ARCHIVES AS A PLACE FOR PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

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SUMMARY

- Participatory design and community archives
- The project
- Some considerations
PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

- Approach that involves proactively all different stakeholders in the design process in order to support the collective creation of products or services that meet the needs of targeted users.

- Roles of designer and participant blur.

(www.zerounoweb.it)
PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

- Participants are co-authors of the product/service
- People with different skills and operational levels work together
- Creating environments "responsive and appropriate to their inhabitants' and users' cultural, emotional, spiritual and practical needs" (Wikipedia)
PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

- This approach is also known as co-design, although some prefer to distinguish
  - participatory design: end users contribute only to decision-making
  - co-design: end users contribute to idea generation too

- User-centered design: users at every step of a process directed by experts
- User design: users have agency and control over the process, "both at the moment of idea generation and [...] throughout the design process"

(Sanders and Stappers)
PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

- "Transparent process of value creation in ongoing, productive collaboration with [...] all relevant parties, with end-users playing a central role" (Pieters and Jansen)

Different mindset

(Alexeyzhilkin, Freepik)
PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

- Development of an archival standard is a design process
  - transparent
  - including all parties
  - end-users playing a central role
  - from idea generation throughout the process

- Non-Example: RiC (Records in Contexts)
PLACEMAKING

- Approach to planning, design and management of public spaces

- All around the world many communities have been involved in projects aimed to change the surrounding built environment

(Project for Public Spaces Inc.)
"Placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm [...] paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place. Making a place is not the same as constructing a building. When people of all ages, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds can not only access and enjoy a place, but also play a key role in its identity, creation, and maintenance, that is when we see genuine placemaking in action."
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(Project for Public Spaces Inc.)
PLACEMAKING

- Archives

the whole of the documents

the entity responsible for permanent preservation

the space where materials are located
PLACEMAKING

- Archives
  - environments where communities can find their roots, stories, relationships, even ideals and sentiments along with the documents where such things are represented
  - ecosystems where different entities should find the space for them and for their values

*Shaping archive* as an environment, a vital community resource, a space where identities may thrive, adopting a participatory design
COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

- The traditional theory and practice of archives has been challenged in the past years by the emerging needs of different communities.

- "Even if there are many examples of participatory initiatives, participatory archives are still exceptions rather than an established part of mainstream archival practices." *(Isto Huvila)*

- They "do not sit easily inside professional silos. The activities frequently described as community-based or community-led archiving share many attributes with other related endeavors such as community history, oral history, community-based museums and heritage groups." *(Andrew Flinn)*
COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

- "Frequently exhibit some common traits (relating to collections, motivation, usage, and relationship to their community/ies)"
  (Andrew Flinn)

- However, they get a different meaning according to the geographical, jurisdictional and cultural context in which they are created

- Shades of meaning between participatory and community archives

- "Community archiving [...] makes us think differently about ownership of records, [...] oral and written traditions, the localism-globalism and margins-centre nexus, multiple viewpoints and multiple realities about recordkeeping, and so much else, including evidence, memory, and obviously identity"
  (Terry Cook)
COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

- This paradigm applies not only to proper community archives, but also to archives that may be established by some mainstream institutional archives.

- Whatever you call them, these archives result from the **engagement of people** who determine the scope and content of the archives.

- **Communities of records**: entities that both create records and put them in the proper context, exerting control over creation, accumulation, management and preservation of documents.
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

- **Archivio Atena** (engl. *Atena Archive*) is a project aimed at creating the community archive of Atena Lucana.

- The project aims to create new tools to allow the local communities to narrate their territory, through the digitization of the local cultural heritage and the establishment of a permanent laboratory where not only artists, scholars, cultural operators and institutions, but also individuals can meet and shape their place of identity.

(www.expedita.it)
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

- Place for **community building**, where multiple voices can be heard and represented, and vice versa, a community of members shaping their individual and collective meanings into their own place

  "Archives as community, community as archives"

- The project won a public competition and is being funded by the Ministry of Culture
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

- Create a digital community archive by digitizing photographs and audio-video recordings coming from private collections of people living in Atena.

- Photographic and audio-visual archives visually preserve the memory of places, things and people, and keep track of the relationships between them.

- Create a shared space, the place where a community may actively participate in the shaping of its memory.

It's indeed placemaking.
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

- The project didn't come out of the blue: it builds on a similar initiative that was carried out in the past years in Bellosguardo, a small town in Southern Italy

Replicate and enhance that experience
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

In 2019 with Bellosguardo Archive Bellosguardo
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

- The project is not only about creating a community archive by digitizing personal photographs. It's about **archival outreach**
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

- "Exploring our records with creativity and innovation drawing out wherever possible a warmth and humanity in the stories we tell"

(The UK National Archives' website)

- Cross-generational environment that supports social cohesion
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THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

- This is public engagement indeed

- This is about empowerment, personal identity, social role

- This is about memory, not as static matter, but as an ongoing reshaping process that everyone can contribute
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

- This is not what we would call a diplomatic analysis, but has certainly to do with the recognition and understanding of the fundamental parts of a document.

- The focus on the back and the attention to the signs is not an emphasis on informational details.

- Not only on the informational value but also historical and socio-cultural value.
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

In this experience of photographic archives
The beauty contest was clearly a pretext to raise comments, create stories, engage the community. It's a call to action to the community.
THE PROJECT ARCHIVIO ATENA

I want to invite the whole population of Bellosguardo
THE PROJECT *ARCHIVIO ATENA*

- In Atena Lucana we will deliver **training courses on digitization**
IN CONCLUSION

- Collecting and digitizing materials is not only a physical or technical action.

- Cultural heritage is a matter of both collective and individual responsibility (Faro Convention).

  This project leverages this principle.

- Relationship is the key concept.
IN CONCLUSION

- **Archival bond**: the network of relationships that each record has with the records belonging in the same records aggregation, a link among records, limited to records

**BUT**

- If we assume a **broader concept of archive** – archive as a place, a socio-cultural environment before a set of objects – then records too get a broader meaning

- Archival bond should be re-interpreted as a **connection among those entities** (i.e., objects, people, communities and their actions along with their cultures)
IN CONCLUSION

- We may argue whether this may still be called the archival bond. But it is about **records**, and the **agents** interacting with them, and the **actions** related to them → it is **archival**

- It binds all these entities together → it is a **bond**

  Something that makes up the identity of archives
  Something that makes up the big picture
  **Something that makes an archive a place**
Thank you for your attention!

😊

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