities of community archives internationally (measured against and perhaps critiquing the descriptions and definitions offered by the dominant Anglophone literature on the topic thus far) will be useful not only for other researchers, but also most importantly, for community archive practitioners themselves. It is worth noting that four out of the five writers here come from non-English speaking countries and all come from nations with very different national archival and community heritage contexts and in the future we will extend our collaboration with further colleagues in Africa, Asia and the Americas. We believe that deeper knowledge and awareness of the differing contexts and realities in which community archives operate internationally

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<sup>1</sup> A relatively recent overview of the mainly Anglophone literature on community archives can be found in Alex Poole, "The Information Work of Community Archives: A Systematic Literature Review," *Journal of Documentation* 76, no. 3 (2020): 657–87, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-07-2019-0140>. The latest edited volume on community archives by Jeannette Bastian and Andrew Flinn, eds., *Community Archives, Community Spaces Heritage, Memory and Identity* (London: Facet Publishing, 2020) extends the scope of the case studies to Asia and the Pacific Islands but still does not reflect the full extent of community archive activities globally.

is a first step to more effectively supporting and sustaining diverse community archive and heritage projects in different countries, including non-Western and non-Anglophone ones.

Noting that the heterogeneity of community archives, their diverse origins, varying collections and independent approach springs from the individuals and communities responsible for their existence rather than from the definitions and observations of academic and professional researchers, it is necessary to recognise the contexts and real world realities that underpin the form of existing community archives. Thus the intention of our comparative approach is to provide in the first instance a richer description of these contexts and realities, and then in so doing we present a first framework to further the international study of community archives, promoting their relevance to individual researchers, communities and social movements and fostering the international cooperation of practitioners.

We openly acknowledge the difficult complexity of definition and terminology in this field, and that the use and generalisation of the term “community archive” is not consensual or even employed in every case. For instance in the UK the term “community archive(s)” is widely employed and is also used in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa but often with slightly different and subtle emphasis. The Portuguese version of the term is its literal translation and reads *arquivo de comunidade* (plural: *arquivos de comunidade*). The Polish term, however, sounds slightly different: *archiwum społeczne* (plural: *archiwa społeczne*); its literal translation into English is “social archive(s)” does not reference community. *Spółeczny* means relating to society or part of it or being created by society and shared by it, and organised by some part of society independently, without the participation of the state<sup>2</sup>. In spite of these differences

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<sup>2</sup> “Spółeczny,” Słownik języka polskiego PWN, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/spoleczny:2523113.html>.

(and recognising the fact that many community practitioners do not use the term at all), it is important to state what we understand when we refer to community archives in this article. The term has been thoroughly debated over the last two decades but broad agreement is to be found in describing endeavours which involve the collection and use of archive and other diverse heritage materials both about a community and by a community, with different levels of active agency from the latter, and operating often as a counter to the collecting focus and practices of other more established archival institutions.

Terminologies and definitions of what constitutes the broad landscape of practices, methods, tangible and intangible features of these phenomena is one of the main challenges when it comes to identifying, studying and understanding community archives. This relates to the fact that, as a socially rooted movement, they are profoundly impacted by diverse cultural contexts including language, history, social structure, legal and cultural practices. Community archives are intensely contextual, and as such, our joint study intends to continue to understand the different terminologies and understandings in use in different countries, recognising that the debate arising out of these differences will contribute to a richer understanding of the movement.

Since 2019 the authors have collaborated in different forums and spaces (including joint conference presentations<sup>3</sup> and more sustained on-going writing and discussion) to first compare the development of community-based archives in our respective countries and then to develop a comparative approach to extend that study to further countries. To facilitate understanding of the national contexts in which community archives operate and to allow for comparative analysis of these contexts, the authors have advanced a set of broad criteria to support analysis of significant aspects of community archives and heritage. We intend to write at

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<sup>3</sup> For instance AERI 2020, IFPH Berlin 2022 and ICA Rome 2022.

length on the development of this approach and the criteria elsewhere, but briefly this has meant identifying out of our own collaborative work examining community archives in our own countries, a set of conditions which we believe significantly influence the development and activities of community archives in different contexts, which we then hope facilitates the comparison of diverse social, geographical and cultural features (including recent history, political and economic systems, cultural and social frameworks) and the impact of these on the development of community archives. The six criteria we have jointly developed and are currently in the process of testing in a number of different national contexts are

1. Terminology and definitions;
2. Typologies and characteristics;
3. Recent history and social structure;
4. Relationships with external entities
5. Funding and support
6. Law and national archival and heritage systems

In this article, for the sake of space, we have chosen to write briefly on only the three criteria which each author selected to be the most significant to the context and realities of our countries (typologies and characteristics (UK, Poland, China, Portugal), recent history and social structure (UK, Poland, Brazil), relationships with external entities (UK, Poland, Brazil, China, Portugal), funding and support (Brazil), law and national archival and heritage systems (China, Portugal). In doing so we aim to open up this approach to testing the usefulness of our framework and to promote further comparative discussion of community archives in a range of different national contexts.

## The United Kingdom

It is difficult to be precise about the exact number of community archives active in the UK at any one time – the UK & Ireland Community Archives and Heritage Group (CAHG) estimated there were approximately 3000 in 2006 and its website currently maps over 750 archives in its directory<sup>4</sup>, though not all of these are still active and the coverage of the database is patchy. However at any one time there may be many thousands of groups and individuals actively engaged in what can be defined as community archive and heritage activity with a variety of collection types and significance which transcend professional definition and designation. Most frequently the communities engaged thus are defined by locality, and motivated by place and the connection between the history of place and community.<sup>5</sup> Many of these local archives are recent and sometimes short-lived (responding to specific funding initiatives) but in other cases they are long established associated with deep-rooted local historical societies.<sup>6</sup> Other community archives combine place with another factor such as occupation and place of work, or a shared passion such as popular music or sporting clubs.<sup>7</sup> Alongside these local and interest focussed archives are another long standing strand of independent and community based archives in the UK which carry out their history work in a more explicitly political and activist fashion, supporting a political or social movement or an articulation of a particular identity, including working-class organisations and life, gender and diverse sexual orientations,

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<sup>4</sup> “Search,” Community Archives and Heritage Group, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/search-for-an-archive>.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance the 122 entries for the East of England on the community archives website: “Search: East of England,” Community Archives and Heritage Group, accessed January 31, 2023, [https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/search-for-an-archive?st=%2A&fq=organisation-category\\_str:%221%2F606%7CEngland%2F34%7CEast+of+England%22](https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/search-for-an-archive?st=%2A&fq=organisation-category_str:%221%2F606%7CEngland%2F34%7CEast+of+England%22).

<sup>6</sup> Fiona Cosson, “The small politics of everyday life: local history society archives and the production of public histories,” *Archives and Records* 38, no. 1 (2017): 45-60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2016.1269646>.

<sup>7</sup> For instance see: “Search: music,” Community Archives and Heritage Group, accessed January 31, 2023, [https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/search-for-an-archive?st=%2A&fq=organisation-subject\\_str:%22284%7Cmusic%22](https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/search-for-an-archive?st=%2A&fq=organisation-subject_str:%22284%7Cmusic%22).

disability and of course ethnicity, race and faith.<sup>8</sup> This variety reflects both the diversity and the contested nature of contemporary British society and the legacies of its imperial past and demographic change, as well as the significance of struggles over identity and belonging, representation and history for many communities within the society.

This overall form and variety of community archives in the UK is closely related to different trends and developments in recent history. Whilst the UK (with the important exception of Northern Ireland) did not experience the same levels of radical political change and conflict in the twentieth century undergone by many other countries (including the other countries examined in this article), the period was still one of significant political and social change including the extension of the franchise to workers and women, the experience of two world wars, the growth and then loss of empire, significant waves of migration, profound economic and industrial change and most recently debates over British identity and the relationship with Europe. The form, focus and operation of community heritage as part of a broader approach to history and heritage in the UK (often contesting dominant national narratives) is strongly implicated by these broader political and social changes.<sup>9</sup>

The long traditions of independent ‘serious leisure’ or ‘amateur’ scholarship undertaken by local historical, archaeological, scientific and antiquarian societies, were extended in the post second world war period by the growth of local history and family history as popular and increasingly legitimate subjects for study inside and outside the academy often bringing local and family histories into contact with broader social history and oral history and in turn informing the development of community archives and heritage work not least in those communities impacted by

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Flinn, “Working with the past: making history of struggle part of the struggle,” in *Reflections on knowledge, learning and social movements: History's Schools*, ed. Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hall, “Un- settling ‘the heritage’, re- imagining the post- nationWhose heritage?,” *Third Text* 13, no. 49 (1999): 3-13.



profound social and economic change.<sup>10</sup> The latter point has in particular attracted interest and funding from different local and national government agencies who have recognised the value of heritage and engagement with heritage, including community-based heritage, as contributing to positive social and health and wellbeing outcomes in communities impacted by change and disadvantage.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the top-down impetus of government socially directed funding, undertaking community archive activities also responded to the grassroots desire by communities to address questions of civil rights, anti-discrimination, misrepresentation and erasure, and struggles for justice and social transformation. Through-out the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, communities defined by faith and ethnic identity, social class, gender and sexual diversities reflected their desire to tell and share their own communities' stories by establishing independent community-based and community-led archives, museums and libraries. Struggles against the state and state sponsored discrimination and for recognition and representation rely on community histories and heritage as significant resources for inspiring and informing those campaigns and communities, building identity and a sense of belonging, and contesting the absences and misrepresentations of other national narratives and archival practices.<sup>12</sup>

As already indicated two of the biggest external factors in the appearance of community archives in the UK are the availability of funding streams and the networks that support the development of archives. Locating sustainable funding is

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<sup>10</sup> Ruth Finnegan, "Introduction: Looking Beyond the Walls," in *Participating in the Knowledge Society*, ed. Ruth Finnegan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 1-19; Andrew Flinn, "Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28, no. 2 (2007): 151-176.

<sup>11</sup> "Community Archivists and the Sustainable Communities Agenda," Jura Consultants, published 2009, archived on October 13, 2011, <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20111013140403/http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/view-publication.php?pubid=949>.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance: Hannah Ishmael et al., "Locating the Black archive" in *Communities, Archives and New Collaborative Practices*, ed. [Simon Popple](#), [Andrew Prescott](#), and [Daniel Mutibwa](#) (Bristol: Policy Press, 2020): 207-218.

often the most pressing matter for community-based archives, especially those that have to maintain a physical property. Whilst some archives are sustained on the resources of individuals and communities, most require regular injections of external funding and much of this tends to be project based funding. The biggest and most important funder of community heritage activities is the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF, previously the Heritage Lottery Fund) which since 1994 has given over £560 million to community cultural heritage projects.<sup>13</sup> Similar but smaller sources of funding for arts based engagement with community heritage are also provided by bodies like the UK Arts Council.<sup>14</sup> Whilst this funding is crucial across the sector – indeed the relative health and vitality of community archives in UK is to a significant extent a product of the existence of this funding stream – it can also bring problems, undermining the independence of community bodies as they have to meet external agendas, substituting more sustainable streams of funding and core activities with project based approaches, and being subject to changes in government policy and direction.

In recognition of the growth and significance of community archives, in the last twenty years the relationship between mainstream and community heritage organisations has shifted from frequent ignorance and antagonism to one of far greater cooperation and partnership, with some local archives and museums sponsoring networks of local and regional community archives offering mutual aid and support.<sup>15</sup> One of the most noteworthy example of this shift towards greater recognition and partnership is the UK and Ireland Community Archive and Heritage Group (CAHG). Founded in 2004 as a response to growing awareness

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<sup>13</sup> “Community Heritage,” Heritage Fund, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/our-work/community-heritage>.

<sup>14</sup> “Our open funds,” Arts Council England, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-open-funds>; “Help with finding funding,” Community Archives and Heritage Group, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/content/resource/help-with-finding-funding>.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Stevens, Andrew Flinn, and Elizabeth Shepherd, “New frameworks for community engagement in the archive sector: from handing over to handing on,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 59-76.

within the archive and broader heritage sector of community archives and the challenges they faced, CAHG became part of the archive sector's professional body (the Archives and Records Association (ARA) in 2011 whilst retaining a high degree of independence.<sup>16</sup> Although still largely volunteer run and with only a limited amount of funding, CAHG (along with other Scottish, Irish and regional English networks) brings community archivists together with heritage professionals to advocate for community archives, providing guidance and technical resources to the sector and a register of community archive activity ([www.communityarchives.org.uk](http://www.communityarchives.org.uk)).

## **Poland**

The landscape of community archives in Poland is both very diverse and under-explored, thus difficult to generalise. In order to provide a brief overview for an international audience, while highlighting features that may distinguish it from other locations, three aspects affecting community archives in Poland are briefly described below: contemporary social structure and recent history of Poland; typologies and characteristics of Polish community archives; relationships with external entities.

Poland is a homogeneous country - the vast majority (over 90%) of the population is Caucasian, Catholic and Polish<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, the ethnic and minorities focus of community archives, so often found in the UK and the US, is rare in Poland. The contemporary community archives landscape was significantly influenced by the turbulent 20th century: Poland regaining independence in 1918; the experience of WWII (concentration camps, deportations, forced labour, life under Nazi occupation, social resistance, underground armed forces); shift of

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<sup>16</sup> The early development of community archives and CAHG is documented in David Mander, "Special, local and about us: the development of community archives in Britain," in *Community Archives. The shaping of memory*, ed. Jeannette Bastian and Ben Alexander (London: Facet Publishing, 2009): 29-47.

<sup>17</sup> "Struktura narodowo-etniczna, językowa i wyznaniowa ludności Polski. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011," Główny Urząd Statystyczny (2015): 29, 92-93, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2011/nsp-2011-wyniki/struktura-narodowo-etniczna-jezykowa-i-wyznaniowa-ludnosci-polski-nsp-2011,22,1.html>.

national borders and population movements after the war; experience of communism from 1944/45 to 1989/90 (repression of former underground soldiers and anti-communist opposition, daily life under totalitarian rule, lack of political pluralism and freedom of speech). The impact of these events on ordinary people's lives is a fairly common subject of community collections.

These circumstances also influenced the creation of community archives in the past. One example is the Polish War Archive (1915-1921), an informal group formed by Polish historians, archivists and librarians to document the participation of Poles in WW1 and the impact of the war on the Polish society, along with war-related songs, language, and customs.<sup>18</sup> After WW2, in the communist period, independent civic activity was forbidden and the state strictly controlled the narrative of the past. Grassroots initiatives could only operate undercover and illegally. These are the beginnings of the largest community archives in Poland: the General Elżbieta Zawacka Foundation (Toruń)<sup>19</sup> and the KARTA Centre Foundation (Warsaw)<sup>20</sup>. Both emerged during the communist period, to record topics absent from official historical narratives (Zawacka in the 1960s, documenting the history of the underground armed forces during WW2; KARTA in the 1980s, documenting the Soviet repression of Polish people and the anti-communist movement). Both legalised their activities after the democratic turn in 1990, forming NGOs that operate successfully to this day.<sup>21</sup>

The history of Poland since the 19th century is also the history of political and economic migration. Currently, between 18 and 20 million Poles and people of

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<sup>18</sup> Wanda Krystyna Roman, "Aby pamięć nie zginęła? Polskie Archiwum Wojenne (1915–1921) i jego zbiory," *Archeion* 120 (2019): 185-202, <https://doi.org/10.4467/26581264ARC.19.009.11818>.

<sup>19</sup> "Main page," Fundacja General Elżbiety Zawackiej, accessed January 25, 2023, [www.zawacka.pl](http://www.zawacka.pl).

<sup>20</sup> "Main page," Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA, accessed January 25, 2023, [www.karta.org.pl](http://www.karta.org.pl).

<sup>21</sup> Zbigniew Gluza, *Odkrycie KARTY. Niezależna strategia pamięci* (Warszawa: Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA, 2012); Katarzyna Minczykowska, "Wstęp," in *Informator o zbiorach Fundacji Archiwum Pomorskie Armii Krajowej*, ed. Katarzyna Minczykowska (Toruń: Fundacja Archiwum Pomorskie Armii Krajowej, 2000): 15-21.

Polish origin live outside Poland.<sup>22</sup> In many countries of the world (e.g. Germany, France, US, UK, Canada, Brazil, Australia) Poles created institutions that documented and maintained Polish identity, tradition and language - now they constitute dozens of diasporic archives.<sup>23</sup>

Community archives in Poland are kept, among others, by NGOs and informal groups, but also by local cultural institutions and libraries, with varying levels of independence. Currently, the community archives directory maintained by the Centre of Community Archives contains over 700 entries.<sup>24</sup> Local and social history are the most common subjects of community collections in Poland. Other topics are under documented groups (e.g. people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, women), history of sports, education, culture (e.g. theatre, photography, music), as well as history of war, minorities, social movements. Community archives typically collect a wide range of sources: archival materials, library and museum objects, originals and copies. Most popular materials are photographs, ephemera, oral history, personal documentation (letters, diaries, school reports, old IDs), small souvenirs, publications. Many archives are either hybrid (with both physical and digital materials) or purely digital. Usually, community archives hold relatively small collections. However, there are several larger community archives in Poland with a longer history and a strong position in the landscape of cultural institutions (like KARTA and Zawacka Foundation). Typically, the community archive is run by a small number of volunteers; sometimes it finances its activities temporarily with public grants.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Rządowy program współpracy z Polonią i Polakami za granicą w latach 2015-2020," Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych (2015): 3-4, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/rzadowy-program-wspolprac-z-polonia-i-polakami-za-granica-w-latach-2015-2020>.

<sup>23</sup> "Baza organizacji oraz instytucji polskich i polonijnych za granicą," Główny Urząd Statystyczny, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://polonia.stat.gov.pl/>.

<sup>24</sup> "Baza archiwów społecznych," Centrum Archiwistyki Społecznej, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://cas.org.pl/baza-archiwow/>.

<sup>25</sup> Katarzyna Ziętał, "Archiwa społeczne w Polsce - prezentacja i analiza wyników badań," in *Archiwistyka społeczna. Diagnoza i wyzwania*, ed. Artur Jóźwik and Katarzyna Ziętał (Warszawa: Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA, 2017): 22-26;

As for relationships with outside partners, local cooperation and collaboration with entities dealing with the same or similar topics as the archive seems to be the most important and the most frequent. Community archives rarely cooperate with state archives and universities, more often with other cultural institutions, NGOs and museums.<sup>26</sup> However, a broader aspect of the relationships of community archives should be noted. They have been in the area of interest of the Polish state archival authorities for more than 20 years. In 2002-2004 and 2007-2008, the Community Archives Council was organised at the General Director of State Archives, but the Council eventually failed due to a lack of funding<sup>27</sup>. Already then, KARTA Centre, the largest Polish independent archive, acted as an advocate for the movement. Particularly from around 2012 KARTA began to regularly support and provide a network of community archives, for example, by creating a directory of community archives, publishing a handbook for community archivists<sup>28</sup>, organising courses, workshops, and biennial congresses of community archivists. KARTA also created the Open System for Archiving (OSA - *Otwarty System Archiwizacji*) - a free tool for describing archival materials and providing online access to their description and digital copies.

In 2020 all these activities were taken over by the Centre of Community Archives (CAC), a cultural institution co-created by KARTA and the Ministry of Culture (and financed by the latter). The Centre's main areas of activity are: educating and supporting community archivists (publications, courses, consultations); identifying and understanding (database of community archives,

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Maciej Melon, "Diagnoza problemów związanych z trwałością zbiorów społecznych," in *Strategia wzmacniania trwałości zbiorów społecznych* (Warszawa: Centrum Archiwistyki Społecznej, 2023): 29-61.

<sup>26</sup> Magdalena Wiśniewska-Drewniak, *Inaczej to zniknie. Archiwa społeczne w Polsce - wielokrotne studium przypadku* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2019): 580-581; Melon, "Diagnoza".

<sup>27</sup> Zbigniew Gluza, "Dekada przed archiwistyką społeczną," in *Archiwistyka społeczna*, ed. Katarzyna Ziętał (Warszawa: Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA, 2012): 18-22.

<sup>28</sup> Ziętał, *Archiwistyka społeczna*.

research); promoting and enhancing the importance of community archives (competitions, reportages, activity in social media); networking community archivists (congresses); providing an IT infrastructure for community archives (Open System for Archiving, [zbioryspoleczne.pl](http://zbioryspoleczne.pl)). What is essential however is that all cooperation between the archives and CAC is voluntary and not about control but support and dialogue. CAC is a partner for community archives, not a supervisor. However, CAC does not have the funds and formal capacity to support community archives financially.<sup>29</sup>

## **Brazil**

This study will focus on the area of Brazil where the writer lives. The state of Pará is situated in the North of Brazil and includes part of the Amazon Forest. It is the second largest state in Brazil, with over 1.200.000 square metres<sup>30</sup> – equivalent to four times the size of Italy or six times the size of the UK. Pará is often in the news because of the land conflicts, particularly between indigenous communities and invasions of their territories by miners, loggers, and drug-traffickers. In fact, issues relating to the land are a key part of Pará's history – the State Archive was created in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to preserve documents relating to land ownership and borders. The North of Brazil is also now the poorest area in the country, although Belém, the capital of Pará, a city of over 400 years, was once a very rich area because of the rubber cycle and the extraction of latex in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is important to note the social, political, and economical situation in Brazil and Pará in particular to understand the role of communities and the emergence of social movements, community centres and groups.

In terms of the recent history and social structure of community archives in Brazil, the first references to archives of communities are those related to social

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<sup>29</sup> "Main page," Centrum Archiwistyki Społecznej, accessed January 25, 2023, [www.cas.org.pl](http://www.cas.org.pl).

<sup>30</sup> "Cidades e Estados," Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, accessed January 26, 2023, <https://www.ibge.gov.br/cidades-e-estados/pa/>.

movements, particularly from the 1950s to 1970s. At that time, there was the emergence of groups demanding land rights and agrarian reforms, such as the Pastoral Land Commission (Comissão Pastoral da Terra, in Portuguese). Also, during the 1970s, groups representing the victims of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985) and their families developed. One very important initiative of these groups was the creation of archives consisting of photocopies of the casework from over 700 cases presented at the Superior Military Tribunal. The documents demonstrated that senior members of the regime were aware of the serious human rights violations that took place in the premises of the secret services. The archive, published in 1985 as a book entitled *Brasil: Nunca Mais*, was significant in supporting the investigations by truth commissions in Brazil from 2012 onwards.<sup>31</sup> Today, although there is an increase of social movements, community groups and various archival initiatives carried out by the civil society, it seems that there is still a lack of interest or research in them by the formal Archive sector.

With regard to the relationship of community archives to external bodies, since the 1970s there have been several Archival and Special Collections Centres established, especially in universities, to gather archival collections from social movements and community groups. For instance, the Edgard Leuenroth Archives at the University of Campinas, in São Paulo state, which received the archives of the project *Brasil: Nunca Mais*<sup>32</sup> and from the academic conference perspective, the National Congress on Archival Science has a particular session on Social Movements archives. However, research on community archives in general is still minimal. A quick search in the proceedings of the Brazilian National Meetings on Information Science over the last ten years show only a few studies on the subject. However two recent events might help to increase interest, understanding and research on community archives. In June 2022, Casa de Oswaldo Cruz (a university in Rio de

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<sup>31</sup> The documents are available at: "Main page," *Brasil: Nunca Mais*, accessed January 26, 2023, <https://bnmdigital.mpf.mp.br/pt-br/>.

<sup>32</sup> "Main page," Arquivo Edgard Leuenroth, accessed January 26, 2023, <https://ael.ifch.unicamp.br/>.



Janeiro) organised an event on community archives with the participation of Professor Wendy Duff, and in October 2022, the Federal Fluminense University, also in Rio de Janeiro, arranged a further meeting on community archives with the participation of Professor Michelle Caswell.

More promisingly, it also seems that there have been initiatives with community archives on the Archival Science courses, particularly via extended learning activities. The Archival Science course in the Federal University of Pará, where one of the author's works, has an extended learning project entitled "Promoting Archives: revealing memories and narrating stories". Throughout this project, undergraduate students will develop outreach activities, and organise the materials and exhibitions. Among the organisations included in the project are the Pastoral Land Commission and the Centre for the Study and Defence of Black Community in Pará.

Finally turning to the provision of funding and support. In August, one of the authors writer was invited to talk about archives and memory in a workshop promoted by the NGO Article 19 with over 50 community groups. Alongside the LGBT, feminist, Black and indigenous community groups, there were also neighbourhood communities and community centres. From the discussions, it was clear that there are two main problems they face regarding archives and information work. First a lack of resources (staff and financial) and second a lack of understanding about how to manage digital information (particularly their social media) as well as their physical records and archives. Despite this, it was clear that all groups in that session were aware of their role and its significance in creating and preserving memories and representations of their groups.

As the lack of funds and expertise on archives is common among these community groups, it seems that the archive sector and the universities (especially

those with archival science research and courses) have an important role in supporting them, by producing more studies on these types of archives and groups, using community archives for teaching, and organising extended activities. Collaboration with universities can not only develop knowledge and support structures for community archives and their groups, but it also can raise awareness and interest with them amongst the students and future archivists.

## **China**

China is a country with over 4000 years of history and its civilization has never been interrupted. In the course of this history it has developed a culture that is very complex, and it is very hard to make a thorough presentation of the situation throughout China. Therefore it is necessary to introduce the topic from an overall perspective.

China has a distinctive conceptual system of understanding community archives, which is related to social development practices as well as to national cultural habits. Beginning with the term “community” first. When Chinese scholars first learned about the term ‘community’, they understood it as a geographic concept. When it comes to community archives in China today, people still tend to understand it in this way - a perspective in which archives of minority peoples and groups are a typical part. As an integral part of the country, population minorities reflect the diversity of Chinese culture and overall there are 55 minorities. These minorities have their historical uniqueness, and some of them have preserved precious historical records, which have made important contributions to ensuring the remembrance of the history and culture of minorities.<sup>33</sup> In recent years, minority archives in China have been made more visible to the world. Some of

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<sup>33</sup> Mengqiu Li, Huiling Feng, and Yubao Gao, “A typology of Chinese «archives»,” *Archival Science* 21 (2021): 173-192, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-020-09352-x>.

them such as ancient Naxi Dongba literature manuscripts and official records of Tibet from the Yuan Dynasty were listed in the Memory of the World Register.<sup>34</sup>

Also in recent years some community archives based on a common identity characteristic have developed such as farm workers archives. In China there are about three hundred million farm workers, their rights need to be protected and their memories need to be saved. Since the early years of this century people began to recognize this, and these archives are kept both by community bodies such as Picun farm workers' museum and by the National Archives.

Relationships between community archives and external bodies are getting closer in China. Since the 2010s, new institutions have been developed to collect different types of community archives such as Picun farm workers' museum, The Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders<sup>35</sup>, Beijing Memory Resources website<sup>36</sup>, etc. As a result the public is able to pay more attention to the people whose memories might otherwise be forgotten. In terms of academic research, the study of community archives in China started in 2014 and has lasted for about 9 years so far. In the beginning, people focused on introducing the research results and writings from other countries (including writers such as Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, Anne Gilliland and Michelle Caswell), but after that people started studying community archives in the Chinese context, and some scholars have written papers describing the basic situation of community archives in China such as Professor Lian Zhiying on the Shuishu archives<sup>37</sup>, which are considered as international minority archives. Meanwhile, research about community archives has been funded by the National Social Science Fund of

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<sup>34</sup> "Memory of the World Register", UNESCO, archived March 23, 2022, accessed July 2, 2023, <https://webarchive.unesco.org/20220323041423/https://en.unesco.org/programme/mow/register>.

<sup>35</sup> "Main page," The Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders, accessed January 27, 2023, <http://www.19371213.com.cn/>.

<sup>36</sup> "Main page," Beijing Memory, accessed January 27, 2023, <http://www.bjny.cn/>.

<sup>37</sup> Zhiying Lian and Gillian Oliver, "Sustainability of independent community archives in China: a case study," in *Archival Science* 18 (2018): 313-332, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-018-9297-4>.

China, which represents the highest level of social science research in China. At the same time, more and more universities are offering courses on the topic of community archiving and are carrying out practical exercises to discuss community archiving with community members.

Furthermore, some large social organisations have begun to participate in supporting community archiving, offering money, professional guidance and technology. For example the Tencent Corporation Foundation contributed to the construction of Tencent·Tong Guan Dong Chorus Ecological Museum, in which the traditional Dong architectural culture is on display and the folklore recorded in the Dong archives is being passed on in a living form.

Finally, what is the position of community archives in China with regards to the Law and national archival and heritage system? The development of community archives is greatly influenced by law - if community archives are recognized, the law will become a supportive factor for the development of community archives, as people will take into account the needs of community archives. For a long time, there was no explicit provision for community archives in official documents, but the situation has changed in recent years. In 2020, China amended its National Archives law, in which it is explicitly stated that the participation of social forces in the construction of national archival resources is to be encouraged, which can be seen as a signal to encourage community archiving. This suggests that the environment will now be better for further encouraging and supporting the archiving of private communities.

As for archival and heritage systems, a trend which is becoming increasingly apparent is that community archives have gradually become an important part of the national archives environment, as the administrators of archival departments realise the value of community archives in shaping national memory and defending the interests of others. For instance as previously noted where some national

archives have recently begun to collect and preserve family archives and farm workers' archives.

## **Portugal**

In Portugal only rare attention has been dedicated to community archives, although there are examples of projects and practices which may be included in its broad set of definitions. The difficulty in framing projects within this definition relies on several aspects:

- i) Terminology: as mentioned in the introduction the use of the term “community archive” has only recently and even then rarely been applied;
- ii) Definitions: several projects are connected or developed by local museums, libraries or local archives, with different degrees of informality, but often are not solely grassroots. Often they are born in local museums, libraries or archives which promote engagement and practice with specific communities. Despite this, there are examples of independently led archival projects;
- iii) Their independence and often informal character can makes it difficult to identify them;
- iv) There has been very little thinking and reflection on this movement in Portugal. Despite these challenges, there are examples of projects and initiatives which may be considered when talking about community archives.

Independent organisations such as associations or informal groups tend to create informal archives, often digitally. The urge to identify and register heritage with possible value for a specific community or group, on the verge of disappearance is often their motivation. That is the case of the project *Fotomemória. Memória do Século XX*, developed by the local association AO NORTE, which has digitised thousands of photographs from private and family collections in a specific

area in the North of Portugal<sup>38</sup> or *Arquivo de Memória*, created by the Association of friends of the Coa Museum, focusing on oral history and life stories from the elder in another specific geographic area<sup>39</sup>.

There are also cases of independent associations dedicated to the documentation of specific subjects such as music (Mural Sonoro oral history archive<sup>40</sup> is such an example) or working and occupation experiences (like the oral history project developed by Universidade Popular do Porto<sup>41</sup>) or the oral history project developed by UMAR<sup>42</sup>, focusing on women's lives and rights. The Association AfroLis has been collecting material for a podcast focusing on the experiences of people of African heritage in Lisbon.<sup>43</sup> These projects rely often on the work and dedication of one or two members of the organisation, with little or even no specific budget. They are also related to very different areas — cinema, image and anthropology, rural life and work, professions and urban life, music or social movements - rather than being part of some more coherent larger community archive movement.

It is also important to mention the role of local archives, museums and local administration culture departments. Although these might not fall under a more orthodox definition of community archives, they can collect important heritage from specific communities, with different levels of engagement and participation. This is the case of the canning industry in Setúbal (Centro de Memórias do Museu do Trabalho Michel Giacometti), or the cod fishing crews in Ílhavo (where the

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<sup>38</sup> “Fotomemória,” *Lugar do Real*, accessed January 26, 2023, <http://lugardoreal.com/fotomemoria>.

<sup>39</sup> “Main page,” *Arquivo de memória*, accessed January 26, 2023, <https://arquivodememoria.pt/>.

<sup>40</sup> “Mural Sonoro,” Associação Mural Sonoro, accessed January 26, 2023, <https://www.muralsonoro.com/https/wwwmuralsonorocom/arquivomuralsonoro-1>.

<sup>41</sup> “Memórias do trabalho – testemunhos do Porto laboral no século XX,” Universidade Popular do Porto, accessed January 26, 2023, [http://cdi.upp.pt/cgi-bin/arquivos.py?doc=apresenta\\_projecto\\_memorias&indice=0](http://cdi.upp.pt/cgi-bin/arquivos.py?doc=apresenta_projecto_memorias&indice=0).

<sup>42</sup> “Projecto Memória e Feminismos,” Centro de Documentação e Arquivo Feminista Elina Guimarães, accessed January 26, 2023, <http://www.cdofeminista.org/projecto-memoria-e-feminismos/>.

<sup>43</sup> “Arquivo Rádio Afrolis,” Afrolis – Associação Cultural, accessed July 2, 2023, <https://afrolis.pt/category/arquivo-radio-afrolis/>.

Ílhavo Maritime Museum has developed a digital heritage platform named “Homens e Navios do Bacalhau” (*Cod fishing Man and ships*).<sup>44</sup>

It is common that the collection of heritage materials, the creation of informal archives and collections emerge from a social set of concerns, associated with other activities, both in the case of independent organisations or projects born in a more institutional environment. Memory plays a central role in triggering the engagement, valuing the individual experiences and shared subjectivities around a specific place, subject or social issue. In the case of independent associations and groups, initially little or no importance is given to the academic consideration of the past by the team, but as the projects grow it is common that an academic or professional collaboration might be sought. Independent associations and groups often collaborate with local archives both in terms of professional consultancy and guidance and/or to have access to equipment for digitisation. Many projects also seek consultancy and collaboration with individual academics or research groups. These collaborations may follow an informal process or, very often when funding opportunities require and value it, a more institutional nature. It is also important to mention the example of the Memory for All programme, developed by History, Territory and Communities Institute (NOVA University of Lisbon and Coimbra University), which collaborates with several different institutions — from associations to private companies, in the development of collecting projects gathered together on a digital platform. The programme has also been organising an annual conference dedicated to History, Memory, Heritage and Communities, bringing together practitioners and scholars related to community archives.

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<sup>44</sup> “Homens e Navios do Bacalhau,” Museu Marítimo Ílhavo, accessed July 2, 2023, <https://homensenaviosdobacalhau.cm-ilhavo.pt/>.

In Portugal the general regime for archives and archival heritage is described in the Decrees 16/93 (1993) and 107/2001 (2001).<sup>45</sup> They define the typologies of archives according to their provenance — as Public or Private archives, their territorial scope — National, Regional and Municipal — origins, subject/topic and medium. Audio-visual archives are firstly excluded (Art<sup>o</sup>1, point 2 of the 16/93) and later included by the Decree 14/94 (1994), which states that photographic, filmic, video graphic, phonographic and computer archival heritage are regulated by a specific legal piece.<sup>46</sup> Decree 16/93 defines that the classification of an archive as of national interest “does not affect its property, but it impedes its alteration, division or destruction without previous consent from the regulatory unit”.<sup>47</sup> In 2001 there was a revision of the policies, protection regime and valorisation of cultural heritage, in which archival heritage is defined in a broader sense — organic and non-organic — with national cultural relevance, public or private. One of the criteria for classification or inventorying is the “probatory and informative value of the archive, relying on its juridic, politic, economic, social, cultural, religious or scientific relevance”.<sup>48</sup> The Portuguese law makes reference to the classification of private archives of historical value, which fall under the same regulation of public archival heritage, with the possibility of donation, deposit or the provision of technical support. As yet there is no direct reference to community archives.

## Conclusions

This is very much a work in progress and the beginning of what we hope will be a continuing international dialogue involving researchers, community archivists and other interested parties, including from continents not represented in this article and our collaborations. However from this basis and building upon on the brief

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<sup>45</sup> Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Decree Law No. 16/93, *Republic Diary* No. 16/93, Series 1 of 1993-01-23. Available at: <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/decreto-lei/16-1993-584777>

<sup>46</sup> Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Act No. 14/94, *Republic Diary* No. 14/94, Series 1 of 1994-05-11. Available at: <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/lei/14-1994-255815>

<sup>47</sup> Art. 21st of Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Decree Law No. 16/93, *Republic Diary* No. 16/93, Series 1 of 1993-01-23.

<sup>48</sup> Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Decree Law No.107/2001, *Republic Diary* No 209/2001, Series 1-A of 2001-09-08. Available at: <https://dre.pt/dre/legislacao-consolidada/lei/2001-72871514>



accounts presented here we find that there are examples of independent community-based archive and heritage activities across our five countries and whilst there are some key similarities (specifically in the valuing of archives and heritage material to a particular group or community and acting upon that recognition of value often arising from the fear that their memory and history might otherwise be forgotten), there are also key and important differences in terms of terminology, types of communities commonly involved, the relation with external partners and funding / recognition opportunities. Contextual considerations such as recent history, social and cultural factors, and the organisation of the archival and heritage sector all matter significantly in accounting for some of these differences. History and political developments implicate the type of communities and social movements which actively engage in archival activities (and can be seen to be doing so openly) as well as what collections may be held and considered valuable. The extent of legal and professional recognition also matters as such acknowledgement by professionals and in archival legislation impacts the visibility of community archives and the support they are likely to receive to enable their long-term sustainability. The development of a fitting and appropriate terminology for these activities is clearly difficult, and whilst the term 'community archives' may be useful as a generic descriptor, we should also be wary of applying it uncritically and in an universalist fashion. Finally it is clear that we should avoid imposing too strict and binary divisions on collecting that is 'on community' and collecting that is also 'by community'. Whilst in some of the countries described here, community engagement with archives can be undertaken very much on their own terms and independently, in other countries the relationship with external partners (professional and academic) can be much more integral to the process of community collecting and engagement with its past. These distinctions all point to the complexity of understanding patterns of community archiving between

countries as well within countries and suggest to us the merit of continuing and extending our research and conversations.

In terms of the framework the authors here have so far developed and advanced, we hope that it helps to usefully understand how community archives are contextualised and impacted by their environment, we also realise that a single focus on a national context diminishes the impact of very important local and regional factors within countries (and not just within large countries) but also does not take into account the multiple environments that multinational and diasporic communities and community archives will be impacted by. It is worth noting in this context that international networks of specific diasporic archives or independent identity-based organisations acknowledge both the similarities and the differences between community bodies based in different countries. Whilst we advocate for a continued relevance of an international comparative approach to understanding community archiving (and the practice and value of archiving generally) we do so with the acknowledgement that this requires a complex and nuanced, socially located perspective that sees the connections and contexts at many different levels and not just the national.