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Management of cartographic archives in Namibia

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Abstract

The arrival of modern technologies and their peripherals in the electronic world cannot be undermined in the management of cartographic archives. Cartographic materials under Namibia's Ministry of Works and Transport is no exception. This study adopted a qualitative method and employed multimethod research design, which enabled the researcher to use interviews and observation as data collection strategies. Interviews were carried out with four participants and an observation checklist was used. The study revealed that despite the changes in the management of records brought about by application of information and communication technologies, it is yet to be felt completely in the traditional archival settings where access to cartographic archives are limited due to several issues, including their uniqueness, lack of qualified archivist, inadequate staff capacity, limited space, inadequate budget for the management of archives and lack of computerised systems for the management of digital cartographic archives. The study recommends that more attention should be given to keeping abreast with new innovations through the establishment of a specific file plan for the management of cartographic archives and introduction of an archives system for managing digital archives since development in this field is dynamic.

Keywords: records management, digital records, drawings, plans, maps, cartographic archives

Introduction

Cartographic archives, by their very nature, are unique both as individual documents and as documents in context, as they are considered to form the skeleton of the memory of humanity, by containing not only factual information but also the information on which other elements of life depend, for example paintings and sculptures, wars and discovery, building plans, occupation and religion, can be placed and better understood through the use of archives. Hence, Emmitt (2014) and Uluocha (2014) posit that such archives play a pivotal role in the delivery of value to the client, building users and society. Furthermore, the architects learn from the cartographic archives to develop new ideas, propositions to suit the culture of their office and needs of their clients; thus, any loss of cartographic archives may be ultimate, and, in most cases, reconstruction is impossible. This implies that managing information in the form

of pictures, maps, drawings and other documents becomes a strategic matter of every organisation. Duranti (2019) observe that states all over the world promote care and custody of archives for current and future references. This is in recognition that its proper management requires comprehensive practices, which serves the nation's memory and enables a society to plan intelligently for its future. Cartographic archives play an important role in ensuring the success of government projects. For instance, they document records about construction, landscape architecture, planning, urban design, graphic design and many other document designs that provide a unique perspective of government properties. Furthermore, governments rely on these records to carry out developmental projects such as renovations of government houses, expansion of roads, repairs of drainage systems and power supply (Rajh & Meze, 2013). According to Jean, Whiffin and Havermans (2013), a considerable proportion of the world's documentary heritage disappears through natural causes; for example, acidified paper that crumbles to dust, leather, parchment, film and magnetic tape attacked by light, heat, humidity or dust. The cinema, for instance, is in danger of losing most of the works that have made it the art of the century (Rajh & Meze, 2013).

The fire that was experienced recently at University of Cape Town where a number of unique records were lost is one such example where the national memory can be easily lost (Haas, 2021). Similarly, in the previous years, in Namibia, the Ministry of Education Ondangwa East region lost a number of records, which resulted in delayed pension pay-outs of public workers (Shivute, 2003). Furthermore, a number of police dockets and court records were destroyed when a fire burnt down a house belonging to the Ministry of Justice at Oshakati in Namibia and this caused a big headache to police investigators and court officials (Namibian Newspaper, 2015). In other studies, Duranti (2019) lamented and raised concerns on how cartographic archives were affected by several threats, such as extreme temperatures and relative humidity often causing large-scale infestation of insects and mold. The combined problems of immense volume, unstable storage media and obsolete software and hardware add up to some very tough problems.

The importance of managing the documentary heritage (cartographic archives) cannot be overemphasised in this information age, since records and information management is the core business that will drive Namibia into the fifth industrial revolution. Records management ensures credence to the general trend of liberalising access to information in order to foster good governance, accountability, transparency and the protection of human rights (Antunes, Borbinha & Barateiro, 2010). The government of Namibia recognises the value of records through various aspirations. The Namibia national priorities (i.e. Vision 2030, NDP 5 and Harambe Prosperity Plan II) are in the context of creating a knowledge-based society where information repositories such as archives and records will play an important role in providing timely and accurate information for informed decisions in the 4IR. Thus, balancing the ability to effectively manage drawings archives to facilitate timely storage and retrieval of information as well as ensuring the safekeeping of records is critical. Drawings Archives under the Ministry of Works and Transport is one such type of archives which should play a crucial role in government administration to ensure information provision for accomplishment of government projects.

Statement of the problem

Cartographic archives play a crucial role in government administration to ensure information provision for transparency and accomplishment of government projects. Thus, balancing the ability to effectively manage drawings archives to facilitate timely storage and retrieval of

information as well as ensuring the safekeeping of records is critical. The researchers observed that despite the indicated aspirations by the Archives Act, Vision 2030 and Harambe Prosperity Plan II, the current drawings archives have not been able to fulfil its responsibility due to a number of factors/ challenges. These challenges impact the government's ability to manage information as an asset and to facilitate effective integration of critical information for decision making and good service delivery.

Purpose and objectives of the study

This study is aimed at analysing the management of cartographic archives in Namibia. The specific objectives are to:

- identify the types of cartographic archives in Namibia;
- determine access to cartographic archives in Namibia; and
- assess staffing capacity for managing cartographic archives.

Research methodology

Data was collected through interviews, observation and document analysis. The study used an observation checklist and some of the listed criteria in the observation checklist focused on the appropriateness of the building, status of records and filing cabinets. The document analysis focussed on evaluating documents such as file plan, finding aids and other guidelines. The interview was based on understanding and analysing experiences and views of individuals. The study population was sampled using purposive sampling where four participants were selected from two institutions whereby two staff members from the Ministry of Works and Transport. While the remaining was sampled from the National Archives of Namibia. Participants from the National Archives of Namibia were included in the study because the institution legally bears custodianship of records and archives management in Namibia, thus, it was believed that the staff members of the archives might be able to provide relevant data on promoting records and archives management at cartographic archives. The participants from the Ministry of Works and Transport were chosen because the drawing archive is an entity under the Ministry of Works and Transport. The data was allocated codes, as participants were sampled from two different institutions as follows: participants from the Ministry of Works (A1, A2) and participants from the National Archives of Namibia (B1, B2).

Literature review

Cartographic archives play a highly significant role in the finalisation of government projects. Moreover, according to Gomes, Guimaraes and Akutsu (2016:13), archives are the lifeblood of public administration, because the activities of organisations, ministries, agencies and state-owned enterprises are dependent on access to information maintained in archives. Gomes et al. (2016) further emphasise that archival records are used to prove "what happened, why and by whom, which shows that records and archives serve as a tool to meet legal, financial and accountability requirements." A study by Yunus and Kadir (2017) established that throughout the public sector institutions, archives are considered as an indispensable tool for enhancing production and effective service delivery to the clientele. Haas (2021) shares similar sentiments and sees cartographic archives as a collection of solutions to property ownership and estate problems.

According to Collins, Garnaut and Collins (2007), cartographic archives can be written documents, photographs, audio documents, electronically or otherwise evidence of projects

and activities conducted in the past because they document the human memory, cultural treasure and heritage of a people, region or country. Archives are recorded in many formats, from papyrus scrolls and clay tablets to films, sound recordings, motion pictures and digital files of significant and enduring value to a community and country (Duranti, 2010). Therefore, the concept of cartographic archives is associated with the systematic collection of records preserved as a testimony of writings or graphic elaborations that permit subsequent consultations. The International Council on Archives (ICA) (2000) argues that cartographic archives not only provide unique information to the public but also aid solutions to failed government projects. Furthermore, the work of planning and construction relating to the sites, including available data of drawing plans, cadastral maps, surveys, zoning plans and lists of easements are used to inform new projects. This is supported by Williamson and Johanson (2013) that before developing new buildings, architects usually analyse available works such as photographs, drawings of other buildings and aerial views of areas and sites, including specific safety standards or instructions for using particular building materials. Furthermore, renovations of old buildings, drainage systems, electrical infrastructures and roads rely on available information stored in cartographic archives.

Haas (2021) also provide other types of drawings archives such as correspondence between the contractor, the subcontractors and with the client; contracts between the architect, the client and the contractor; photographs of the site before construction begins and ongoing as well as records of the completed building; field reports (made daily by the architect on the site during construction, noting progress and problems); drawings (prepared by materials suppliers and subcontractors illustrating how certain equipment is to be installed) and structural drawings and calculations. On the other hand, Farroni and Mancini (2019) state that architecture drawings are records documented on a variety of forms and media, depending on their age or their initial purpose. In the nineteenth century architectural drawings were documented on either heavy-grade paper stock or linen, which suffered a great deal of abuse, as it tends to dry out and become brittle.

Drawings archives are found in different countries around the world and sometimes as stand-alone entities or as part of the bigger entity such as National Archives, library and documentation centres or records centres (Armstrong, 2006). One of the most famous cartographic archives is found at the University of Pennsylvania; it preserves the works of more than 400 designers from the eighteenth century. These records are commonly used for reference and benchmarking by engineers, researchers and the public at large (ICA, 2000; Barker, Van Niekerk & Swart, 2016; Haas, 2021). According to Barker et al. (2016) cartographic archives are considered to be institutions that have custody of records associated with public buildings or government sponsored projects; they exist to facilitate the accomplishment of individuals and government projects. Furthermore, they provide information to execute projects as per defined specifications. Thus, they convey concepts, ideas, construction details and other specifications required by contractors in the development of infrastructure and buildings.

An earlier study by ICA (2000) opines that cartographic archives are not necessarily records produced by architects, but also those that document building production such as municipal or county records, building permits, demolition permits, tax records, maps and city planning documents, records of real estate firms, contractors and engineers, landscape architects and developers. All these records may have crucial significance in piecing together the architectural history of a locality or region. This then makes cartographic archives to appear decisive, due to what it can offer, as a configurator of ideas that become form, expressed in the many testimonies of original documents conserved, and as a tool of analysis that allow the public to

reconfigure its contents, even with the new languages of digital representation (Gelashvili, 2020).

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, various inventions and industrial revolutions, world wars and technological advancements, impact on the way archives are managed. Several large institutions have created web-based databases to facilitate access to their collections (Yunus & Kadir, 2017). For this reason, the French Archives Act of 1794, which promulgated the first modern archival institution in the world, gave prominence to the concept of records management and public access to records. This Act established the principles of National Archives and rekindled the Greek concept of the accessibility of records and archives. It obliged the state to care for and take custody of records for the sake of its citizens. As a result, the responsibility of the state for the care of valuable documents was formally acknowledged. Countries all over the world adopted simulations of the 1794 Act. The ideas emanating from the French Revolution (1789–1789) have continued to define the care of the documentary heritage of nations. This explains why most governments recognize records and archives as a tool for improving government efficiency that is required to conduct business and disseminate information to the right recipient at the right time.

Despite the important role played by cartographic archives in government administration and in resolving disputes, Mosweu and Kenosi (2018) indicate that they are usually given very little attention, even in developing countries where there is statutory responsibility for their management. This is in line with the arguments by Matongo (2021) who states that of all the areas of human knowledge that have been documented, few have suffered so much neglect as architectural drawings. ICA (2000) further laments that only in recent years has there been a widespread interest in the preservation of drawings archives such as architectural works, specifications, job files, and other documents related to the profession's activities. This then confirms the arguments of Matongo (2021) who points out that many organisations and individuals lack the foresight to value and manage records properly, while others allow them to be managed by unqualified staff, allowing them to be lost either through their own failure to provide for safekeeping.

It has been acknowledged by Farroni and Mancini (2019) that archives have faced many challenges for decades, for example, organisations may not have a systematic programme for preserving architectural records within their custody. Special efforts are made to preserve such records only in isolated instances. An exception is the United Kingdom, where a national repository was established in 1834 by the professional architectural organisation, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). With its accompanying British Architectural Library, the collection forms a vital, comprehensive research source for the scholar of modern architectural history (Haas, 2021).

Poorly managed cartographic archives will force contractors to make decisions on an ad hoc basis without institutional memory (ICA, 2000). Kemoni and Ngulube (2007) state that through the use of archives, the government learns from the past to make present decisions and plan for the future. According to Gelashvili (2020), the absence of well-managed drawings archives not only results in loss of vital information but also loss of official memory of the state as well as the overall national identity. The absence of well-managed archives has consequences not only for the government but also the citizens, especially the poorest who are less able to defend themselves. Matongo (2021) states that if archives are stored and not made accessible, it is as good as being non-existent because information is indisputable working tools or instruments of government administration without it, the government will not function properly since officials will not be able to make informed decisions.

Findings

This section presents the discussion of findings as presented below. The data was collected from participants from two different institutions, and it was analysed using the qualitative research process, as this allowed the researcher to interpret the meaning from the experiences of individuals. The participants were coded as follows: participants from the Ministry of Works (A1, A2) and participants from the National Archives of Namibia (B1, B2).

Types of cartographic archives

The first objective of the was to identify types of cartographic archives. The study findings were that cartographic archives under the Ministry of Works and Transport in Namibia create huge volumes of records in its endeavour to ensure infrastructure development and maintenance of state assets through operational excellence and prudent management of resources. It was revealed by interviews from all participants (A1, A2, B1 and B2) that the cartographic archives preserved records of all government buildings, town planning, roads, government houses, offices and others. Furthermore, the observations also confirmed various types of records including microfilms, lager print paper records of government houses and buildings plans of government hospitals, offices, town planning and land surveyors report, road construction maps, site surveys prepared by civil engineers to show the contours of building sites and its relation to surrounding ground. The observation reveals various documentary heritage such as working drawings and documents that detail how buildings were constructed, specifications directing the contractor and how the construction work was carried out. The documents also showed the kinds of material used. Other documents include correspondence between government and contractors and subcontractors, photographs of the site before construction began and of the completed building, field reports, mechanical, electrical and structural drawings and calculations. The study revealed a big collection of cartographic archives under the Ministry of Works and Transport, which could be used as reference by government institutions, private and individuals.

Regarding how organisations perceive the value of cartographic archives, the participants indicated that cartographic archives played an important role in the lives of individuals and accomplishment of government projects, including building of government mass houses, renovation of government buildings and structures and road construction. A case in point is where a participant mentioned that there has been a high demand for access to records of old government houses. The participant further qualified the statement that (B1) cited that “*some of these records that were mostly requested are those of government houses that were sold to individuals.*” The participant further explained that the records were needed for the renovations and extensions of houses. Another participant (B2) was of the view that “most records that users had been demanding were for the maintenance of old government buildings,” and further explained that the records were usually needed for the replacement of water pipes whenever government offices experienced leakages and when there was a power failure and interruptions in buildings and offices. The participant gave an example that in 2021, the Windhoek Central Hospital had a problem with power supply and there was a need to provide a building plan so as to solve the problem. The engineers and electricians thought the building plan, which could have been used to identify the main supply and connections were in the custody of the National Archives of Namibia, since the national archives are mandated with the care and custody of all public records; however, it was later found that this was not the case. Thus, the maintenance of the power outages took a long time, since officials were working without records. This confirms the study by Matongo (2015) that without well managed records the government may

not function properly as decisions will be made without referring to sound records. Thus, poorly managed records force staff and individuals to make decisions on an ad hoc basis without institutional memory.

Access to cartographic archives

In the case of access to drawings archives, all participants indicated that access was difficult due to several reasons. The first reason was that there was no dedicated staff to manage and provide easy access to records when needed. The institution relied on a retired staff member who only served the public once or twice per week when requested to do so by the government. The second reason was that the institution did not have equipment for photocopying, scanning and preservation of digital cartographic archives; therefore, drawing archives did not preserve records or provide access to digital records. The third reason was that there was a lack of supervision from the Ministry of Works and Transport as well as the National Archives; hence, the staff managing archives allowed users to carry records out of its place of custody risking and exposing them to being lost and destroyed. Participants (A1 and A2) indicated that the Ministry of Works and Transport did not create positions for a qualified archivist to manage the cartographic archives. Participant (A1) cited that “the cartographic archives were managed by a retired administration officer who only comes to assist when there are requests for the retrieval and issuance of documents”. Participant (A2) shared similar sentiments and further alluded that: “In an event where a user (architecture or member of the public) wanted a house plan or any architectural drawing, the staff at cartographic archives always allowed users to go with the records and return them whenever they have finished using them.” The findings of the study reveal that the drawing archive is not yet prepared to manage archives in the fourth industrial revolution as it still operates manually. A study by Darwina and Raharia (2022) argue that archival practices should undergo a significant transformation from physical document storage to digital archiving driven by the advent of digital technology where computerised systems can serve diverse and dynamic societal needs to enhance service deliveries.

Moreover, study findings revealed that the existence and information resources of the cartographic archives has not been made known to the public; hence, not many people have used this important archival repository. This is contrary to the aspiration of the Harambee Prosperity Plan II, which requires the public to have access to information so as to improve their livelihoods. All participants indicated that most users who usually seek access to drawings archives are contractors, engineers and individuals who bought from the government with the intention to improve their house plans, renovate and or extend their houses. Participants (B1 and B2) indicated that before allowing access to the cartographic archives, the archivist should always familiarise themselves with the copyright rules and all other instructions given by the creating organisations, the arguments being that certain records may not have been authorised access to the public for a certain period of time. In response to the information provided above, participant (A2) cited that: “Copyright rules and other instructions are not usually followed due to several issues, for example, the Ministry of Works and Transport did not employ a dedicated and qualified archivist who should provide leadership guidance on various issues, including access and copyright and other instructions.”

The findings of the study were that provision of access to the cartographic archives was conducted without any guiding principles, risking chances of violating the ownership instructions.

Staffing capacity for managing cartographic archives

All the participants were asked whether the cartographic archives had employed a professional archivist and or a records manager to manage and promote leadership guidance at cartographic archives. The participants indicated that the Ministry of Works and Transport did not create positions of an archivist and/or records managers to manage the cartographic archives. Furthermore, the cartographic archives relied on a retired administration officer who worked part time and only retrieved information once a week (on Wednesdays and/or when there was a request by users). This was confirmed by what was observed during the first time when the interviewees found the place closed since it was only opened on Wednesdays. Participants (B1 and B2) also shared concerns about the manner in which the cartographic archives were operating. Participant (B1) cited that “we usually face challenges when we refer people to the cartographic archives as most of the time there is no one to assist the users”. Participant (B2) also confirmed poor access provision at the cartographic archives and cited that:

“...we were given a contact telephone number of the office responsible for drawings at the Ministry of Works and Transport but each time we try to communicate with the officials for enquiries and bookings there is always no response. The Ministry of Works and Transport should just upgrade their staff establishment so that they can employ an archivist dedicated for the management of the drawing archive, otherwise preserving records that are not accessible is the same as not having them.”

It was also stated that the National Archives is unable to fulfil its mandate for promoting good records management practices in public sector institutions. A follow-up question was asked as to whether the staff entrusted with the management of the cartographic archives was employed on full time bases. All participants provided the same response that there was no dedicated staff for the management of the cartographic archives and that the person who was assisting was a retired administration officer who showed interest in the management of records. Participants (A1, A2 and B1) further indicated that the officials responsible for managing the cartographic archives did not have tertiary qualification in records or archives management. The findings revealed that the drawings archives under the Ministry of Works and Transport in Namibia were neglected and were left in the hands of a retired staff who had no tertiary qualification in the profession of records and archives management, thus, may not have any understanding of theories and principles of records and archives management. A study by Sumariti (2023) believes that inadequate staffing plays a negative impact in public administration as it contributes to poor preservation practices and delayed dissemination of information to the users.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study offered empirical evidence on the management of cartographic archives and offered opportunities for improved access of records. Cartographic archives are not managed properly, which resulted in the loss of information through mishandling and deterioration. The Ministry of Works and Transport is urged to review its job establishment and create positions of professional archivist to manage the cartographic archives, such as the senior archivist, who should provide a leadership role to supervise the management of the cartographic archives, ensure development and implementation of policies, procedures and guidelines, work in cooperation with the National Archives and other stakeholders; and that the ministry should

also consider employing an archivist who will provide support in terms of development of finding aid manual and conduct data entry, arrange and describe archives, acquisitions of archival facilities, providing information services to the users. The Ministry of Works and Transport should make adequate space available for research, backup of information and safe keeping of cartographic archives. The ministry should invest in information management systems by creating a dedicated budget for the management of the cartographic archives. Strategies should be put in place to ensure the archival records in question are managed properly throughout its life cycle. The establishment and implementation of specific policies and procedures will ensure that the management of the cartographic archives is guided by principles and procedures.

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