A Methodological Approach for Activate a Community-Based Archive as a Decision-Support System in Urban Regeneration Processes

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Abstract. The community archive can be a powerful tool for territorial investigation and simultaneously a collaborative approach to learn and act in social innovation and urban regeneration processes. This study presents a methodological advancement for defining a community-based archive based on participatory mutual learning between experts and community inhabitants, aimed at co-identifying shared values by the context's spatial, social, cultural and environmental dimensions. If, on the one hand, non-formal training experiences represent an opportunity to re-understand the territory together through community engagement and empowerment actions, on the other, they produce data and tools that become interfaces to interact with in the decision-making processes that the archive is constantly called upon to define. The Atena Archive project, in the village of Atena Lucana in the province of Salerno, Italy, represents the context in which the methodological advancement was structured and applied in some parts.

The research, therefore, aims to examine the role of the community archive in territorial transformative processes, structure a value-centred approach for activating a community archive, and identify the decision-making processes to active during the census processes to make communities protagonists choose what to archive collaboratively.

Keywords: Community-based archive · participatory mutual learning · collaborative decision-support system

1 Introduction

Recent literature has shown an increasing focus on building community archives in different forms, including national collections, official registries, libraries, museums, business archives, internet platforms, and personal memories. Despite their variety, all archives share the characteristic of asserting themselves as authoritative sources by collecting, organising, and interpreting significant records. Archives curate a historical narrative by choosing and safeguarding elements from the past, trying to provide an accurate and unbiased account of history to society, and emphasising its roots, identity, and future trajectory.

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The assumed objectivity and authority of archive accounts have been questioned following the critique that arose in the 1990s. According to McKemmish [1], archives are dynamic entities built by authority that are not objective or impartial. Their narratives are shaped by choices over which components to incorporate, maintain, or omit, underscoring their storytelling power's subjective and discerning aspect [2].

In this sense, the city is also an archive because the urban fabric is a sedimentation of the past that can be richly evocative of memories that can destabilise the present by giving disturbing hints of other possible worlds that have existed and can be made to exist in the same urban and shared space. The space can provide the means to develop and experience shared collective memories to stimulate critical thinking and action. At the same time, community archives reflect a historical practice of recording local history and social movements by volunteers and activists [3].

A burgeoning collection of community archives literature currently focuses on particular organisations, localities, and issues [4]. Various political, social, and technological variables have led to the growth of independent archiving projects [5–7] that include the community in co-creating collective memory and identity in a digital environment [8–10]. Flinn et al. [11] define a community archive as the product of the community - represented by all kinds of people who come together - for their attempt to document the history of their territories and their identity, collecting material over which they exercise some control and over which they have substantial knowledge. Community archives can serve as substitutes for traditional repositories, and they can represent a method allowing communities to determine what is valuable to them collectively, shape their shared memory of the past, and manage how narratives about their history are created so they take control of the decision-making process [12, 13]. Anne Gilliland's VIA (Voice, Identity, Activism) framework integrates insights from many community archives projects to comprehensively establish a values-driven method for addressing these initiatives. Gilliland argues that a community-based archive practice approach prioritises a community's interests, needs, and well-being [14]. In fact, in the last decade, the most recent literature has introduced the concept of the 'participatory turn', according to which the involvement of communities in the identification, knowledge, protection and valorisation of tangible and intangible heritage is an indispensable practice to foster the regeneration of places and valorisation of identities.

In this logic, community participation is seen as an enrichment tool for traditional archives [15], as community members are invited to interact more actively with institutions and participate in managing and describing archives. This paradigm shift is identified with the term community-based participatory archives.

The concept of participatory archives is rooted in postmodernism, which values the user's role as a social agent in creating and managing collective archival memory. In literature, community-based participatory archives are combined with community archives. Nevertheless, studies and research are emerging that focus on community-based participatory archival projects, as the sharing of information and content between community members and decision-makers leads to a mutual understanding that results in a unique archive that is created with and for the community. Interpreting and creating the archive is shared with a broader public [16], correcting the gaps in content collection in many traditional archives.

Community-based participatory archives are a new approach in which archivists, land professionals, institutions and community members work together to document local histories and create distinctive archival collections.

Many participatory archives range from independent community-led efforts to institution-supported projects. Through these archives, community members support the collection of information and content that constitutes the territorial capital of a place, adding to the documentation all that represents value to them (personal experiences, memories of places, traditional activities, relationships and movements in community living spaces) and bridging the gap between personal and community aspects, as they help in the search for all those tangible and intangible elements and objects that need to be considered in order to tell the story of their territory and to identify the distinctive elements on which to build regenerative practices and processes. This knowledge makes it possible to build tools to support the territorial decisions of authorities and institutions.

As part of the process of evaluating what should be archived, Shilton [16] states that cooperation and collaboration between communities and archiving professionals generate mutual learning that leads to the knowledge and identification of those values that are to be recognised as representative of a community narrative and that constitute a narrative and interpretation of the spatial context other than a simple document. Successful decisions about what to value, as meaningful for the definition of a community archive, are based on understanding the value of particular narratives, documents or events that can only be recognised through mutual learning between those who archive and those who propose what to archive.

The concept of mutual learning, introduced by Scholz as a fundamental principle of Transdisciplinary (Td) research [17, 18], is defined as "the basic process of exchange, generation, and integration of existing or developing knowledge across different parts of science and society". In particular, mutual learning is based on the idea that people can learn more together than alone.

Mutual learning is regarded as a helpful approach in decision-making contexts as a knowledge-based support tool among experts and communities [19, 20], especially for investigating and exploring uncertain issues, as it manages to transcend mere knowledge acquisition [21]. The knowledge possessed by each community member enhances reciprocal learning, improving the forms of knowledge related to the territorial context under investigation. Mutual learning extends well beyond the mere exchange, generation, and integration of knowledge. Mutual learning creates the ideal conditions for the local community, experts and authority to share knowledge and good practices on a peer-to-peer basis to improve decision-making through a creative and collaborative approach[22], with the ability to integrate knowledge and experiences from various settings to reach a consensus on the transformations needed to achieve future strategies for the cities.

To gain "in-depth knowledge" on how to value community records, it is necessary to use participatory processes aimed at identifying those value elements represented for the definition of a community-based archive defined by and for the community.

Participants in community participatory archives support through their knowledge, a mutual learning mechanism thus established between community members, institutions, and all stakeholders [23].

From this viewpoint, documentation transitions from static document storage to a collaborative and evolving design process. The community-based archive anticipates collective memory by eliciting value rather than just being a repository of past events. It becomes a tool for rethinking and regenerating territories through recognising values [24].

This research is embedded within the framework agreement with the Municipality of Atena Lucana and the "Archivio Atena" project, winner of the public notice "Attractiveness of Villages", part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR M1C3) financed by the Next Generation EU. The objective is to construct a community-based archive for the Municipality of Atena Lucana. This initiative involves a broad spectrum of institutional subjects, local actors, and other figures (such as residents, students, artists, business enterprises, territorial associations, and census operators).

From this perspective, the research presents itself as a methodological advancement in a previous study [24], aiming to elucidate the role that community-based archives can play within decision-making processes in vulnerable inland areas [25].

It seeks to answer the following research questions:

- Is it possible to define the community-based archive as a value-centred tool to support decisions in urban transformation processes by generating new values from those recognised in census processes?
- How and with which method?
- Can mutual learning experiences become the approach through which a community-based archive is structured?

The research is structured into four parts: the first part is dedicated to introducing and contextualising the research questions within a broader international literary panorama. The second part concerns the methodological proposal, where the methodological approach is elicited. The third part deals with the methodological application of the case study. Finally, the fourth part gathers the discussions and conclusions.

2 Methodological Proposal

This paper proposes to advance the methodological approach outlined in the paper 'Community Archive as Place-Based Decision-Making Process: A Proposal for the Archivio Atena' [24] to answer the research questions. The previous experience attempted to outline a model approach to activating a community archive as a support tool in urban regeneration. However, in this advancement, the focus is on recognising the role of the community-based archive within decision-making processes. Specifically, the aim is to identify how the community-based archive can be considered a tool and an approach to activating mission-oriented and value-centred processes.

The methodological proposal, represented in a radial diagram (see Fig. 1), envisages two main conditions that stimulate census actions in a community-based archive: internal and external. In the first case, the community-based archive identifies objectives, timeframes and archiving processes through research-action paths as a territorial socio-cultural organisation and structure. In the second case, the community-based archive is

interrogated by an external decision-making environment (public administration, associations, agencies, etc.) so that the value capital recorded by the archive can support and guide choices at the urban level in response to a specific objective.

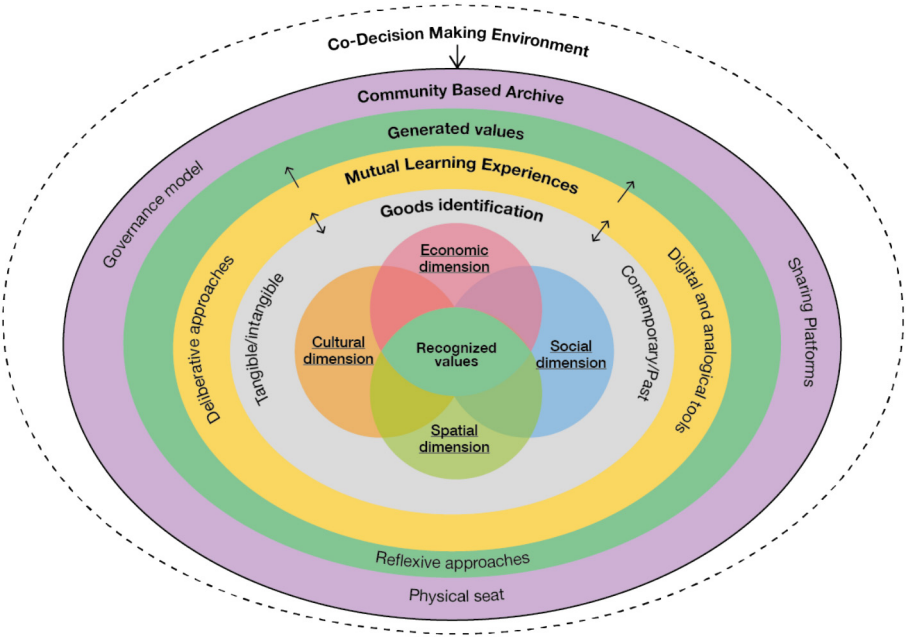


Fig. 1. The methodological approach proposed for a community-based archive

Starting from the literary background analysed, the Mutual Learning experiences (which can be translated, by way of example, into higher education schools, workshops, summer schools, etc.), due to their ability to relate communities of inhabitants and experts, are experienced precisely as operational expedients to co-identify existing values in the context and, at the same time, to co-generate new shared ones. Assuming the role of a hinge, shared learning activities thus represent the operational core of the community-based archive by using a set of deliberative approaches on the one hand and analogue-digital tools on the other.

By deliberative approaches, we mean those approaches that consider the collective and intersubjective meanings that, through social interactions, convey conceptions of the common good among people [26–29]. These approaches also allow for shifts from an individual to a social position, thus helping to identify common ground and reduce the polarisation of viewpoints that often characterise conflict situations. Therefore, deliberative methods can also promote learning and reflection. They encourage people to go beyond their self-interest to construct collective judgements that reflect a more comprehensive and socially just evaluation of public goods. The scientific literature divides these techniques into deliberative, analytic-deliberative, potentially-interpretive deliberative, interpretive, psychometric-deliberative and psychometric [30, 31].

The mentioned techniques can be considered part of the more extensive set of methods for evaluating Ecosystem Services. These methods can be grouped into two categories: those based on revealed preferences, such as direct observation, documentation, media and social media analysis, and those related to stated preferences [32], which include interviews, questionnaires, storytelling, participatory mapping, and focus groups.

Digital or analogue tools are all those devices through which value is identified within the mutual learning paths, and data is censored. These tools include apps, postcards, photographs, video interviews, and augmented reality. Each context, community archive, and census line is unique and requires a specific mutual learning experience and deliberative approach for tangible or intangible assets. Therefore, the tool used for a particular objective of census is determined by the communities participating in the mutual learning experiences.

Starting from the assumption that the community-based archive is conceptually structured on the shared identification of the values that communities consider relevant to the census in the exercise of self-representation [14–16], the methodological proposal pays attention not only to how these are elicited through collaborative modes and specific tools but also in which dimensions these values can be ascribed. At this stage, three main issues are important: the nature of the heritage recognised as a value, the temporal dimension in which contextual values are recognised, and the multidimensionality that characterises values.

In identifying the object of the census as heritage recognised or in the process of being recognised, it is necessary to consider, especially in the context of urban regeneration processes, that the consistency of the object of the census can be both tangible and intangible. According to the UNESCO definition, heritage is defined as the set of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society inherited from past generations, maintained in the present, and passed on for the benefit of future generations. In this sense, tangible and intangible heritage represents an expression of the communities residing in the territory. Specifically, intangible cultural heritage is manifested through oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social customs, ritual and festive events, knowledge and practices relating to nature and the universe, and traditional crafts.

Therefore, it is important to remember that the co-identification of a community-based archive's heritage occurs in both the past and the present. This is necessary because the community-based archive is an ongoing process consolidating past memories and recognising the value of heritage representing contemporary times. The archive observes the context and its contemporary phenomena, which can outline future perspectives in the decision-making process.

Finally, the methodological proposal places the recognition of shared values central in the co-identification of tangible or intangible assets to be archived. Thinking "for values" [33], this approach recognises the census object as a representative medium of deeper values rooted in those relationships between communities and places. Therefore, a multidimensional approach is necessary to structure the process of recognising values potentially related to social, cultural, environmental, and economic dimensions. While exploring and assessing economic and ecological values has reached a precise scientific definition, it is far more complex to understand the vast and intricate set of values

that interact in the social and cultural spheres [34]. These values present divergences among themselves, yet spaces of hybridisation and interpenetration. Cultural values are inherited values that form the core of the cultural dimension, including customs, rituals and conventions that influence the tendencies, skills, and habits that characterise how people live [35]. Harrison and Huntington [36] go so far as to argue that cultural values are the things that matter in shaping economic progress, pointing to a close connection between cultural and economic value, understanding the latter almost as an externality of the former, for Throsby [37] cultural value' refers to the value created by cultural goods and experiences that is not merely 'economic value', tending to separate the two dimensions. An accepted conceptual basis to proceed is to extend the field of influence of cultural value, interpreting it as a composition of observable elements or dimensions (aesthetic value, symbolic value, architectural value, etc.) that may be susceptible to more specific evaluation [37].

Klamer, however, argues at the same time that cultural value is also separate from social value [31], which instead has its dimension, neither economic nor cultural. Pursuing the theory of relational sociology [32], one assumes the definition of the 'relational' nature of the person, i.e. the belief that the relationship with the other constitutes individuality. From this perspective, social values are considered to be those that strengthen human relationships through the practice of respect, justice, and freedom, for example, in seeking a better future. Therefore, social values can be defined as transcendental and understood as part of the social change expected by the people in a community. In this direction, no social value acts independently, as together, they form a chain of values that, exercised repeatedly, release positive results. It is evident, therefore, how recognised values are hardly ascribable to one of the four dimensions but rather to a more complex overlapping of different dimensions that contribute to delineating values and, thus, recognisable assets.

While mutual learning experiences are, therefore, functional in eliciting values, they also become strategic in generating new ones through re-recognition through the relationships and exchanges between communities and experts. The new values, hybrid in their overlap, can manifest themselves in new skills, entrepreneurial perspectives, urban processes, uses, and economies. By way of example only, we mean new values generated, visible through the outputs produced by the census lines (e.g. video-interviews, magazines, publications, exhibitions, web platforms, etc.), social values (e.g. human relations, professional relations, etc.), cultural values (e.g. new projects, new knowledge, etc.), economic values (e.g. new trades, new economic chains, new recognised organisational forms, etc.), environmental values (e.g. new guidelines, new regulatory approaches, new urban transformations, etc.). Newly generated values also mean new futuristic perspectives that a community-based archive is thus able to offer, through its interface, to the decision-maker questioning it from the outside. Recognising the new values generated is important for promoting dialogue and reflection. This dialogue allows communities to re-examine what has been done, the emerging values, and prospects for the future. If learning is considered a 'transformation of experience' [39], this requires skills of reflection, deliberation and evaluation that must be learned [40] to build new forms of cohesive communities around shared values.

The new values generated, together with the recognised values, thus represent the base of an iceberg at the visible apex of which appears, in the chosen platforms, the products of the census carried out (digital or not) and the new value heritages generated; the physical space in which the archive may decide to configure itself; the organisation that governs the archive through its governance model and structure. The combination of these three dimensions externally characterises the community-based archive as a complex tool with which the external decision-making environment can interface to develop processes of valorisation and regeneration of the spatial context in which the community archive operates.

3 Case Study

3.1 The Contest

The case study takes place in Atena Lucana, a municipality in southern Italy with a population of 2,430. Atena Lucana is one of the 15 villages in the Vallo di Diano area, in the Salerno, Campania Region province, which falls under the 'internal areas' category. The town, on the border with Basilicata, is situated on a hill in the western part of the valley at an altitude of 625 m above sea level (see Fig. 2). Access to the Vallo appears to be significantly facilitated by the nearby and modernised Salerno-Reggio Calabria motorway. However, the historic centre of Atena Lucana, of medieval origin, situated on the top of the hill, is currently abandoned. It is built around three concentric rings connected by small streets and ramps that are not easily accessible. Most of the inhabitants of the historic centre have moved to newly built areas.

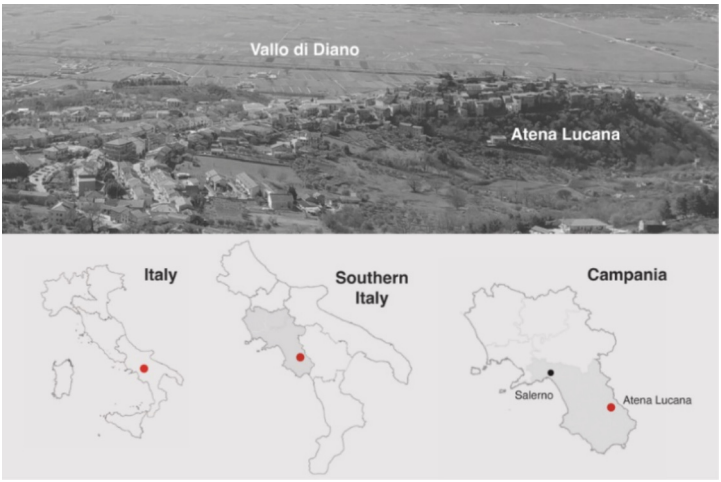


Fig. 2. Atena Lucana

Thanks to the allocation of the Ministerial Grant for the Attraction of Historic Villages, the creation of a Community Archive called "Archivio Atena" is in full swing.

The project involves digitising the cultural heritage and creating a permanent laboratory for the meeting of researchers, scientists, artists, cultural operators, and public and private institutions to develop new ways of narrating the territory through the identification of spatial, cultural and social values. The Community Archive aims to collect a community's local cultural heritage, both material and immaterial, to preserve and promote its shared identity.

The "Archivio Atena" is part of a broader research project called "Opera Paese", which aims to create a digital photographic archive in the Cilento Vallo di Diano and Alburni National Park (SA). "Opera Paese" is led by a group of researchers (photographers, art historians and experts in digital archives) who use photography as a research tool and consider the photographic archive as a means of preserving collective memory and promoting the territory. "Opera Paese" focuses on acquiring and sharing private photographs, activated through a participatory and collaborative collection. A simplified method for collecting, digitising and describing family photographs has been developed in collaboration with the Central Institute for Cataloguing and Documentation of the Ministry of Culture. This method was transferred to a local working group through a training process.

The Municipality of Atena Lucana, supported by the will of the associations present in the area, has expressed interest in adopting the practices of Opera Paese to initiate a cultural and urban regeneration involving the community and the space of the historic centre. Hence, the participation in the ministerial subsidy, resource allocation, and the birth of the "Archivio Atena" project.

In 2022, Atena Lucana will begin experimenting with a new method developed in collaboration with training institutes in the field of photography, such as ISIA in Urbino, university institutes, such as La Sapienza in Rome and Federico II in Naples, and ministerial bodies, such as ICCD, the Central Institute for Cataloguing and Documentation.

3.2 Mutual Learning Experience

This paper recounts the specific experience of the Mutual Learning School of Advanced Training conducted with La Sapienza University of Rome, which aimed at professionalisation in the processes of collection, organisation, digitisation, and description of private photography, aimed at the establishment and increase of community archives. The school is involved in the realisation of census projects by enhancing elements belonging to cultural heritage and their respective values. All the work carried out in this phase became part of the gradual process of composing the community archive.

The narrative of this case study attempts to demonstrate how the community archive feeds its census lines through an experience of Mutual Learning and how the archive can support community decisions. The students and inhabitants who participated in this training experience contributed to developing a thematic census in a bottom-up process of construction and restitution. The actively involved community members, those who came here on purpose, and external experts activated a collaborative process by exchanging knowledge, experiences, and diverse perspectives. Together, they determined the scope and contents of the archive.

The school encouraged an open and inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders. The students were divided into balanced working groups in terms of age, level of education, interests, and skills. Each group included at least one photographer and one resident.

The school was structured into modules, with some consisting of theoretical lessons and others of laboratory activities. During the laboratory, the students took exploratory walks identifying places and cultural values that trigger relationships. Thanks to urban and rural walks, collaborations with residents were activated. In a collaborative approach, several group brainstorming sessions, guided by teachers, were structured to formulate census themes. The investigation phase was important for defining a theme, during which interviews were conducted with the people involved.

The census project analysed in this paper stems from the shared idea of a group reflecting on the theme of dwelling, which implies observing and understanding habits and housing conditions. From the investigation conducted by the students in the field, it emerged that for the community of Atena Lucana, the kitchen has been and continues to be a central place for domestic life, a place of sharing not only within the family but also communal. The group of students under examination came into contact with the Pignata family, facilitated by the presence of a family member in the work team. The School of Advanced Training students and the extended family became the authors of a new census.

The Pignata family shared the old hearth of the house (see Fig. 3), perhaps the most intimate space and dimension of family life. The old kitchen became a place of learning, a research and action set. It was rearranged and reactivated to allow the preparation of a typical dish from the culinary tradition “Sciuscielli.”



Fig. 3. Pignata family kitchen

The material goods identified and censused during this research were the kitchen space composed of the hearth and the small furnace, both inserted in a structure of

bricks and mortar, lined with white tiles; a sizeable wooden pantry cupboard still used to store preserves, utensils, and ancient tools that make up the work surface (see Fig. 4). These were described and catalogued one by one according to parameters established with the archive expert from ICCD. The identified immaterial goods were the ancient recipes narrated, the stories, and the interviews. The analogue tools used were hand-drawn sketches made during site visits, which provide an overall image of the space and the transcription of recipes. Digital tools included photos of the kitchen space, the re-staged set, each catalogued utensil, and recordings of interviews.



Fig. 4. Census of tools and utensils

The census of these assets results from a deliberative approach because the identification of the census theme, the implementation methods, and the outcomes resulted from interaction among experts, students, and representatives of the local community.

From studying this space, strongly characterised by material and immaterial goods, research extends beyond the domestic walls through new forms of conviviality and sharing. The narrative of people, stories, practices, and memories takes shape through the study of individual objects, documentation, and photographic census. "Fire, Pignata, and Sciuscielli" becomes a participatory art action: every process, tool, technique, or culinary recipe is staged to be transmitted, safeguarding the heritage of the domestic hearth. The project found its restitution in a convivial moment that starts from the preparation of the dishes, reaches the consumption of the meal, and ends with the stories of the people. A community dinner that explores Atena Lucana in its traditions, discovering its gastronomic peculiarities, ancient customs, and narratives that will become part of the extensive Community-based Archive.Subsequently, a reflective phase opened in which the working group was encouraged to critically discuss the identified values' multidimensionality. Their cheerful and negative implications, possible conflicts or contradictions, and the challenges that could arise in repeating such an experience and promoting these values were examined.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The research reflects on the role of community-based archives as a decision-support tool, particularly in urban and territorial transformations affecting vulnerable contexts in inland areas.

In the context of the case study of Archivio Atena, in the historical centre of the village of Atena Lucana, in southern Italy, it was observed how community-based archives have the capacity to go beyond the conventional role of preservation and instead act as platforms for the activation of communities in paths of civic participation. Cultural heritage and memory's tangible and intangible resources can shape future visions and urban policies. Creating a community cooperative to manage the community archive and collaborating between the public administration and the archive to regenerate an abandoned village is a good example.

The experimentation of approaches based on mutual learning to include local communities in creative processes of co-design and co-production with experts has proven to be particularly effective due to its ability to recognise shared values through experiences and, at the same time, generate new ones. The school of higher education, as well as workshops, residencies, and summer schools, prove to be compelling opportunities, especially for re-interpreting neglected contexts such as the historical centre of Athena. While the exchange of knowledge and expertise between locals and non-locals stimulates the sharing of memories and limits their loss, it also fosters the emergence of new ideas and projects. The intergenerational and shared recognition of social and cultural values, which are considered relevant and therefore to be preserved and passed on, often stimulates innovative processes for their re-interpretation, generating both new artefacts (crafts 3.0, design, etc.) and new cultural gimmicks (events, festivals, etc.) that can innovate traditions and develop new ones. The new projects linked to the theme of food and wine tourism, which emerged from the historic village kitchens census, manifest this.

At the same time, it is also necessary to recognise how the centrality of mutual learning experiences in the methodological framework of the community-based archive entails risks. While the sustainability of these experiences requires significant design efforts and expertise, mutual learning is not always easy to implement in local processes. This implies a constant interaction between participants, inhabitant communities, experts of different ages and backgrounds, and geographical contexts, which sometimes find weak spaces for mutual understanding. Moreover, the mistrust of the inhabitant communities can sometimes be a barrier to the success of mutual learning experiences structured in this way.

Moreover, the physical space in which the community-based archive is located, as well as the platforms for collecting and sharing the census materials, both digital and non-digital, become, in these processes, shared spaces of co-learning that are representative of the communities that inhabit them and also significant for external communities. To date, Archivio Atena is fuelled by the production of photographs by contemporary authors taken during residencies open to artists and scholars from different disciplines, capable of narrating the multidimensionality of recognised values from various points of view.

In conclusion, the research proposal consolidated in the practice of Archivio Atena provides a replicable approach and model for activating community-based archives as

effective and innovative decision-making tools within urban and human regeneration processes based on listening and participation of local communities.

For the future, it is crucial to continue exploring and implementing community-based archives in other contexts and to stimulate an evaluation of the multidimensional impacts they can generate on the communities they inhabit and the territories in which they operate.

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