

The effect of converted buildings on the management of records and archives in the Eastern Cape Provincial Archives of South Africa

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Abstract

Archival buildings play a pivotal role in the management of records and archives. This paper highlights the findings of a case study that investigated the effect of converted buildings on the management of records and archives in the Eastern Cape Provincial Archives in the Eastern Cape province in South Africa. The study population consisted of all archives and records personnel in the Eastern Cape Provincial Archives. The sample comprised 13 purposively selected participants. The participants had the requisite knowledge and experience pertaining to the management of records and archives in their respective records and archives in the provincial archives offices. These included the director, assistant directors, archivists, and assistant archivists. Data were collected using interviews, observations, and document analysis. Collected data were analysed using emerging themes based on the objectives of the study. The findings of the study revealed that all archival offices and repositories of the Eastern Cape Provincial Archives are housed in converted buildings. There was a clear lack of adequate and suitable office and working space, and repositories for effective management of records and archives. This has serious implications for adequate processing, storage, access to, and preservation of, records and archival materials. It was recommended that more resources should be allocated for the management of records and archives by revamping the existing facilities while resources are provided for planning and building of requisite infrastructure for records and archives management for the Eastern Cape province.

Keywords: converted buildings, archives buildings, records, archives management, Eastern Cape Provincial Archives

1. Introduction and background

Archives buildings are more than monuments housing cultural heritage. They have tremendous influence on the infrastructure important for records and archives management. Thus, the efficacy of archival functions such as accessioning, arrangement, description, access, reference, preservation and conservation, security, public programming or outreach, and service delivery

significantly depends on the nature of archival buildings. In other words, there is need for ample room to receive new materials, space for backlog collections, work areas for arrangement and description, and long-term storage for processed collections (Morris 2005; Purcell 2012). Additionally, archival institutions must seek to provide adequate resources that include buildings, equipment, and budgets for recurrent expenses and development as well as future expansion (Millar 1999a; Millar 1999b; Mnjama 2007; Ngulube 2003).

Although there is global professional recognition for purpose-built buildings for records and archives management, the use of converted or leased archival buildings still prevails in many countries. It is important to note that a converted archival building is not initially planned for records or archives management. Essentially, various reasons are given for the use of converted or adapted archival buildings. In a seminal paper, Duchein (1977) argues that the cost of occupying an old building may be lower where no major work has to be done on the building's main structure. In the United States of America, for example, old buildings are adapted because of their proximity within established communities. In such cases, converted buildings are used on the premise that archival services will be closer to the community (Haymond 1982). Furthermore, adaption of old and converted buildings may be due to the tax advantage offered by the federal government to private organisations for renovating historic buildings. Additionally, archivists or managers of archival institutions in most countries seldom wield enough power to influence allocation of resources for the planning and allocation or development of infrastructure for records and archives management (Millar 1999). When scarce resources are allocated to direly needed infrastructure such as health, transport, water and sanitation, and security, the housing of archival materials may not be among the top priorities of some governments. For example, Ngulube (2018) states that lack of perceiving archives as valuable documents by the North West province in South Africa resulted in the conversion of a purpose-built archives structure into a call centre.

Nevertheless, there are deliberate efforts in both developed and developing countries to house records and archival materials in purpose-built facilities. For example, the State Archives of Queensland in Australia is among those with a purpose-built archives repository with an emphasis on functionality, not beauty. Experts, supported by legislation, regulations and a standard, guide organisations intending to adapt existing buildings or to erect new buildings for archives (McCausland 2013). In the developing world, there are countries that boast of purpose-built archival buildings (Abioye 2007; Bhebhe, Masuku & Ngulube 2013: 47; Murambiwa 2012; Netshakhuma 2019; Ngoepe & Keakopa 2011; Ngulube 2018). The advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the resultant emergence of electronic records affect infrastructure and archival legislation for the records and archives management (Chigariro & Khumalo 2018; McCausland 2013; Netshakhuma 2019; Ngoepe & Keakopa 2011).

It is worth noting that member countries of the Eastern and Southern African Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) have consistently voiced concern over the continuing management of records and archives in converted or leased archival buildings in many countries in the region. Although many countries in the region have purpose-built archival buildings, this is limited to buildings at the headquarters of main offices while records and archives in regional or branch offices are in converted or leased archival buildings (Mnjama 2007; Netshakhuma 2019). Additionally, most existing archival legislation is silent on the infrastructure for records and archives management, especially in the emerging era of continuum approach and electronic records management (Chigariro & Khumalo 2018).

In South Africa, provincial governments are mandated to establish and manage their records and archives. The constitution requires the devolution of the state's responsibility for archives from central government to the country's nine provinces. Some provinces have functioning provincial archives, but some still have to establish provincial archives, as required by law (Ngoepe 2008; NARSSA 2007). There are few purpose-built facilities for provincial archival collections. Out of the nine South African provinces, only the Free State, Western Cape, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga manage their archives in purpose-built accommodation (Feni-Fete 2014; Ngulube 2018).

2. Problem statement

Archival buildings are more than the structure; they purport to be to the human eye. In essence, they embody the vision and mission of effectively and efficiently managing records and archives found therein. In other words, archival buildings are expected to enhance efficacy of records and archives management, including accessioning, arrangement, description, access, reference, preservation and conservation, security, public programming or outreach, service delivery and human resource management.

Available literature indicates more purpose-built archival buildings in developed than developing countries (Acker 2010; Feni-Fete 2014; McCausland 2013; Ngoepe; Ngulube 2018). The situation in the developing world may be due to economic conditions or less awareness about the important role of archives in society (Mnkeni-Saurombe 2016; Ngulube & Saurombe 2016). Literature documenting the effect of converted archival buildings in South Africa in general and the Eastern Cape, in particular, is scarce (Kanzi 2010; Ngoepe 2008; Ngulube 2003; Ngulube 2018, Ngulube & Tafor 2006). On the other hand, available literature highlights the importance of records and archives in fostering the freedom of information, accountability, and good governance (Declarations of Archives 2010; ISO 15489, 2016; Mnkeni-Saurombe 2016). This has implications for purpose-built archival buildings for efficient and effective records and archives management. The findings of this study gave new knowledge of the prevailing effect of archival buildings on records and archives management in the Eastern Cape Provincial Archives (ECPA). This is important to relevant stakeholders within and outside the ECPA and provides a basis for the improvement of housing archival collections in the Eastern Cape.

3. The aim of the study

The aim of this study was to explore the effect of converted archives buildings on the management of records and archives in South Africa with focus on the Eastern Cape Provincial Archives.

4. Research objectives

Objectives of the study were to:

- establish the nature of archival buildings in the Eastern Cape
- determine compliance with the legal and regulatory framework for the management of archives by the Eastern Archives buildings
- identify challenges of current Eastern Cape Provincial Archives buildings in the management of archives.

5. Research questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What is the nature of archives buildings in the Eastern Cape?
- How do the Eastern Cape Provincial Archives buildings comply with the legal and regulatory framework for records and archives management?
- What are the challenges of the current Eastern Cape Provincial Archives buildings to the management of records and archives?

6. Literature review

This section presents the literature review addressing objectives for the study.

6.1 Nature of archives buildings

Archives buildings not only provide a place to house archival records, but are also a visible sign of its value and symbolise the importance of a country's cultural heritage (Wilsted 2007). Madumere (2022) notes that archives buildings must be designed in view of the following: the storage of archived materials for efficiency, protection of the archived materials is the principal design driver for this building type, compartmentalisation of storage areas to limit involved area of catastrophic loss in case of fire or system failure, daylight for the staff without harming of archival materials or adversely affecting the sensitive indoor environmental conditions, controlled access to archive storage areas; secure and safe loading and receiving areas, secure and controlled public/researcher access.

6.2 Buildings' compliance to records and archives management legal and regulatory framework

Good records management framework consists of information-related laws, policies, and programmes, records management standards and practices, and the necessary qualified human resources to implement and manage the systems (Okello-Obura 2011). The legal and policy frameworks ensure a strategic approach to building capacity to capture, process, store, use, conserve, and preserve records and national heritage. The National Archives and Record Service of South Africa Act (previously National Archives of South Africa) No. 43 of 1996 (Marutha & Mosweu 2021), addresses issues about storage, preservation, management, and caring of archives and repositories. Provincial archives were established in South Africa's nine provinces enacting their legislation (Netshakhuma 2020).

6.3 Challenges of records and archives management buildings

Given that archives are not considered a priority in the public service in most developing countries, buildings are often neither suitable nor adequate (Mnjama 2005). Therefore, the recycling of existing buildings has become a significant feature of archives service point provision. Mazikana (1991) adds that a significant number of archival institutions operate from inadequate and insufficient accommodation; sometimes from premises that were never meant for archival storage. Sometimes, old buildings need to be adapted for reuse as archives. Without proper storage, materials will deteriorate, making a vital record completely unusable or extremely expensive to recover (Benjamin 2006). Because older buildings were not designed for the storage and conservation of archives documents, they often have many drawbacks, and

adapting them to archive buildings is often more difficult than starting from scratch (Hernandez 2005:13).

According to Oliver (2021), climate change puts archives at risk. A climate change adaptation strategy to adopt is to invest in the design and efficiency of spaces housing records and raise awareness of the importance of resilient buildings. Another challenge is physical access. The building should be as accessible as possible, encouraging and inviting people to fully use the services it provides (Latimer & Niegaard 2007). Latimer and Niegaard (2007) point out that access should be as clear and straightforward as possible with a self-evident layout facilitating independent discovery and study; researchers should not have to understand how the archive is laid out to make use of its services. Ling (2003) states that it should be remembered that the site houses valuable archives and should be treated accordingly. The site should give every indication that it is a dedicated records storage facility. Thus, the area around the repository building should be cleared of any obstructing objects and suitable signs erected giving appropriate information and contact details.

7. Research methodology

This was a qualitative study. A case study approach was adopted. Data were collected from a sample of 13 participants that were purposively selected based on knowledge and experience in the management of archives in respective provincial archives buildings in the Eastern Cape. Data were collected through in-depth face-to-face interviews and predetermined observations on the effect of buildings on records and archives management (Kalusopa 2017; Marutha 2016). Data were analysed using content analysis to identify themes based on the research objectives (Luthuli 2017). Data are presented using percentages, tables, and graphs.

8. Findings and discussion

The discussion of the findings is based on the data analysed according to the objectives of the study.

8.1 The nature of archives buildings in the Eastern Cape

When interviewees were asked what the nature of the archives buildings is in the Eastern Capewere. They noted the following:

Interviewee A: “The Eastern Cape Provincial archives buildings are all inherited.”

Interviewee B: “The Department of Spots, Recreation, Arts and Culture in the Eastern Cape never built its archives repositories.”

Interviewee D: “They are converted buildings.”

Interviewee E: “They were used for other purposes before they were handed down to DSRAC.”

The study revealed that all ECPA are housed in converted buildings. The provincial archives headquarters in Kings William’s Town was initially used by Radue Milling Company (Morrow & Wotshela 2005). This was confirmed by one of the key respondents who stated how the building was converted by installing, among others, temperature-regulated strongrooms with shelves for indirect preservation and storage of archival materials (Gaya 2013).

Mthatha Archives was initially housed in the Bhunga Building, a structure built in 1927 and remained there until 2000 when its location in the basement strongroom afforded it the

conditions required for a collection of records of its stature. However, in 2000, the building was re-assigned as one of the Nelson Mandela Museum's three sites. This resulted in the archives, its functions and staff moving into a relatively wholly inadequate structure in Mthatha Public Library (Maart 2012). The researcher visited the archive and observed the appalling conditions. Interviews with participants in the institution confirmed the effect of the current poor state of storage in the facility on the rapid deterioration of archival materials and effective functioning of the institution. Moreover, Morrow and Wotshela (2005), as academics, researchers, and historians, opine that housing archives in converted storage exposes records to danger of being lost completely. They note that Transkei archives in Mthatha were stored in a vandalised building with broken windows and infested with mice. However, the researcher noted efforts made to alleviate the situation aimed to improve conditions of existing accommodation of archives and staff.

Similarly, Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) Archives Repository is housed in a converted leased building (Van Zyl 2013). The records and archives have been neglected or stored in undesirable locations such as dirty storerooms. This does not happen in purpose-built archival buildings that are tailored to preserve the importance attached to vital national cultural heritages. Purpose-built archival buildings have advantage of greater convenience and flexibility: all the requirements of the brief to the architect can be transferred more easily to the plans for a new building than those for an adaptation of an old building (Morris 2005). A new building designed specifically as an archive allows the space to be used more efficient and offer greater security. Purpose-built archives buildings are often less costly than converting an old historic building, which might require costly structural works that are often difficult to achieve (Hernandez 2005; Morris 2005). Moreover, old buildings are not easy to adapt into an ICT infrastructure. It is not easy to drill into the walls and floors and install the type of ICT infrastructure needed to support archives and records management (Miller 2016; Morris 2005).

8.2 Compliance with the existing legal and regulatory requirements

Observations revealed that Port Elizabeth Provincial Archives and Mthatha Archives do not have a designated space for processing new deposits. Some are kept in cramped spaces, which makes their physical access impossible. Because of lack of space in various repositories, new archives accessions are delayed. Users struggled to satisfy their research needs. This contravenes the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2, 2000, that a requester must be given access to a record of a public body if-

- (a) that requester complies with all the procedural requirements in this Act relating to a request for access to that record; and
- (b) access so that record is not refused in terms of any ground for refusal contemplated in Chapter 4 of the Act.

The researcher noticed that South Africa has appropriate national archival policies and laws; however, there are still challenges with enforcing them (NARSSA 2007; Ngoepe 2008). The study revealed that there was serious breach of existing national and provincial archival laws and policies during movement of archival materials and services from Bhunga building to Mthatha Public Library. Participants indicated that the proper management and care of public records were not ensure as stipulated in the NARSSA Act. More importantly, none of these repositories had space to accommodate the variety of formats in their care. The Universal Declaration on Archives (2010) stresses that if that is the case, archives are not managed and preserved to ensure their authenticity, reliability, integrity, and usability.

8.3 Accessibility of buildings to both current and potential users

When respondents from the three sites were asked if their buildings were accessible to users, they gave an encouraging response that they were accessible to current and potential users. However, was inaccurate because some archives buildings are in areas that could not be easily located. For example, in Mthatha, the archive building is located inside Mthatha Public Library and the exterior signage did not include Mthatha Provincial Archives. This meant that first-time researchers and the public were likely to either get lost or may have to ask around. It is important that the location of archival is clearly indicated to demonstrate its importance in society and its users (Dearstyne 2006), which can be accomplished by an archival institution through formal outreach programmes (Mnkeni-Saurombe 2016). For example, the King William's Town Provincial Archives are located at the back of the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture (DSRAC) building far from the public transport route and cannot be easily found. This will inconvenience users who are not familiar with the area. There is also no information board on the main road pointing to the entrance to the archives. The only signage visible is at the archives department's entrance inside DSRAC's yard. Pugh (2005) states that directional signs are important.

In Port Elizabeth Provincial Archives, the signage is visible on the wall, but the main door confuses people because it looks old and unused. The doorknob is positioned at the top of the door, making it difficult for people using wheelchairs to reach. There was no alternative entrance.

8.4 Space for future expansion

According to Swartzburg and Bussey (1991), archives building plans' should make provision for possible growth and development. Interviewees were asked if the current growth would require additional space in future. They all said it would. The researchers probed further as to what would be done if the need of space arises. They pointed out the following:

Interviewee A: "The building could be vertically extended."

Interviewee C: "We may have to lease space."

Interviewee D: "I have no idea what will be done."

Interviewee E: "We shall turn down transfers from records creators."

Interviewee F: "We shall be forced to transfer deposits to a facility with available. Space even though it will be in another town/ city."

The findings established this was not sufficiently considered in Mthatha and Port Elizabeth Provincial Archives. Ganya (2019) states, "The Port Elizabeth Provincial Archives relocated in 2017 to another unsuitable space in Office Park that was used as an underground parking space."

The sites of Mthatha and Port Elizabeth Provincial Archives buildings provide no room for lateral or horizontal extension. The King William's Town Provincial Archives has enough space for future expansion as DSRAC owns unused land close to the archives.

8.5 Space for archival functions in the archive's buildings

Respondents were asked if there is enough space to work for different sections in the building. Figure 1 shows that most respondents (10: 77%) indicated there is not enough working space for different sections while three (23%) respondents said there is.

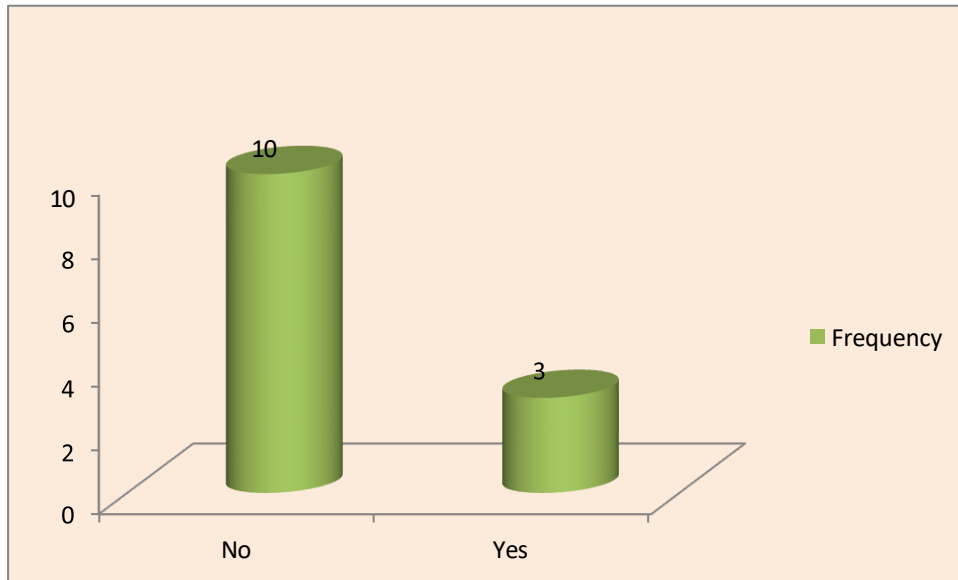


Figure 1: Space for archival functions in the archive's buildings (n=13)

The study revealed that there is no space for core archival functions; for example, in the Mthatha Provincial Archives and Port Elizabeth Provincial Archives there is no processing area for repackaging, cleaning, sorting, listing, boxing, and conserving records and archives. There are also no additional surfaces for sorting and arranging collections. Collections are sorted on the floors. This is in contrast with available literature explaining that an archives building should be designed to facilitate the administration of the archival programmes, preservation-planning activities, and use of archival records (Yakel 1994).

The environment remains far from ideal in Mthatha Provincial Archives. There is a dire need for storage spaces and search room to accommodate researchers and offices for administration. The situation in King William's Town Provincial Archives is slightly different, though its awkward space presents problems as it disrupts the pattern of the workflow. The processing room is located on the ground floor and the storerooms on the first floor. Once the archives staff processed the collections, they have to climb a steep and narrow flight of stairs carrying the heavy load to pack in the storerooms. Offices are uncomfortably hot, which poses danger to the staff's health. The lighting elements pose challenges to records preservation, escalate ongoing electricity costs, and require substantial additional cooling to control heat.

According to Morris (2005), a designated reading room should be provided to enable researchers to access original items from the repository. However, in Mthatha Provincial Archives, there is no quiet area for research and reading. The tables were not designed for oversized materials, which poses a threat of damage to the valuable archival materials.

Due to lack of adequate space, the Mthatha Provincial Archives and Port Elizabeth cannot perform effective outreach programmes on site. Neither have an exhibit space. Wilsted (2007) emphasises that archives' exhibition programmes provide an opportunity for local users and tourists to view archives materials and gain an understanding of their value in preserving history and culture. This public display provides direct contact between the archives visitors and the collections (Pastore 2008). Saurombe and Ngulube (2016:38) advise that "Since archives are kept for use, any activity that will help the archives fulfil this mandate should be embraced by archival institutions."

8.6 Accommodation and storage of archives

The study found that Mthatha Provincial Archives is an approved repository and is in jeopardy. All records from government departments were accepted. However, due to lack of storage space, they could accept relatively few archives. Staff are compelled to turn down or delay transfers of records from the records creators.

The researcher observed that there is a space crisis, with existing space already overflowing. Collections stored there are subjected to disastrous elements such as overcrowding, risk from fire, and lack of proper environmental controls. They are also exposed to damp, dust, and rodents. This contravenes the legal and statutory requirements stipulated in the Provincial Archives and Records Service Act of Eastern Cape (Act No. 7 of 2003). This does not assist the management of records and archives. Government needs to embark on a rescue mission to salvage the situation and avoid total disaster.

The ECPA have static shelving in their storage rooms. They did not take advantage of maximising their archival records storage capacity by installing mobile storage system. Pacifico (1996) states that mobile storage systems can accommodate a variety of storage housings, including shelving, map cases, microfilm cabinets, and roller drawers.

The records and archives of Mthatha and Port Elizabeth are exposed to all elements of destruction. Preservation processes are difficult because the archival facilities do not have a heating, ventilation and air conditioning system (HVAC). Respondents were asked if their archives building achieves the most fundamental goal of preserving the collection. Twelve (92%) respondents said it does not, while one (8%) indicated it does. This is contrary to what literature indicates on the need for HVAC system to achieve strict environmental standards in the records storage areas. Swartzburg and Bussey (1991:121) state "To ensure that the materials the archive has collected for the benefit of its patrons last as long as possible, the building should have proper environment to house them."

According to Wilsted (2007), archival collections spend 99% of their lives in the storeroom and planners should make every effort to provide the highest level of security there. The archives buildings should safeguard the permanent valuable, wide variety of archival records materials, including paper records, maps, drawings, photographs, film, and electronic records. Some of these contain sensitive/classified information; all are irreplaceable. Hence, the need for security system to protect archives staff and archival records from such threats as theft, unauthorised disclosure of classified information. The records and archives in the ECPA are protected through continual monitoring by archives staff and using lock and key in the storage areas. There is no electronic or burglar alarm security system.

The Mthatha Provincial Archives and Port Elizabeth Provincial Archives storage facilities are awkwardly located in the building. They are not isolated from the areas frequented by the public and working areas. Carmichael (2019) recommends that if there is no separate, locked storage room, one should consider screening or roping of the storage spaces to separate them psychologically from public areas. King Williams' Town Provincial Archives storerooms are located far from the search room. The principle of making all stores easily accessible to the search room, administrative offices, was not followed in the conversion of the ECPA, as a result supervision and coordination of activities to ensure the security of repository holdings is difficult.

The Mthatha Provincial Archives do not provide ready access to storerooms. Some are in an outbuilding that is almost impossible to access because of its dilapidated condition. Therefore, staff cannot provide appropriate support to researchers. The archival materials are at risk of being damaged when they are carried from the outbuilding to the archive because there is no covered or roofed corridor to ensure their safety from the elements like rain and dust. Forde and Rhys-Lewis (2007: 52) propose that "a storage area which is at some distance from the administrative offices and the reading rooms is difficult to manage and increases the risk to documents being taken between locations; they may get wet, get lost or be stolen."

8.7 The challenges presented on the management of records and archives

The findings established that the current buildings present many challenges to the management of records and archives. The unavailability of space to accommodate new accession and backlog collections contribute to the deterioration of archival materials. There are no proper storage areas for archival materials. Large numbers of documents suffered damage from overpacked boxes, damp, or dirt and accumulation of a thick coat of fine black dust.

The environment where records are kept is inappropriate. The study indicated that there is lack of proper environmental controls in all ECPA. The archival materials may diminish because of humidity, insects, and neglect. The researcher observed that most of Mthatha Provincial Archive materials are kept in fire hazardous stores. Electrical wires are hanging from the roof and walls with no proper insulation.

The ECPA do not own the buildings that house the records and archives. Some buildings have been leased for the past 28 years. The disadvantage of a leasing option is that the lease contract might expire and not renewed by the property owner after having spent a lot of money converting the space to meet the current needs. Moreover, 53.8% of respondents indicated there are no plans for a purpose-built building.

9. Recommendations

It is recommended that the government recognise the importance of keeping records and archives in a purpose-built building. They are an important national heritage and their role in accountability cannot be overlooked. The government should devise standard plans for the housing of archives that, even if the buildings are converted, they should adhere to required standards. The national government must assist the provincial government in ensuring their records and archives are housed in suitable archives facilities and the building housing archives is within the required legal and regulatory framework.

The provincial archives run under the mandate of national archives where national archives pose a supervisory role. National archives should commit resources into the provincial management of records and archives. Such resources should essentially be committed towards ensuring that provincial records and archives are housed in purpose-built buildings. Moreover, mobile storage systems could be installed to address the challenge of inadequate storage accommodation.

Training opportunities should be offered to archives practitioners to gain sound professional education on archives buildings and their effect on the management of records and archives. Lastly, the DSRAC should work closely with the Department of Public Works to ensure archives are housed in government buildings rather than in leased properties.

10. Conclusion

The archives buildings are important to the management of records and archives. Studies indicate that most developed countries have purpose-built accommodation for their records and archives (Wilsted & Nolte 1991; Acker 2010). This is rarely the case in most developing countries (Lakshmi & Jindal, 2004) where very low priority is accorded to the practice of proper records and archives management due to economic conditions.

The findings indicate that all Eastern Provincial Archives are housed in converted buildings that are unsuitable to extend their lifespan and use. It is recommended that the national government intervene and build purpose-built buildings to manage the national heritage treasure and empower archives practitioners by offering training opportunities on archives buildings and their effect on the management of records and archives.

Declaration

The authors declare that:

- The manuscript has not been previously published and is not under consideration for publication with any other journal or copyrighted publishing platform of any kind.
- Permission was granted for collection and publication of the presented identifiable data from target organisation (Permission letter must be provided with manuscript).
- Unlawful statements that infringe any existing copyrights are avoided in the manuscript.
- Manuscript and study meet all the ethical requirements of the journal and that of my institution or company, as well as legal requirements of the study country.
- There is not any potential conflict of interest for the research.
- All authors are familiar with the content of this manuscript and gave consent to co-publish.
- All authors contributed to the writing of the article manuscript.
- Authors take responsibility to keep participants information confidential as required by legislations, including Protection of Personal Information Act.
- Author(s) gives consent to the Journal of South African Society of Archivist to publish the manuscript.

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