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Engaging Communities in Archival Practices: A case of Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall

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Abstract

This study explores community engagement in archival practices at Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall in Thailand. The objective is to examine how the Archive engages with the community by applying Stevens, Flinn, and Shepherd's community engagement framework. The findings of document analysis, archival records, and secondary sources indicate that Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall engages external communities in all five participatory areas. However, challenges such as limited documentation and underutilized collaboration opportunities remain. This study offers insights into the benefits of community engagement and provides basic guidelines for community engagement for university archives in Thailand.

Keywords: Community Engagement, Archives Management, Participatory Archives, Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall

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1.0 Introduction

With the shift in societal values and technologies, community participation is a new trend in archival practice. These changes accommodate a focus on communities as producers, owners, and stakeholders of related archives, which were traditionally limited to archivists who are trained as a profession. Also, most archives are produced in many organizations and are too much to be managed by archivists. Therefore, some archives engage with communities and let them be a part of practitioners (Cook, 2013).

'Community engagement', sometimes viewed as 'Community Participation', is a concept that helps clarify and understand the cooperation process between communities and mainstream archives. Community engagement can be defined as the process of involving groups of people with related objectives and/or interests in each issue to voice their thoughts, make decisions, or take actions through working processes. Community engagement goals include increased operational effectiveness, transparency, trustworthiness, and support for sustainable development (Engagement Australia, n.d.; Seelakate & Berpan, 2023).

Many archival institutions have adopted the concept of community. For instance, the National Archives of Canada initiated "Project Naming", which provides a platform for the public to participate in describing archival materials under their care (Greenhorn, 2019). Similarly, the Arizona State University Library established the Community-Driven Archives Initiative, a collaborative effort among university archivists to explore and undertake archival activities supporting various community engagement dimensions (Arizona State University Library, n.d.).

In Thailand, there are efforts to increase the role of communities in archival practices. For instance, the National Archives of Thailand has initiated a project called "Describing the Historical Photographs", which allows the public to view historical photographs and ask the

public to provide detailed information about those photographs that cannot be described by archivists (National Archives of Thailand, n.d.). This study deeply investigates Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, which serves as the university archives of Chulalongkorn University, Thailand's first university (Office of Art & Culture, Chulalongkorn University, n.d.). The organization has been selected as a case for this study due to its mission and archival activities that inherently involve the external community.

To examine this research, we will adapt the framework developed by Stevens, Flinn, and Shepherd to analyze how Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall has been engaging with external communities in archival practices (Stevens et al., 2010). The study seeks to establish guidelines for adopting participatory approaches in university archives, focusing on promoting inclusivity, engaging diverse archival collections, and addressing operational challenges.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Community Engagement Concept

Hughes-Watkins (2018) argues that mainstream archives traditionally decide the existence, preservation, and availability of documents, records, and archives in a society based on the distribution of economic and power. Through these practices, it can be perceived that archivists in mainstream archives hold the power to organize the organization's evidence, memories, and identities, leading to the exclusion of underrepresented communities (Cook, 2013).

From an organizational perspective, community engagement strengthens relationships with the community and promotes social responsibility by ensuring all stakeholders can participate in decision-making processes. This inclusive approach prevents the exclusion of relevant stakeholders who may be affected but might otherwise lack the way to express their opinions, thereby avoiding potential distrust and fostering cooperation between the organization and the community. Furthermore, for information organizations such as archives, this engagement supports more efficient community and social operations, as these types of institutions serve as crucial tools for creating social impact (Seelakate & Berpan, 2023; The National Archives, n.d.).

For the community, engagement facilitates rapid and direct communication of information and opinions, ensuring that management in various areas authentically reflects and responds to community needs. This approach leads to sustainable community development and fosters a sense of ownership in operations (Seelakate & Berpan, 2023). These align with other studies that show the benefits of public participation in archival operations (Huvila, 2015).

It can be summarized that fostering community participation enhances the community's positive perception of archival institutions. Moreover, it supports tasks that archivists cannot solely manage. Conversely, this approach allows the community to play a significant role in managing archives reflecting their identity and collective memory. This inclusive involvement shifts the traditional boundaries of archival work, which has historically been confined to professional archivists or staff (Huvila, 2024).

Transcription and verification of archival content, participatory projects, and crowdfunding initiatives are good examples of community engagement in the contemporary archival sector to increase public participation. Despite limitations in implementing community engagement practices, such participation significantly reduces the workload and time demands on institutional archivists (Seelakate & Berpan, 2023).

An illustrative example of this engagement is discussed in "Subtle Transformations: Increasing Participation and Access through Transcription". This study examines the cases of granting public access to audio files and inviting the public to transcribe them. Archivists must consider various factors, including resource accessibility for transcription participants, suitable methods and tools, accuracy verification processes, and strategies to motivate and encourage public participation. When community members engage in the transcription process within this framework, the outcomes tend to align with community needs, as participants select and prioritize topics of interest to themselves and society (Dong, 2019). This approach transforms the public into both producers and consumers of the archives, strengthening the relationship between the institution and communities to join in the path (Bastian, 2021).

These explanations and examples demonstrate that the concept and significance of community engagement align with Cook (2013)'s community paradigm, which emphasizes the needs of communities as gatherings of individuals with shared identities. Consequently, mainstream archives must consider potentially involved community groups to effectively manage and provide archival services that meet the needs of both the community and organizational stakeholders.

For the framework used to analyze community engagement approaches in the context of Thailand, this study adopts the model proposed by Stevens et al. (2010). Their framework examines the dynamics of collaboration between mainstream archives and community archives that curate and manage collections tied to specific identity groups. This model is particularly relevant to the present research, which explores how Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, as institutional archives, can engage with external communities. Based on the findings, the study identifies five key archival practices within mainstream archives that can involve community engagement: (1) custody, (2) collection, (3) curation and dissemination, (4) advice, and (5) consultancy.

2.2 Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall

A university archive is the official memory and repository for a university's records, publications, and artifacts. University archive serves as "the bridge between the past and the present and serves as a beacon for highlighting the contribution of academic institutions to society" (Chrysanthopoulos et al., 2021).

Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, 'Chula Memorial Hall', or 'Memorial Hall of Chulalongkorn University' was officially established on March 26, 1988, marking the university's 70th commemoration (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, 2018, pp. 17–19). From 1988 to 2002, the Archives operated under the oversight of the Vice President for Administration. Between 2002 and 2013,

oversight was transferred to the Vice President for Arts and Culture. During this period, the organization was structured into five divisions: 1) Administration, 2) Archives, 3) Museum, 4) Information, and 5) Quality Assurance (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, 2018, pp. 24–25).

In 2013, the Archives underwent a structural reorganization, becoming a subdivision of the Office of Art and Culture. It is now divided into three divisions: 1) Administration, 2) Archives, and 3) Museum. The Archives section, located on the 15th floor of the Borommaratchakumari Building, is responsible for the archival repository and provision of archival services. These services include facilitating research on various aspects of the university's history and providing access to archival records, periodicals, and audiovisual materials. The Department maintains both original artefacts and their digital surrogates for research purposes. Permanent and temporary exhibitions are displayed in Chakrabongse Building (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, 2018, pp. 22–29).

Moreover, Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall serves as the primary entity responsible for collecting, storing, preserving, and disseminating information, archival records, and cultural heritage that reflect the history of Chulalongkorn University and the history of higher education in Thailand. It showcases the university's development from the past to the present, while also honoring its founder and associated Thai royal family members. In addition, it promotes new historical knowledge about the university and the royal family members through various activities such as academic conferences, seminars, and dissemination of information through the Memorial Hall's platforms (Office of Art & Culture, Chulalongkorn University, n.d.).

The Memorial Hall's functions extend beyond managing university archival records to encompass the curation of valuable artefacts related to the university, the development of Thailand's higher education system, and associated royal family members. Consequently, Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall engages in a diverse range of activities that reflect its multifaceted role, including (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, 2018; Office of Art & Culture, Chulalongkorn University, n.d.):

- 1) Collecting, accessioning, conserving, and preserving archival records, photographs, artefacts, etc., including those donated by alumni or their descendants.
- 2) Archival describing and providing archives retrieval services for research purposes.
- 3) Disseminating information through various media, such as exhibitions, radio broadcasts, website (currently under maintenance), and content sharing on social media platforms like Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall Facebook page (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, n.d.).
- 4) Operating strategic activities, such as producing media and publications about Chulalongkorn University's history and valuable assets, organizing academic discussions on significant occasions, and developing databases for university archives.
- 5) Facilitating special occasion activities, such as visits and tours for students or university guests.

In conclusion, Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall functions as the archive for Chulalongkorn University. Its operations and activities primarily focus on managing archives received from various organizational units within the university, as well as those from external groups such as alumni or members of the public who possess cultural heritage related to the university. Consequently, it is crucial to understand how Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall engages with external parties, particularly in the current 'community' paradigm in archival practice.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Type

This study uses a qualitative research approach, focusing on an in-depth case study of the Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall. It adapts the framework developed by Stevens, Flinn, and Shepherd to analyze how Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall has been engaging with external communities in archival practices. The framework proposes five engagement activities: custody, collection, curation and dissemination, advice, and consultancy.

3.2 Population and Sample

The study focuses on the Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, which acts as the university archives, as the primary sample due to its mission and activities involving community engagement.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods include:

- 1) Document Analysis: Review internal documents, publications, and digital content.
- 2) Archival Records: Examination of the Memorial Hall's archival records.
- 3) Secondary Sources: Literature review from previous studies on community engagement in archival practices.

This approach provides insights into the organization's perspective, which reflects the mainstream archives' viewpoint. However, it lacks data from the community's perspective, highlighting a key research gap.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis within the framework proposed by Stevens, Flinn, and Shepherd. This approach examines the extent of community involvement in the five participatory areas. The findings are synthesized to identify current practices, challenges, and opportunities for enhancing community engagement.

4.0 Findings

The data from the literature review and preliminary research indicate that Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall has been carrying out a participatory approach in five archival practices for community engagement as follows:

4.1 Custody

In addition to the organization's archival records, the Memorial Hall handles archives donated by alumni, royal family members, and individuals who hold valuable records or artefacts that reflect Chulalongkorn University's history (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, 2018, pp. 91–98). Moreover, as some individuals do not wish to donate their original collections to the university archives, the Archive encourages potential donors to provide digital surrogates for information dissemination and to serve as a knowledge resource for those interested in Chulalongkorn University's history as it appeared on pamphlets, publications, and Facebook posts. Additionally, the collection may be copies of archival records from external institutions, such as surrogates reflecting the development of higher education in Thailand from the National Archives. (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, n.d., 2008)

4.2 Collection

Regarding collection, Memorial Hall asks the public to provide valuable information about university-relevant resources. Furthermore, the organization sees an opportunity to seek archives from Facebook, such as the page sharing stories or historical photographs related to Chulalongkorn University posted by individuals and other pages (Chongkol et al., 2009; Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, n.d.).

4.3 Curation and Dissemination

Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall engages in various activities to share knowledge about Chulalongkorn University. These include exhibitions, academic conferences, and print media production such as newsletters, research papers, and books. The organization also broadcasts knowledge through year-round radio programs, inviting speakers who are typically faculty members and alumni of the university. Additionally, information is disseminated through social media platforms, including the Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall Facebook page. (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, n.d., 2018)

Data from the 20th Anniversary of the CU Memorial Hall reveals that between 2002 and 2008, Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall organized 10 events in collaboration with external communities. These consist of four exhibitions, three academic conferences, one book event, and two research projects. The external collaborators included both public and private sector entities (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, 2008).

Additionally, Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall collaborates with external organizations to organize events and disseminate information to the public. External parties may provide financial support or other forms of assistance. However, details on non-financial support and the processes involved in establishing these collaborations remain unclear. Furthermore, regarding the radio program featuring guest speakers, it would be interesting to know if Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall has plans to expand the range of speakers beyond university employees and alumni, or to broaden the topics covered. It is also worth exploring whether Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall provides opportunities for interested individuals outside the university to share information or propose program topics through the organization's channels. Such initiatives could enhance the diversity of content and introduce perspectives that the Memorial Hall might not have considered independently.

4.4 Advice

Since Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall is one of the important sources of Chulalongkorn University's history, it employs various methods to advise historical information to external parties, including 1) providing archives retrieval for faculty, staff, students, and interested individuals; 2) conducting guided tours of the museum section located in the Chakrabongse Building for current students, alumni, university guests, and school students. These tours highlight the history and development of Chulalongkorn University and its associated royal family members. For instance, the Memorial Hall hosted participants from the international conference "International Forum on Data, Information, and Knowledge for Digital Lives" on November 15, 2017; 3) sharing historical knowledge through interviews with the Memorial Hall staff, such as providing information about Chulalongkorn University's history to alumni for homecoming events or supporting historical data to television programs; 4) providing archives management knowledge to students, and external organizations (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, n.d., 2008).

4.5 Consultancy

Regarding this engagement, only one instance of a study visit was found in the literature: a visit to the Thai Bank Museum at the Siam Commercial Bank headquarters on January 11, 2008 (Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall, 2008). However, the source does not provide details about the purpose of this visit or mention any other case study visits. Consequently, the analysis of consultancy practices is severely limited and lacks essential details. This information gap necessitates further in-depth research to comprehensively understand the Memorial Hall's consultancy activities and their broader implications for community engagement and knowledge exchange in the archival field.

To summarize, Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall engages in practices related to custody, collection, curation and dissemination, advice, and consultancy, which are the frameworks of the study. However, this study can only provide an overview of the Memorial Hall. When considering these practices through the lens of community engagement, it becomes apparent that we need to examine much more. Therefore, to conduct a more comprehensive and in-depth study, it is necessary to collect more data by interviewing the organization's staff. This additional research data would provide well-rounded information about the Memorial Hall's

engagement with the community and its role in preserving and disseminating institutional history.

5.0 Discussion

The data collected indicates that Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall actively engages with external communities, particularly through the acquisition and preservation of archives created by external parties. This engagement is likely influenced by the nature of the university, which involves diverse groups of people, such as staff, current students, and collectors interested in the university's history. Consequently, the university archives must interact with these groups to acquire resources that enhance the university's collective memory and identity. By encouraging donations of artifacts, digital surrogates, and historical narratives, the institution attempts to ensure that underrepresented perspectives are incorporated into its archives. Nonetheless, Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall currently lacks a formal written policy or guidelines for accepting archival donations. As a result, individuals who possess items related to the university may be unaware that the archives are open to donations. Potential donors may also be uncertain about whether their items meet the criteria for donation or how to go about the donation process. Establishing and promoting clear written guidelines could help raise awareness and encourage greater community participation.

Another interesting development is the role of social media, which has significantly enhanced the institution's ability to connect with external communities. For example, the Memorial Hall uses its Facebook page to request contributions of university-related items and to disseminate important information that may reach 16k followers. The Memorial Hall has embraced digital platforms to expand its reach and foster interaction with diverse audiences. This approach highlights the potential of social media to complement traditional archival practices and aligns with global trends in participatory archives.

In terms of curation and dissemination, the only current activity involving external communities is the invitation of guest speakers to participate in Memorial Hall's radio program. Other forms of collaborative outreach, which were more common in the past, are now rarely seen. This change raises interesting questions about the reasons behind the shift and how it may affect the institution's operations.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the university archive itself. The strategies employed by the institution could serve as a model for other archives in Thailand, especially university archives, which have a similar context.

However, a limitation of this study is its reliance on limited sources. While these materials provided valuable insights into the Memorial Hall's activities, they did not comprehensively understand the processes and rationale behind these engagements. For instance, the reasons why some community members choose to contribute digital surrogates instead of original artifacts remain unexplored, as do the methods used by the Memorial Hall to build trust and foster long-term relationships with external contributors. Also, the extent and nature of external parties' support for archival activities remain unclear.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

Community engagement or community participation is one of the new trends in archives. Many institutions try to adapt to this concept due to the advantages offered to the institutions and communities, which are typically the primary users of archival institutions. Likewise, Chulalongkorn University Memorial Hall demonstrates the potential of integrating community engagement into archival practices. Its efforts in custody, collection, curation, advice, and consultancy reflect a strong commitment to preserving collective memory and fostering inclusivity. However, challenges such as limited data on engagement processes and underutilized collaboration opportunities remain.

Recommendations for the university archives: The data indicate that certain processes, such as consultancy, involve limited community involvement. To serve as a model for community engagement, the Archives should expand the scope of community participation by collaborating with alumni and other organizations and inviting them to assist in collecting the archives. Additionally, documenting principles, operational guidelines, and outcomes at each engagement stage is crucial. Such documentation facilitates the tracking of community collaboration and provides in-depth information for researchers seeking to study these initiatives.

Recommendations for Future Research: Given the limitations of current data collection methods, which primarily rely on a literature survey, future studies should incorporate interviews to gather more in-depth insights. The target population for these interviews could include both former and current staff members, enabling a detailed understanding of community participation across different processes. Furthermore, interviews with donors and institutions that collaborate or have collaborated with the Memorial Hall could offer a valuable community perspective. Moreover, particular attention should be given to activities involving community engagement in areas such as curation and dissemination.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The research findings may contribute to an introduction to community engagement in archival practices in Thailand today. Moreover, they may be an example for other archives in Thailand to initiate a collaboration with communities that is inevitable in the present.

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