



## **PROCEEDINGS**

**16TH CIRN CONFERENCE 24-26 October 2018**

**Monash University Prato Centre, Italy**

**"RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND CREATIVE  
ENDEAVOUR THAT AIM TO SHAPE AND  
INFLUENCE POLICY AND PROGRAMS".**

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## **BACKGROUND TO THE CONFERENCE**

Since the founding colloquium in 2003, the CIRN conferences have been marked by informality, collegiality and interdisciplinary thinking, bringing together people from many different countries in an ideal Italian setting. Themes have ranged across issues such as privilege, gender and sexual identities, forms of knowledge, documentation, participation and community-based research, power, ideals and reality, measurement, and the applied arts. While we have a particular theme each year we also seek papers (refereed, work-in-progress, non-refereed), presentations and papers (including Graduate student presentations) related to any aspect of Community Informatics Community Archiving, or Development Informatics, or the Art, and Archives Memories and ICTs space. We are particularly interested in papers from researchers and practitioners that can address the challenges of locating community-focussed research within wider theoretical and practice frameworks. We also have a Research Student (Masters and PhD) presence and encourage the presentation of current or planned work in colloquium sessions. This is a great opportunity for interaction with other students in an international setting.

[For the proceedings past events, archives etc, please see <https://www.monash.edu/it/our-research/research-centres-and-labs/cosi/prato-conferences>. For past websites/events (services have closed down, no one hand-crafts sites anymore. 😞) look for ccnr.net between 2002 - 2010 as well as cirn.wikispaces.com 2009-1018 on [archive.org](https://archive.org).]

## **OUR (INTER-)DISCIPLINARY FRAME**

Community Informatics is primarily concerned with improving the well-being of people and their communities through more effective use of ICTs. Community Informatics foregrounds social change and transformative action in emergent social-technical relationships rather than prediction and control and likewise, Development Informatics or ICT4D is concerned with ICTs in the international development context. This orientation also has much in common with Community Archiving. Community-centric archival research, education and practice are concerned with empowering communities in support of such desirable objectives as democracy, human and civil rights, self-determination, sustainable development, and social inclusion. Recordkeeping and archiving are fundamental infrastructural components supporting community information, self-knowledge and memory needs, thus contributing to resilient communities and cultures and supporting reconciliation and recovery in the aftermath of conflict, oppression. Development Informatics (also called ICT4D) is involved with the use of ICTs in international development settings. The purpose of International Development is heavily contested, and thus, the use and interpretations of ICTs in that space is also subject to a wide variety of interpretations. More recently, those in the Art, and Archives Memories and ICTs have been participating with us in an exploration of how the media, dance and other forms of arts interested in ICTs intersect with community development, community memory and archives.

## 2018 THEME

Most often, we want our work to have influence.

Whether in Community Informatics, Development Informatics, Community Archives, or Art, and Archives Memories and ICTs projects involving ICTs, we aim for activity that influences not just future projects or research programs, but also government policy. However, the interests of different audiences (the academy, communities on the ground, NGOs, funders, policy makers) are not necessarily congruent when it comes to being influenced by the impacts, outcomes, value and worth of a project program, or more abstract research. Choices need to be made.

The attempt to shape and influence on the basis of research and practice is sometimes expressed as utilization-focussed evaluation "The focus in utilization-focused evaluation is on supporting intended use by intended users. The essence of this approach is a continual examination of and adaptation to how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and how they experience the evaluation process" (Michael Quinn Patton). But who are the users here? And what is the real world? Who has control?

- Just what do "shape and influence mean?" For what purposes? Do we become too constrained by trying to "shape and influence" institutions?
- What about the general space of public discourse, policy, and influence particularly via new media as an alternate means of shaping and influencing?
- What are good (and bad) examples of shaping and influencing?
- What are the opportunities and constraints with attempting to shape and influence policies and programs? Can it stifle free inquiry and discourse when there are findings that surprise or raise controversy?
- Even if the utilization of research and practice are not the key purpose of project or program activity, what assumptions are made about what counts as important or will have influence in reporting to funders, policy-makers and others, including communities themselves?
- Can the focus on future utilization result in hindering innovation or experimentation? What forms of research and practice are most useful in meeting this challenge? Are they a help or hindrance?
- What is the place of community-based research in such an orientation? Who leads? Who follows? Whose voices count?
- How is research/practice messaged to different audiences for impact?
- Is seeking to influence in a neoliberal environment turning scholarship and practice into commodities for selection? Are there novel perspectives/approaches/methodologies that help expose underlying assumptions implicit in neoliberal approaches to ICT-related contexts? What are innovative solutions to these persistent challenges?
- What are the alignments and discontinuities between bottom-up ideals that are often process driven and the demands of funders and policy-makers for "useful" and "accountable research and practice? What has worked or not worked for you? Can the imposition of requirements be used as a form of power and control? What forms of reporting have been or could be most useful to different audiences?
- We are particularly interest in papers that can report on and theorize these problems in community informatics, development informatics, community archives the arts/archives community.

We welcome papers (refereed, work-in-progress, non- refereed), presentations and papers (including Graduate student presentations) related to any aspect of Community Informatics Community Archiving, or Development Informatics, or the Art, and Archives Memories and ICTs space. We are particularly interested in papers from researchers and practitioners that can address the challenges of locating community-focussed research within wider theoretical and practice frameworks.

## **Keynotes**

Natalie Pang, National University of Singapore  
Eduardo Villanueva Mansilla, Pontificia Universidad Catolica Del Peru

## **Committee**

Tom Denison, Monash University  
Vince Dzekian, Monash University  
Joanne Evans, Monash University  
Anne Gilliland, UCLA  
Kiera Ladner, University of Manitoba  
Sue McKemmish, Monash University (Chair)  
David Nemer, University of Kentucky  
Safiya Noble, UCLA  
Gillian Oliver, Monash University  
Colin Rhinesmith, Simmons College  
Mauro Sarrica, Sapienza University, Rome  
Martin Wolske, University of Illinois  
Larry Stillman, Monash University (conference organisation and administration)

## **Peer Reviewers:**

Marco Adria University of Alberta  
Misita Anwar, Monash University  
Tom Denison, Monash University  
Joanne Evans, Monash University  
Gillian Oliver, Monash University  
Greg Rolan, Monash University  
Larry Stillman, Monash University

## **Peer Review Statement**

The Conference Proceedings contains refereed, non-refereed and PhD colloquium papers and Powerpoints from the conference.

- All full papers in the refereed category were subject to blind peer review by at least two reviewers, and reviewers' comments returned to the authors. Authors were then required to make changes and if necessary, a further review conducted before final approval.

## **Whose Voices Count? From public records to public memory**

Charles J. Farrugia

University of Malta / National Archives of Malta

Traditionally, accession policies of national archive institutions world-wide gave preference, if not exclusivity, to public records. This approach is nowadays under challenge in a number of archives. Private records, often in the form of oral testimony, are gradually finding their place side by side with their public counterparts. The National Archives of Malta recently embraced this approach. Through a project called MEMORJA archivists are becoming not only appraisers of records but actual co-creators (Farrugia 2006).

This paper aims to address the question of whose voices count when applied to a real life scenario in particular on the MEMORJA project. The venture had direct implications on the functioning of the leading and participating archivists. Instead of managing the accessions process, they are now going out there in search of oral testimonies, ephemera and audio-visual documentation. This approach poses new challenges. And these are the issues analysed in this paper.

### **Archives and voices**

This study poses a number of questions. Whose voices are we striving to capture in our project? What ethical implications does such a process pose? To what extent are we trying to strengthen the voices of communities that are underrepresented? To what extent is this eagerness to strengthen such voices shaping and influencing our accessions, appraisal and outreach processes. This paper questions the decision-making processes applied by the MEMORJA team at the National Archives of Malta. In particular, what areas of focus have been chosen for oral testimony, and what are the characteristics emerging from each theme. To what extent will such decisions shape the future of oral testimony in Malta?

The approach for this presentation consists of an assessment of the processes involved in the current MEMORJA project as compared to the traditional processes. Furthermore, it will delve into such aspects such as the methodological approaches of oral history, archival documentation and an investigation on who is exerting influences – government policy, the archival institution, the available resources, underrepresented communities or a mix of all these?

The debate on whether the archivist should act as a gatekeeper of records and neutral broker of the information embedded in them or be more pro-active in the creation process is a long-standing one. Gradually, in part due to the narrowing in timeframes between the creation phase and the end of the lifecycle brought about by electronic records, archivists started involving themselves much more in the initial stages of the creation of the record. The phenomenon is reflected in the thinking of a number of archival scholars who challenged the whole concept of neutrality and objectivity (Schellnack-Kelly 2017a).

Brien Brothman argues that record-keepers are “creating value, that is, an order of value, by putting things in their proper place, by making place(s) for them” (Brothman 1991). Furthermore, in his writings he re-frames archival work as a form of *giving*, of making gifts. His main argument is that we have been thinking too much in terms of the archivist’s role as that of keeping and preserving. In his view “the main contention is that a dynamic of giving beats at the heart of the archival endeavour” (Brothman 2010). The role of the archivist in the whole process of the creation of records is also discussed by Richard Cox who wrote that ... “archivists need to reflect on how their actions really contribute to the purpose of archives, and most archivists generally assume that their mission is more than assembling random collections of interesting stuff for some ill-defined societal or scholarly purposes” (Cox 2002).

Other authors have put the archive and thus the archivist in the storytelling domain. Schellnack-Kelly highlights this link in the works of both Derrida and Foucault. Derrida argues that “the archive is a construction created from, and an expression of, power. He views every interpretation of the archive as an enrichment, an

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extension of the archive. That is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future” (Derrida 1996). This perspective views the archivist as the one imbued with the powers to control and determine the constituent elements of memory by collecting the archive (Schellnack-Kelly 2017b).

In a traditional national archive approach, the sources for collecting the archive were pre-determined. The creating bodies within public offices decided what and when to create records in line with the legal obligations, mission statement and working rules, regulations, customs and traditions of the institution.

For a number of years since the 19th century the predominant historical thinking enforced a strict demarcation between orality and literacy. This however, gave way in later years and in today’s society community stories are becoming ever more vital. In the words of John Chircop, communities’ stories, “... not only preserve local traditional knowledge, customs, and a sense of social identity and belonging, but more fundamentally they continue the more intimate, natural, eye-to-eye, emotional contact between persons of different ages” (Chircop 2014).

## **MEMORJA: the project**

The current Memorja project steered by the National Archives was not the first of its kind in Malta. As early as 1994 the Malta Oral History Society was set up. Following that, inspired by historian John Chircop the History Department at the University of Malta gave the possibility for the setting up of the Oral History Centre in 1999. These measures led to the first oral history fieldwork which developed into the ‘People’s Voices of the Twentieth Century’ (Chircop 2003)

This came at a time when the National Archives was preoccupied with the lack of access to certain material of national significance, such as photos of the island’s most important historical events. A number of Maltese photographers were also frustrated with the state of affairs in terms of the difficulty in accessing professionally organised photographic archives. Their offer to collaborate in some way triggered the idea of a permanent portrait exhibition. This was the starting point of an ambitious project under the name – the National Memory Project.<sup>1</sup> The event marked the onset of an effort to bring under one-roof components from the Maltese Islands’ national and public memory.

What started out as the initiative of archivists reacting to the changing needs of the profession was later endorsed politically. An electoral manifesto proposal in the run up to Malta’s 2013 elections specifically promised the setting up of an oral history project. Thus, to some extent, the proposal became a political target aimed at bottom-up representation of ideals. This politically driven process paved the way for the national archives to justify the request for funds for new recruitment and consolidation of human resources, while providing the funding for the procurement of the technological infrastructure needed. The archives took the opportunity to turn this political measure into tangible professional archival measures aimed at the building of a state of the art audio-visual representation of ‘holistic’ memory of the nation.

In late-2016, the National Archives of Malta initiated plans for the rebranding of the formerly-titled National Memory Project into MEMORJA, a new oral, sound and visual archive. This change was only agreed upon following intensive brain storming sessions or often heated arguments and clashing perspectives. On one hand there was the argument in favour of using the term public memory, specifically hinting that it is the memory of the people and not the memory of the nation that we are after. The other view was that the institution is a national one, vested by a national remit through legislation. Thus, the argument was that by removing the term national from the title of the project we will render it less national, unique and authoritative. The final decision was to go for the word *memorja* which in itself has a number of advantages. First of all it is a word in Maltese. Thus the message is that we will be preserving elements of the Maltese national identity, central to which there is the language. Secondly, it is a word that is understood by many as it is similar in so many languages.

Since the main objective of the project is to employ cutting edge research, methodologies, theoretical and archival approaches and techniques to collect, record, transcribe, preserve and make available all deposited material detailing the history of the Maltese Islands, the sub-heading oral, sound and visual archives was added.

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The ambitious aspirations of the creators of this project are that gradually it develops into the main depositor of national and public memory.

A five-person team started working on this project in January 2017. Members on the team undertook a course in oral history and public memory before they could embark on the fieldwork. MEMORJA aims to record and collect oral history interviews, personal photographs, documents and other ephemera and, as a result, the National Archives of Malta has taken on the dual roles of a memory-capturing institution and one which now creates records, as opposed to the traditional task of preserving government/public records.

As of writing, MEMORJA is in possession of 70 oral history interviews and six written accounts. In addition, all legacy material from the Public Memory Archive (PMA) at the University of Malta's History Department is gradually being converted from analogue to digital to merge (in digital format) with MEMORJA. It is estimated that this initiative is bringing into the project more than 500 interviews on a variety of themes. But in order to proceed in a structured manner, a number of themes have been identified to be worked upon. Around each theme, a thematic focus group was formed, led by a lead official and bringing together experts who can bring contacts, material or links to all those in the community who can contribute either through interviews, information or other ephemera.

### **The thematic focus groups**

The research themes selected for the initial focus group are:

- British Expatriates in Malta
- Public Administration
- Experiencing War: survival, shelter and food
- Maltese Emigration (The Malta-Lampedusa connection);
- Bell ringing / campanalian culture.

Each was selected with a specific purpose in mind, but mainly in order to fill gaps in our documentation and capture the voices of those who are not documented, for one reason or other. For the scope of this paper, each interviewer of each focus theme was questioned about her/his experience. Interviewers were asked the following questions: a. Do the interviewees convey to you the feeling that there is a sense of justice being carried out in having their voices heard to and documented for posterity? and b. Has there been any instance in your interviews whereby the information given contradicts or challenges historical accounts as we know them to date? Their initial feedback is recorded at the end of the description of each theme below.

#### **British expatriates in Malta**

British expatriates in Malta seeks to delve deeper into the history of the relationship between the United Kingdom and Malta by recording local history with the help of individuals who lived during the final decades of British Malta (1800-1964). Interviewees – British, Maltese and Anglo-Maltese persons – discuss the military bases, everyday life in post-war Malta, political issues and cultural differences, amongst other subjects. This theme was further expanded when the experiences of service families' children started being recorded for posterity as well. These children had attended the Naval Children's School and HM Dockyard Children's School which had occupied sites at Ta' Xbiex, Cottonera, Senglea and the Dockyard before moving to Tal-Handaq, Hal Qormi.

Questioned about her experience so far, the first interviewer who worked on the British expatriates theme argued that she did not feel that those interviewed felt a sense of justice being carried out through giving them the opportunity for the interview (Blake 2018). However, she did point out that those who have been willing to briefly discuss the Mintoff administration seemed to be pleased that they were voicing some of their personal experiences/feelings.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Public Administration**

Civil servants are often regarded as implementing the policies of Government from 'behind the scenes'. Often, they are voiceless as they have to back government policy, whether they like it or not. However, through their memories, the public can mould an idea of the structure of Public Service '*ic-Civil*' and of certain episodes which

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are now history. The main events that are featuring in these interviews are background stories of the granting of Independence in 1964 and the inner workings of the British Forces' 'run-down'. Other ex-public high-ranking officers have experiences related to Malta's accession to the EU in 2004. Other subjects tackled in these oral reminiscences are former Prime Ministers, their work ethic and their relationships with other government officials, changes to public administration over the decades, different functions and grades, personal experiences and the role of women in the civil service.

Contrary to the feeling conveyed to the first interviewer, in this cohort of interviews, the sense of justice being done was felt by the majority of interviewees. The sense of justice or rather the need to recount what each public officer has achieved when in office was strongly present. In particular, when asked whether they felt there was enough appreciation for their work, some of them said it plain and straight that there was not (Caruana 2018). One of those interviewed and who had served for several years in roles of director and later Permanent secretary position had this to say when questioned about the sense of appreciation for his work:

*I do doubt whether there is recognition, especially from the public ... I encountered several public officers who work hard and shoulder responsibility, and work competently ... When you see, as I have, officers who are really passionate about their work, you cannot deprive them of adequate recognition (Memorja Interviews 2018).<sup>3</sup>*

Most participants in the public administration theme made sure to list and describe all the projects and important tasks that they have accomplished in a certain level of detail. It seems they were eager to make sure that their contribution be registered for future generations.

### **Experiencing War: survival, shelter and food**

Experiencing War: survival, shelter and food aims to document and record a past which is slowly but surely disappearing from public memory. These oral testimonies – of which there is still a substantial number – strive to preserve daily experiences as felt by the people on the ground during the Siege of Malta between 1940-1943. Stories of the outbreak of hostilities and the first bombings on 11 June 1940 are still rife in interviewees' memories, whereas mass evacuations, the refugee experience, fear and uncertainty, the communal kitchens, racketeering, hunger, sanitation, shelters, soldiers and sirens are still recalled with clarity and lucidity.

Asked about his experience with this cohort of subjects, the thematic leader said that all interviewees about World War II were excited in helping out in the project. Though on one hand they were quite surprised that this initiative took such a long time to be put into practice as they noted that most of the relevant people who were around back then had since passed away. They had surmised that the project was somewhat "a noble gesture of recording this generation's struggles".

This was also the thematic group whose interviewees posed a number of challenges to the established line of events. Some even questioned dates as recorded in official documentation. One of the interviews touched on the rather controversial topic of the execution of Carmelo Borg Pisani accused of serving as a spy for Italy in British Malta.<sup>4</sup> The 95-year old interviewee insisted that Borg Pisani had landed in Malta in 1941 and not the summer of 1942. The interviewer had to decide whether to challenge this point or not and decided in favour of not interfering for fear of disturbing the flow of the interview. His assessment of the situation was the following:

*I did not stop him as that would have ruined the flow of the interview, the interviewee would have doubted himself and would thus have jeopardized the remainder of the interview. Such scenarios can be irritating but these can be cross-checked with existing literature and historical accounts (Baldacchino 2018a).*

This was also a theme that reignited a certain level of anger in respondents, due to them supporting one faction or other in the hostilities. One of the respondents touched on the controversial topic of deportation of Maltese to Uganda by the British. He came up with a rather bold statement stating that "...wartime colonial government had incriminating evidence on the deportees and had every right to deport these quislings away from our shores"



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(Baldacchino 2018b). As proof of this he quoted a director of his at the Office of the Prime Minister who around 1947-48 had explicitly told him that the files concerning these people were in his safe. Notwithstanding, he was not been able to find them anywhere.

**Emigration: The Malta-Lampedusa connection**

The Maltese population experienced extensive migratory flows in the inter-war period and the nineteen fifties and sixties. It is estimated that there are twice as much Maltese in the diaspora than in Malta itself. The process is documented in a structured manner in the public records held at the national archives. It is all documented in a top to bottom approach. The state machinery was documenting the shifts in population through passport applications, visa permits, passage-assisted schemes and other official shipping lists or air passenger logbooks. While this approach provided emigration historians with a gold mine of data, they often failed in capturing the human side of emigration.

The movement of people and how this is documented in public archives and its effects on demography of populations is still a current preoccupation. The population is continuously struggling to adapt to an influx of people, some economic migrants from North Africa and other from all over Europe in search for employment. Sociologists, anthropologists, and historians need the official documentation to understand these flows of people. But the documents will only give one side of the story. Oral testimony supplements the official documentation and imbues it with feelings and personal emotions. Amongst the many facets of the emigration saga, there are several sub-plots that have escaped focused studies or have been almost put under the carpet consciously or unconsciously. One of these topics is the contacts and relations between Malta and the Italian island of Lampedusa.

Even though Malta and Lampedusa are separated by a stretch of the Mediterranean Sea, they share similar economic, trade and socio-cultural aspects. Due to logistical realities of this research theme, fieldwork and interviews had were conducted in Lampedusa in September 2017. Throughout the interviews with the individuals who agreed to be recorded, there were two main topics prevalent in contemporary Lampedusans' memories: first of all there were accounts of stories passed from one generation to another through oral tradition dating back to the first Maltese settlers on the island in the early 1800s. These families had worked predominantly in agriculture. Nowadays only two families with Maltese surnames remain: the de Battista family and the Caruana family. The second aspect touched upon was the commercial and cultural connections between Lampedusa and the Maltese Islands the 1950s and 1980s. Testimonies of Lampedusan fishermen make reference to life at sea, life in Valletta before the British departure, entertainment, the products on sale in shops at the time and the sale of fish stocks.

This particular theme brought with it a number of challenges. The first was the language. Interviews had to be carried out in Italian. Thus a member of staff of the archives who is a native Italian speaker was sent to do fieldwork in Lampedusa. Even this proved challenging as at times the dialects spoken were quite challenging even to a native Italian speaker. The other challenge was building trust between the interviewee and the interviewer. This was hampered by a sense of bitter legacy between the two nationalities in years gone by and also by the logistics. It is challenging to build a trust relation in just a week or two.

Asked about her experience interviewing fellow Italians about their relation with Malta and the Maltese, the interviewer said that all persons approached where interested and glad that their testimonies were being recorded. They appreciated that someone was interested in their experiences of their own story, investigating certain subjects unknown to many, and showing a level of sensitivity to towards their life experiences. On the whole, the narrative given was not much different from that already known. To some extent this is also understandable considering that most of the interviewees were also themselves involved in the writing and production of publications about the history of the island compiled so far (Sestili 2018).

**Bell ringing / campanalian culture**

This theme can be considered as one that originated from the community and not from the archives. It was inspired by the private initiative of a bell-ringing enthusiast. Over a span of two decades he painstakingly recorded

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all bells in all villages in Malta during the various feasts. It was no mean feat considering that this was purely on a voluntarily basis and that he had to deal with hundreds of churches and negotiate the deal. In all, the national archives received 3,600 recordings amounting to 600Gb of data (NAM 2016). From an archival point of view this donation is considered as a goldmine. Furthermore, the enthusiast organised the data according to parish, church, and specific feast and time of the day, and thus provided well-structured metadata.

With all this data, it is now possible for the persons in the focus group to turn their attention on the other aspects of the topic. Bell-ringing relates to the local customs and also certain international rules of the Catholic church. There is a whole terminology associated with it and a lot of technical approaches how to conduct bell ringing. There are persons who have bell-ringing as their hobby, while others provide such services against payment. We want to hear their story, document it and render this aspect from Maltese society part of the permanent memory of society.

Although work on this theme is at its very initial phase, with only one interview concluded and another six persons who have been pre-interviewed, there seems to be agreement that this project will give back some life to this tradition that has been struggling during these times. They identify lack of interest in youths or too much regulations as two main factors rendering bell ringing less important in the life of most towns and villages (Caruana, 2018).

## Discussion

The current assessment of the project indicated that different themes do pose differing challenges. Some themes are almost exhausted and will soon be closed. Others such as local production and industrial heritage have already been earmarked to be worked upon. It is clear that there are a number of challenges which have come to the fore and that need multidisciplinary discussion as they do have an impact on the way the project progresses and the voices it captures. For practicality purposes the challenges have been grouped under three headings: archival, technological and of a human nature.

### Archival Challenges

The actualisation of the project has brought to the discussion table several issues of an archival nature. Most questions emanate from the new realities we have to work in. These realities are reorienting the role of the archivist in the institution. This process has a bearing on the issue of job nomenclature, job description and also the type of training and qualifications required to fulfil such a task in the most professional manner. Thus, the process raised questions such as the following: Do we need archivists to carry out this process? To what extent are historians better placed to carry out such process? Is it best to have a national archives officer handling a theme or an enthusiast who already knows the intricacies of the topic and the people involved? Can the interviewer manage to cope with doing the interview and the transcript, as best methodology in oral history dictates? Once the data is captured, how best to organise the data both in the repository and if put online? What about the impact on ownership rights and the interaction of the user with the data.

Such 'public-private partnership' in the creation of records raises another archival issue that is very relevant to the discussion about whose voices we are after. It is the dimension of the interaction between the subject of the narrative, his or her family and the archive, which topic was debated from a practitioners' point of view by Mary Stewart and Cynthia Brown. In their assessment Stewart and Brown outlined how archived recordings provide crucial context to family research and also how the families involved in the interviews or referred to in the same interviews react to them. They also discuss the ethical challenges posed by providing online access to such sources and argue that:

*Oral testimony can pose ethical challenges that are perhaps more emotionally charged than other media – about whose voices are heard, the wide range of comment and reflection on the actions and characters of those described, and the perspectives that they present in the interviews (Stewart and Brown 2017).*

### Technological Challenges

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The project also depends heavily on the technology available. The biggest challenge here was the large amount of recordings carried out in the past by university students. Some were on tape, others on cds. The quality of the recording was not always optimal. Apart from the conversion needed from analogue to digital, other issues emerged. Some recordings reside on formats that are already becoming obsolete and quite challenging to migrate.

Plans were put into place by our IT people on how to store the data on servers that are not connected to the internet and replicate it on the users server. At that stage the issue of whether to stick to the system of sound recording only was raised up. The same interviewers came to us questioning whether we are missing valuable data in the non-verbals of the interviewees. Thus, the shift is now at hand to start recording not only the sound of the interview but also the visual. This is putting extra pressure on our IT people to invest more energy and finance on the handling of data which will be much larger than if we had to stick to the sound only approach.

This latter move is already being challenged by those who are arguing that if we are going to film we should go for best image quality. What if snippets need to be included in some feature or media production? Again, this adds to the technical challenge. While the traditional dictum in the digitisation of records for archives was always to go for the best resolution possible, in this case we need also to consider the resources of the institution. While technically the sky is the limit to how sophisticated we want to go, the whole project needs to fit in the general resources capability of the managing institution.

There is also the argument of how technically perfect do we need the recording to be? Is it better to interview the data subject in his own daily context where the interviewee feels most comfortable or in a studio environment where we can have optimum sound ambience? On this we have been guided by the current trend in oral projects of capturing the voice in its natural surroundings, even with the background noise and context as it is contributory to the interview. At instances, we have encountered interviewees, mainly from the public administration thematic group who have refused interviews in their own residences. Thus, for such cases we still had to provide a more formal set up in our head office.

### **Human Resources Challenge**

Apart from the considerations discussed above, the bottom line is that we are dealing with people and not with records and thus the human consideration is fundamental to the success of such a process. Some interviewees for the British Expatriates theme were thankful for the fact that they were given the space to express their feelings not only with fellow expatriates but with an 'official / institutional' body. Participants in the public administration theme considered the project as giving a voice to officers who have been reluctant to speak up due to public service 'silence code'. For this cohort we realised, that although they were all in high office and had a lot of say in decision-making, they rarely had the opportunities to speak up, as the same office often prohibited them from doing so.

Themes such as Experiencing War and the Emigration are particular for the strong emotional feelings expressed by interviewees. The Second World War and Malta's role in the hostilities has been documented really well from primary sources. But this project is making it possible to tap into new ground. Instead of statistics and dates which are well known, we are documenting the emotional feelings and strong political affiliations of participants.

The same strong feelings were felt in the interviewees carried out under the Maltese Emigration (The Malta-Lampedusa connection) topic. It became obvious that the Lampedusians view the Maltese as colonisers who brought a certain level of disruption to their island. This dimension of Malta viewed as a colonising country is also worth documenting and the best way to do it is from the peoples' views and memories. To some extent, the process has helped in a small way to reconcile a bit the two perspectives of the Lampedusians and the Maltese, at a time when both islands are again experiencing similar challenges with migration in the Mediterranean.

Some of the participants also argued that by focusing on a particular theme MEMORJA is helping in keeping alive and strengthening particular traditions or professions. This was the feedback about the bell ringing tradition. This also raises the issue of whether such a project should target dying traditions and act as a catalyst to rejuvenate them. The question for further discussion here is whether we are being too demanding on our archival institutions most of which are already facing big challenges to survive. Is this presenting us with a golden opportunity to realign the role of national archives in society and make them more relevant and politically visible tools for action in communities?

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that most archives are realising that society demands a better representation of different voices in national memory repositories. A number of national archives are venturing into new ways of how to achieve this. This challenge comes at a time when archivists are already faced with pressures of financial sustainability. Some are also struggling to handle the digital disruption. Memory projects are encouraging/forcing archivists to adjust to new scenarios whereby they do not work in isolation but within multidisciplinary teams. It is a new reality whereby the voices we need to preserve do not come in ready-made boxes. The MEMORJA project we have in Malta have inspired us to go out of our buildings and to hunt for voices. Some of the voices were underrepresented. Administrative bureaucracy or some other form of social taboo suffocated other voices. There is no doubt that the project is proving successful in identifying these people and have them collaborate and speak up. The other side of the coin is that the whole venture is extremely demanding – the resources needed are quite impressive in terms of finance and technology. But what I consider as the biggest challenge is the human dimension. We need to train the people not only to do the interviews but to prioritise, weigh the opportunities that come up, respect the data subject and reach a fine balance between the interests of the interviewees and the memory of future generations.

Only time will tell whether we are succeeding in our ambitious targets. In my humble opinion we will surely fail if we do not bring such initiatives in the academic domain to stimulate discussion and challenge ideas. The project needs such input to grow. Likewise, the theoretical discussion we hold on the new challenges and archival paradigms cannot be carried out in isolation, distanced from the real life application. I do hope that this paper will give scope for a healthy discussion around the raised points.

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### Supplementary Notes

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<sup>1</sup> On the 22nd March 2004, the then President of Malta, His Excellency Prof. Guido de Marco inaugurated the National Memory Project at the Legal Documentation Section of the National Archives of Malta.

<sup>2</sup> Dominic Mintoff was Prime Minister of Malta during the years 1955-58 and 1971-84. During his premiership there were instances when relations with Great Britain were quite turbulent.

<sup>3</sup> Original transcript: *Ghandi d-dubji jekk hemmx rikonoximent jien, mill-pubbliku l-iktar... Jiena rajt hafna nies jahdmu hafna u jassumu responsabbli', u jahdmu b'certa kompetenza....Jigifieri meta tara, bhalma rajt jien, ufficjali li verament they're passionate about their work, ma tistax ma tapprezzhomx* (Frank Mifsud 31st May 2017, Marsaxlokk).

<sup>4</sup> Carmelo Borg Pisani (10 August 1914 – 28 November 1942) was a Maltese-born artist and Italian Fascist who, on being discovered during an espionage mission in Malta in 1942, was found guilty by a British war tribunal and executed for alleged treason.