

The Archival Platform

Reflections, learnings and future directions

SASA Conference 2014
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memory - records - places - museums - archives - artefacts - cultural practices

Website: www.archivalplatform.org

Twitter: @the_archive

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Origins

In 2007 the The National Archives and Records Service, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life Research Project (Wits) organised a conference to consider the state of the archive.

The Conference concluded that the archival system was *under severe strain* and the sector urgently in need of support.

Concept

The Conference proposed the establishment of an ***Archival Platform*** as an intervention aimed at: improving communication across the sector, encouraging synergies, networking and collaboration; raising issues for sustained critical engagement, and where appropriate, decisive action; and facilitating collective interventions in the public interest.

Public engagement

From the outset, **public engagement was seen as being central to the Archival Platform's activity and identity**, distinguishing it from the work of professional organisations such as SASA and ESARBICA or other civil society initiatives such as SAHA.

Funding

The Archival Platform was established with funding from **The Atlantic Philanthropies** as part of a 'cluster grant' to four archival organisations: Historical Papers (Wits) the South African History Archive (SAHA) and the Visual History Archive and the Archival Platform.

Institutional base

The Archival Platform operates under the auspices of the **University of Cape Town** NRF Chair in Archive and Public Culture and the **Nelson Mandela Foundation**.

The location within a high-level academic research unit and the association with a respected and influential civil society activist initiative, offers unparalleled access to **leading scholars** in the field and a **considerable and influential network**.

The Archival Platform Team

Steering Committee: Prof Carolyn Hamilton, Dr Mbongiseni Buthelezi, Prof Njabulo Ndebele, Sello Hatang, Verne Harris and Dr Noel Solani

Staff: Director and assistant.

Others: correspondents, researchers, facilitators.



Stakeholders / audience / users

The Archival Platform interacts with a academics from a range of disciplines, record keepers, government employees, cultural workers, heritage professionals and practitioners, memory activists and theorists, archive creators and users, public and private institutions as well as with organisations and communities.

Aim

The Archival Platform aims to play an advocacy and intervention role in respect of memory, archives and records as dynamic public resources in South Africa in the 21st century and within the context of a fledgling democracy through activities directed broadly at: public education, professional development, research, networking, advocacy and sectoral mobilisation.

Key areas of concern

The role of archives and records in relation to:

- Access to information and the 'right to know'
- Social justice and the 'right to truth'
- Good governance and accountability
- The discourse around re/making the

The state of the profession, the archive, the national archival system and the broader archival sector.

Core programmes 1

Communication: encouraging dialogue, facilitating networking and sharing of information via the Archival Platform website, newsletter, social media platforms and events.

The Archival Platform social media platforms are not simply a conduit for news. **They carry original content: commissioned from correspondents or contributed by others.**

Core programmes 2

The *Ancestral Stories* programme: focuses on family and clan histories and brings the oral narratives, praise poems, customs and practices on which diverse people draw to make sense of their personal, clan and national pasts into the ambit of the archive.

These are among the **most read** posts on our website and generate significant discussion.

Core programmes 3

The *Registry of Archival and Memory Initiatives* *which is* a single online portal, searchable by location and theme through which archival and memory institutions and their holdings can be promoted and accessed.

This includes over **600 listings** and a series of thematic posts.

Core programmes 4

The on-going scan of the South African archival sector. The latest development in this programme is the ***State of the Archive*** which provides an analysis of the archival landscape and the challenges facing it.

While the report will be useful as a stand-alone Archival Platform product, the ***process*** through which it has been researched and created has proved to be a useful activist intervention.

Moving on

We have concluded that South Africa has a **vast treasury of archival resources**, held in many hands.

But there **deep-seated problems** that require systemic change and long-term interventions across a number of different fronts by: the three spheres of government, tertiary institutions, professional and civil society organisations.

Our observations

A few challenges:

- The significance of archives and records is insufficiently understood.
- The impact of Constitutional changes and the 1996 Act were not well considered.
- The sector is drastically under-resourced: institutions cannot fulfil their mandates.
- There are huge inequities in the system.
- Archivists and records managers need support on many levels.

Taking action!

The Archival Platform cannot resolve the deep-seated problems facing the archival sector.

What it can, and is doing, is work with the sector to identify and articulate challenges, analyse the underlying causes and point out areas in which interventions are required.

We need an archives army!

Creating resources

The Protection of Personal Information Act, No 4 of 2013 (POPIA), will impact significantly on archival practice. It will challenge archivists and records managers to give effect to the right to privacy by safeguarding personal information in a way that balances this right against others, particularly the right to access of information.

The Archival Platform has developed **guidelines for archivists and records managers.**

Building partnerships

Working strategically with:

- The South African History Archive
- Southern African Historical Society
- South African Human Rights Commission
- Public Affairs Research Institute (Wits)
- Various university departments and institutes
- National and provincial archives
- South African Society of Archivists

Promoting dialogue

National Dialogue Forums to address two issues: POPIA, the placement of archives in government.

Provincial Dialogue Forums to facilitate interaction, share information, and act as a catalyst for the formation of the archives army!

Local Dialogue Forums to promote the concept of using records to exert rights.

Thank you!

We look forward to working with you!

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