Digital Public History and Archives in Greece

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Abstract:

Purpose - In the current online context, the work of historians and archivists crosses multiple levels. Archival institutions, digital public history research projects, and broader activity in cultural heritage management have shaped many new archival digital repositories. The purpose of this article is to review this kind of online activity in Greece and highlight relevant concerns for managing historical archives online.

Design/methodology/approach - This article presents digital archival repositories of archival institutions, cultural and information organisations and history research projects. It highlights the need for classification by the creator to improve the evaluation of the content and architecture of digital repositories.

Findings - A core point from the review is the need for more collaboration between scientists, as new technologies, media, and the web have created fluid boundaries between disciplines

Originality/value - A convergence between research and academic institutions and memory institutions and the development of joint scientific projects is in the interest of the preservation of historical archives but also of the community to which the stakeholders involved in such projects are addressed.

Index Terms — Digital Public History, Digital Archives, Archives, Archival Studies, Greece

I. INTRODUCTION

The web is filled more and more with digitised historical archives. Archival and scientific institutions, associations and individuals interested in the study of the past are digitising and making historical sources available online. Digital Public History refers to a research methodology and practices focusing on using digital technologies, media and internet to engage the public with historical content and enhance the historiography. This can include using websites, online databases, social media, virtual reality, and other digital tools to make historical information and resources more accessible to a broader audience **[1, p. 127-130; 2, p. 120]**. Digital historians typically need access to large amounts of digital data, such as text, images, audio, and video. They also require tools for analysing and interpreting this data, such as text-mining software, image and audio analysis software,

and GIS software.

Additionally, they may need to use databases and other information management systems to organise and store their data. Archival sources remain at the heart of historiographical research, and the creation of digital repositories is requested. This was emphatically noted during the period of the covid-19 pandemic when archival institutions were closed for a long period, and even today, appointments for archival research are limited. On the other hand, today's archivists have the knowledge and tools to respond to these needs. At the heart of digital history stands, among other things, the digital archive concept, with historians and archivists often understanding various things differently.

In the 1990s, the development of the World Wide Web changed the presentation of historical information and access to primary sources. In this context, the memory institutions (libraries, archives and museums) have a primary relationship, as they collect a significant part of the historical sources. At the same time, these institutions are interested in offering their collections and activities to the community. So public digital history seems to be an ideal arena for the intersection between academic history and research and memory institutions, with both focused on the public. But is this the reality? What methodological and epistemological issues emerge from this relationship? The current article aims to present and highlight the various aspects of this coexistence as they are formed in the Greek-language case. Although geospatial boundaries do not match the study of online information, the issue of language enables us to study non-English national paradigms separately.

Especially in the digital environment, Archival Studies seems to have lost the privilege of defining the "archive" **[3]**. Suppose the convergence of Computer Science and Archival Science has disconnected the second one from history. In that case, the new framework for producing and publishing historiography reconfigures the needs of archivists and historians. This relationship is formed through common work in the mixed analogue and digital environment.

II. GREEK ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS ONLINE: TYPICAL CASES

A great entry point for exploring the online Greek-language world of digital archives -or rather digitised historical archives- is the General State Archives. In 2009, they published their digital collection called *@ρχειομνήμων* [*@rcheiomnimon*] **[4]**. This collection includes selected

digitised items from the collections of the national archives, mainly 19th-20th century archives. The General State Archives are structured into local – Regional Archives, and each Archives has followed a different usage and storage pattern in the digital collection. For example, some Archives use the repository to present their collections as an online index. Ten years later, in 2019, the *National Archives Index* **[5]** was launched to monitor the overall collections of the Greek archives and assist researchers. This year, in the context of the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, have launched *The Digital Archive Portal for 1922* **[6]**, which maps and presents all the available archival sources of the Greek Archives related to the theme and the efforts of the Greek State for the rehabilitation and assimilation of its refugees.

National and general historical anniversaries are an opportunity to develop projects to digitise cultural heritage. On the bicentenary of the 1821 Revolution, the Research Centre for the Humanities (RCH) designed and launched *The Greek Revolution of 1821: Digital Archive* **[7]** with the collaboration of 22 information, education and research institution. Published on this repository more than 13,500 documentation cards (documents, arts, music, books) and over 45,000 digitised archival items (documents, images, audio material). The research team of the project developed before this project *The Ioannis Capodistrias Digital Archive* **[8]** for the Kapodistrias Museum or Kapodistrias Museum-Centre of Kapodistrian Studies. The double anniversary of 2021 for the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Greek Revolution and 2022 for the 100th anniversary of the Asia Minor Catastrophe offered many opportunities for the collaboration of memory institutions with the research and academic community through digital public history projects.

The Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive Society (ELIA)-National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation digitised and published online more than 100,000 archival items from its collections in the framework of the European Union's "Information Society" program **[9]**. Like the General State Archives, many information institutions used the "Information Society" program, which on a large scale, created digital archival collections and formed the culture of digitisation in Greece. The following are the digital results of this funding. The Contemporary Social History Archives (ASKI), taking advantage of the financing from the same operational program, digitised over 11,000 items from their collections **[10]**. The *Digital Archive* of the National Research Foundation "Eleftherios K. Venizelos" consists of manuscripts, graphic material (postal cards and lithographs-posters), photographic and cartographic material to achieve its primary goal: the research and study of the era and work of the great Greek statesman (starting at the mid-19th century until the end of the 1960s) **[11]**. The digitised collections of these institutions are included in the *SearchCulture.gr,* which was developed by the National Documentation Centre (EKT) **[12]**. This repository is the Greek aggregator for cultural content and the national provider for Europeana. The *Digital Library* of the American

School of Classical Studies at Athens, as called, includes the archaeological photographic collection, the Dorothy's Burr Thompson photographic collection, photographs from the historical archives and a database of Ion Dragoumis' Correspondence **[13]**.

In addition to archives, libraries and research centres, several cultural organisations and public benefit foundations have launched repositories of digital archives. The Digital Collection of the Cavafy Archive by the Onassis Foundation consists of manuscripts of poems, hand-compiled printed editions, prose literary works, articles, studies and notes, photographs by the poet and the Singopoulos's archive **[14]**. *The Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation Archives* provided online access to the archive of Eleni Antoniadis-Bimbikou with 30,000 items, the archive of Stelios Mayopoulos and the archive of the Istanbul Brotherhood "Agapate allilous" via its archival repository **[15]**.

Apart from repositories of digital archival collections, many research projects have produced websites presenting digitised historical documents from archives relevant to the projects' historiographical questions. Previously mentioned are the major research projects for the 1821 digital archive and Ioannis Kapodistrias archive. *The digital collection of the research program "Refugees: their reception in Greece (1821-1989) - Research-Documentation-Dissemination"* of the Research Centre for Modern History (KENI – Panteion University) and the Institute of Historical Research (National Hellenic Research Foundation) **[16]** attempts to include a wide range of cases of refugee settlement in Greece and at the same time to form a picture of the many different historical sources in which relevant information material can be found. Another kind of digital public history project uses available historical archives and creates new collections through oral history. The project "*Memories of the Occupation of Greece*" of the Free University of Berlin Center for Digital Systems launched an online archive repository of a total of 93 interviews of contemporary Greek witnesses of the German occupation of Greece under the Nazis **[17]**.

Based on these representative examples of digital archival repositories/digital archives, their development can be classified into three main categories: (a) archival and broader information and cultural organisations developing independent digital repositories, (b) joint projects to create thematic digital collections between information organisations and the university and research community, and finally, (c) research projects of universities or research institutes developing digital thematic collections. Interoperability is not the norm in the above cases. In many different ways, web users have access to historical archival sources. Historical archives leave their physical context behind and move into a different world that creates new terms and problems in their use and interpretation.

III. ARCHIVES AND ARCHIVAL PRACTICE IN MOTION

The idea of the "archives in motion" refers that archives are not static and unchanging but constantly evolving and adapting to new technologies and ways of understanding

the past. This concept emphasises archives' dynamic and fluid nature and the importance of actively engaging with and reinterpreting the materials they contain. In practice, this idea can involve digitising and making historical materials available online, creating new archival collections that reflect diverse perspectives and experiences, and using digital tools to analyse and interpret historical data in new ways. It also involves collaboration and working with communities to co-create, preserve and share their history and cultures. By recognising the importance of constantly reevaluating and updating the materials and methods used in archives, this perception can help ensure that historical records remain relevant and accessible to future generations. A concept that has been shaped mainly through the use of archives in museum exhibitions and has its background in the broader field of cultural heritage preservation [18].

The above mobility reveals a complex digital archive collection/repository creation world. For example, a classification of the cultural heritage providers indexed in SearchCulture.gr under the category "historical collection/archive" includes: regional and local authorities, cultural and public benefit foundations, educational and research institutions, museums, archives, libraries, political parties et al. [Table 1.]. In the contemporary digital context, there are displacements through these projects that can create distortions in the archive. The transition from producer to provider, the common and misused use of the terms item, collection, repository, database, library record and archives, and the often incomplete description, moves the practice away from archival theory and methodology. The use of General International Standard for Archival Description seems to be limited exclusively to archival institutions, and many archival description fields are created depending on the needs of digitisation projects. At the same time, in such a wide repository, different kinds of descriptions are created (incomplete or surface descriptions together with detailed and documented descriptions). At this point, archivists have the important role of peer reviewers of such projects [19].

Cultural and Public Benefit Foundations	Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation Baron Michael Tossizza Foundation Chamber Of Fine Arts of Greece (EETE) Committee for Pontic Studies (EPM) Constantinos Simitis Foundation Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre (EKBY) Greek National Opera Hellenic Olympic Committee Hellenic Book Club Konstantinos K. Mitsotakis Foundation Macedonian Art Society TECHNI Michael Cacoyannis Foundation National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation National Research Foundation "Eleftherios K. Venizelos" Onassis Foundation Parnassos Literary Society Thessaloniki International Film Festival Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra YMCA of Thessaloniki The European Cultural Centre of Delphi (ECCD)

Museums	"V. Papantoniou" Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation Benaki Museum Folklife and Ethnological Museum of Macedonia-Thrace Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece Jewish Museum of Greece Nikos Kazantzakis Museum Foundation OTE Group Telecommunications Museum Science Center and Technology Museum (NOESIS) Thessaloniki Olympic Museum
Educational and Research Institutions	Academy of Athens American Farm School Anatolia College National Documentation Centre National Hellenic Research Institution University of Crete University of Patras American School of Classical Studies at Athens
Regional and Local Authorities	Association of Friends of Stefanos Kotsianos Institutions (Municipality of Polygyros) Charity Company of the Municipality of Mandra-Eidyllia Local Development Company of Lesvos Municipality of Haidari Municipality of Komotini Municipality of Platanias Public Benefit Organisation of Kavala "DIMOFELIA"
Libraries	Kalambaka Library for the Rousanou Holy Monastery Levadia Central Public Library Public library of Serres Veria Central Public Library
Archives	Contemporary Social History Archives Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive-Cultural Foundation of the National Bank Of Greece
Other	Acropolis Restoration Service (YSMA) Sotiris Kakisis Archive Union of the Democratic Centre (EDIK)

Table 1. Providers of "historical collection/archive" content in SearchCulture.gr

Producing content and metadata in English is necessary, as online repositories are accessible globally. The repositories that have translated content provide services and make their operations visible in the international context.

The variety in the types of institutions that are interested and engaged in the disposal of their archival collections is a positive sign for archival awareness. However, the precarious economic situation and the high costs of digitisation projects make it necessary to form a common discussion around the development of digital archival repositories. The need to formulate a common scientific discussion for evaluating the projects that have been implemented and formulating relevant policies is a matter of fact and essential for digital curation and preservation.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Digital Public History and, more widely, Digital Humanities have made it more difficult to define the boundaries between disciplines within the Social Sciences and Humanities and other fields such as Archival Science, Museum Studies, Information Science and Cultural Heritage Management. But coexistence remains an opportunity for the evolution of all scientific fields. Over

the last twenty years, the development of research projects in historical studies has increasingly been linked to the digital domain. Many of the scholarly projects are completed with deliverables that have a strong digital footprint - websites, digital publications, databases, ontologies, etc. Digital outputs are not systematically peer-reviewed/critiqued, as is traditionally the case with monographs or collective scientific papers. Through the collection, description and indexing of digital outputs of scholarly works, many new questions arise, such as what criteria would be used to evaluate digital public history projects, what is their content, and how would they be classified? The boundaries between scholarly activities in the digital world are fluid and by no means one-dimensional.

Archives, museums, libraries, universities, research institutions, and independent research groups engaged in researching the past produce online publications that could be considered part of the research field under consideration, "Digital Public History". It could be argued that the ongoing activity around this field represents a point of convergence between the various cultural/information institutions (archives, museums, libraries), academic institutions (universities and research institutions) and professional, scientific collections (scientific societies, informal research groups).

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VI.   AUTHORS

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