

ESARBICA JOURNAL

**JOURNAL OF THE EASTERN
AND SOUTHERN AFRICA
REGIONAL BRANCH OF THE
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON
ARCHIVES**

**Volume 44
2025**

ISSN 2220-6442 (Print), ISSN 2220-6450 (Online)

<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/esarjo.v44i1.2>

© ESARBICA ISSN 2220-6442 | ESARBICA Journal, Vol. 44, 2025

Engaging the public through archives: a systematic review of participatory approaches in public programming

Mthokozisi Masumbika Ncube

Department of Interdisciplinary Research and Postgraduate Studies: University of South

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4835-6594>

ncubemm@unisa.ac.za

Patrick Ngulube

Department of Interdisciplinary Research and Postgraduate Studies: University of South
Africa

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7676-3931>

ngulup@unisa.ac.za

Received: 2 September 2025

Revised: 17 October 2025

Accepted: 26 November 2025

Abstract

Despite growing scholarly interest in participatory practices within the archival field, comprehensive synthesis of how such approaches are implemented through public programming and the outcomes they yield across different regional contexts remain lacking. This study addressed this gap by systematically reviewing participatory approaches in archival public programming, aiming to classify their forms, evaluate their impacts, and identify implementation challenges. A systematic review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, drawing on 43 peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2025. Inclusion criteria focused on empirical, English-language studies that explicitly addressed participatory strategies in archival public programming. Through thematic analysis, six primary categories of participatory practice were identified: community outreach, digital engagement, co-creation, education, research, and activism. Collectively, these practices enhance accessibility, community empowerment, institutional relevance, and educational value. However, persistent challenges, including exclusion biases, limited public awareness, resource constraints, and tensions between institutional and communal values, continue to shape the efficacy of these strategies. The analysis revealed distinct regional dynamics: while the Global North benefits from advanced infrastructure, robust institutional support, and technological integration, it often struggles with representational inequities and overly academic participatory models. Conversely, the Global South demonstrates strong grassroots engagement and innovation in community-centred practices, but is constrained by digital underdevelopment, limited funding, and fragmented policy support. These findings underscore the need for context-sensitive, inclusive, and co-designed participatory frameworks that prioritise cultural responsiveness, long-term infrastructure investment, and reflexive professional practice. By addressing these regional challenges, archival institutions can move participatory engagement from aspirational rhetoric to an equitable and sustainable reality.

Keywords: Archival accessibility, archival public programming, community engagement, community participation, participatory approaches, systematic review

Introduction and background to the study

The escalating discourse surrounding the intrinsic value of public participation in bolstering the accessibility, relevance, and societal influence of archival institutions is undeniable (Chigwada et al., 2025; Ngoepe, 2019). For clarity, archives can be broadly defined as organisations dedicated to preserving records deemed to have enduring value, whether historical, cultural, legal, or evidentiary, which are typically unpublished, unique, and maintained for long-term access and use (Lopang et al., 2014). These records serve as critical evidence of past events, actions, and identities, forming the bedrock of collective memory (Ngulube et al., 2017). The concept of participatory archives is fundamentally rooted in postmodernism, a philosophical stance that profoundly values the user's role as a social agent actively involved in both the creation and management of collective archival memory (Goss, 2020; Ngoepe, 2019; Theimer, 2015). This postmodern lens challenges traditional archival paradigms by reconceptualising the archive not merely as a repository of historical facts, but as a dynamic space where meaning is co-constructed (Goss, 2020; Theimer, 2015).

Contemporary archival theory increasingly acknowledges that engaging diverse publics through public programming can enrich descriptive practices, illuminate hidden narratives within collections, and foster a more profound connection between archives and the communities they serve (Ncube & Ngulube, 2025). This aligns with the postmodern emphasis on decentralising authority and validating multiple perspectives in the construction of historical narratives (Goss, 2020; Theimer, 2015). Public programming in archives encompasses a range of planned activities and initiatives designed to create awareness of archival holdings and services, promote their use, and educate various publics on their significance (Chaterera & Rodrigues, 2019; Maluleka et al., 2023). This includes exhibitions, workshops, educational initiatives, digital engagement through social media and online platforms, lectures, seminars, and community outreach efforts (Saurombe, 2020). This burgeoning recognition is reflected in professional guidelines and scholarly publications advocating for more outward-looking and community-centric archival practices (Chaterera & Rodrigues, 2019; Chigwada et al., 2025; Maluleka et al., 2023; Ncube & Ngulube, 2025; Saurombe, 2020).

A contextual consideration of regional dynamics is critical to understanding participatory archival practices. Archives in Global North countries, typically characterised by high-income economies, advanced technological infrastructure, and well-resourced institutional frameworks, often benefit from extensive professional training, established digital systems, and stable funding streams (Co et al., 2023; Ruschensky, 2017; Thompson, 2024). These advantages facilitate the implementation of sophisticated public programming initiatives, including digitised collections, interactive online platforms, and co-curation projects that engage both academic and non-academic audiences. For example, the UK's National Archives' Archives' Inspire programme promotes digital engagement and participatory interpretation through crowdsourcing transcription projects (James et al., 2018), while the Smithsonian Institution's Transcription Center in the United States invites the public to collaboratively transcribe and annotate digitised documents to enhance accessibility and knowledge sharing (Gunther et al., 2016).

Similarly, the Europeana platform exemplifies large-scale participatory digitisation across European cultural institutions, fostering community storytelling through digital exhibitions and user-generated content (Dritsou et al., 2024). However, such contexts may also exhibit limitations, including overly formalised or academic-focused participatory models, a tendency

to prioritise institutional objectives over community needs, and persistent representational inequities that constrain inclusivity (Caswell et al., 2016). For instance, while the Library and Archives Canada's Co-Lab enables public tagging and transcription (Library and Archives Canada, 2025), critiques have highlighted that institutional control over metadata and curatorial narratives often limits the extent of genuine community authorship (Kandiuk, 2016; Seeman & Dean, 2019). Likewise, in many Global North initiatives, marginalised voices, such as those of indigenous, immigrant, or diasporic communities, remain underrepresented despite the existence of participatory frameworks (Christen, 2018). These examples illustrate that even in technologically advanced and well-funded environments, participatory archival practices must continually negotiate tensions between institutional authority, inclusivity, and community empowerment.

In contrast, archival institutions in Global South countries often operate under resource-constrained conditions, with limited access to technological infrastructure, funding, and professional development opportunities (Ngoepe & Ngulube, 2014; Chigwada et al., 2025). Despite these challenges, archives in these regions frequently demonstrate innovative, community-centred approaches that emphasise grassroots engagement, local knowledge preservation, and culturally responsive programming (Chaterera & Rodrigues, 2019). For example, in South Africa, the District Six Museum in Cape Town serves as a model of participatory memory work, where displaced residents contribute photographs, oral testimonies, and artefacts to reconstruct the social history of the community that was forcibly removed under apartheid (Hayes-Roberts, 2020). Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the National Archives' Oral History Programme documents indigenous knowledge systems and local histories through interviews conducted in vernacular languages, thereby centring on community voices often excluded from colonial-era records (Bhebhe, 2015). In Kenya, the African Digital Heritage initiative has pioneered participatory digitisation and virtual exhibitions that engage local youth and communities in reinterpreting cultural heritage through digital storytelling (African Digital Heritage, 2025; Kasemsarn & Nickpour, 2025).

In India, the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI) collects and curates stories, videos, and photographs contributed by citizens to document everyday life in rural areas, an example of how digital participation can thrive even with limited institutional resources (Khare & Vikas, 2022). In Latin America, the Memoria Abierta project in Argentina and the Colnodo's Digital Memories initiative in Colombia leverage open-access technologies and community partnerships to preserve testimonies related to human rights violations and social movements, foregrounding the social justice potential of participatory archiving (Alberch i Fugueras, 2021). These initiatives demonstrate that, even amid infrastructural and financial constraints, Global South institutions often prioritise social relevance, inclusivity, and cultural continuity over technological sophistication. They also highlight the creative adaptation of participatory models, ranging from oral histories to collaborative digitisation, which respond to local needs and epistemologies (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2022; Chaterera & Rodrigues, 2019; Maluleka et al., 2023; Mukwevho, 2018; Saurombe, 2020). Understanding these contextual differences is essential for appreciating the diverse trajectories of participatory archival practices globally, as well as for designing frameworks that are both sensitive to local realities and informed by cross-regional best practices.

Nonetheless, despite these encouraging practices, a significant intellectual and practical void persists regarding a detailed understanding of the range of participatory approaches currently implemented in archival public programming. Although engagement is widely promoted in theory (De Ceulaerde, 2024; Sigauke et al., 2025), there remains a lack of systematic

classification, description, and analysis of the specific methodologies employed by archival professionals to facilitate public involvement. This lacuna is not merely an academic oversight; it presents a substantial impediment to the effective professional practice of archivists. Without a complete grasp of the diverse models of participation, ranging from crowdsourcing initiatives and co-curation projects to community archiving efforts and participatory oral history programmes (Bhebe & Ngoepe, 2022; De Ceulaerde, 2024; Marini, 2019; Mukwevho, 2018), archival professionals struggle to make informed decisions regarding the design, implementation, and subsequent evaluation of public programmes. This lack of theoretical and empirical grounding can lead to the adoption of generic or ill-suited participatory strategies, thereby diminishing the genuine involvement and tangible benefits for the communities that archives aspire to serve (Ncube & Ngulube, 2025).

Furthermore, the existing literature exhibits a pronounced deficiency in synthesising the outcomes and challenges associated with various participatory approaches in this archival setting. Although individual case studies offer valuable insights into specific projects (Chaterera & Rodrigues, 2019; De Ceulaerde, 2024; Maluleka et al., 2023; Ngulube et al., 2017; Sigauke et al., 2025; Saurombe, 2020), a broader comparative analysis that transcends institutional boundaries and programmatic typologies is conspicuously absent. This fragmented understanding severely hampers the identification of best practices and the elucidation of critical success factors that underpin effective community engagement in archival public programming (De Ceulaerde, 2024). Without such a synthesis, archivists are left to navigate the complexities of participatory design in a largely ad hoc manner (Ncube & Ngulube, 2025), often rediscovering challenges that could have been anticipated (such as funding limitations, lack of digital infrastructure, or institutional resistance) or replicating successes that could have been scaled (Mukwevho, 2018). This intellectual isolation hinders collective professional development and the establishment of robust, evidence-based frameworks for participatory archival work. In essence, while the theoretical embrace of participatory archival public programming is gaining considerable traction within the archival discipline (Chigwada et al., 2025), there is a pressing need for a more systematic and detailed overview of its practical manifestations. While acknowledging the growing imperative for public engagement in archival practice (Bhebe & Ngoepe, 2022; Chaterera & Rodrigues, 2019; Maluleka et al., 2023; Ngulube et al., 2017; Saurombe, 2020), the current academic literature largely suffers from a critical deficiency: a lack of systematic and holistic examination of how archival institutions are actively operationalising diverse participatory methods (Maphorisa & Jain, 2013; Perry et al., 2024). Moving beyond aspirational rhetoric, a deeper understanding of the mechanics and ramifications of participatory archiving is necessary.

Statement of the problem

The increasing emphasis on public participation in archival practice highlights its potential to enhance accessibility, relevance, and societal impact of archival institutions (Chigwada et al., 2025; Ngoepe, 2019). Archives, as custodians of records of enduring historical, cultural, legal, or evidentiary value, serve as essential repositories of collective memory (Lopang et al., 2014; Ngulube et al., 2017). Participatory archival approaches, grounded in postmodernist perspectives, reconceptualise archives as dynamic spaces where users actively co-construct meaning, challenging traditional top-down models (Goss, 2020; Theimer, 2015). Public programming, including exhibitions, workshops, digital initiatives, and community outreach, has emerged as a key mechanism for fostering engagement, uncovering marginalised narratives, and strengthening connections between archives and diverse communities

(Chaterera & Rodrigues, 2019; Ncube & Ngulube, 2025; Saurombe, 2020). Despite these developments, there remains a significant gap in systematically understanding the diverse participatory methods employed in archival public programming. Existing studies are often fragmented, limited to specific institutions or case studies, and lack comprehensive classification, methodological analysis, or assessment of outcomes (De Ceulaerde, 2024; Sigauke et al., 2025). This fragmented knowledge constrains archivists' ability to make informed decisions regarding programme design, implementation, and evaluation, frequently resulting in generic or ineffective strategies that fail to foster meaningful community engagement (Mukwevho, 2018; Ncube & Ngulube, 2025).

Furthermore, there is a paucity of synthesised evidence on the outcomes, challenges, and best practices of participatory initiatives such as co-curation, crowdsourcing, oral history projects, and community archiving (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2022; Marini, 2019). Without an integrative overview, archival professionals must navigate participatory programme design in an ad hoc manner, often encountering avoidable challenges or missing opportunities to replicate and scale successful practices (De Ceulaerde, 2024; Mukwevho, 2018). Addressing this gap through a systematic review will provide empirical guidance, inform professional development, and support the creation of more effective, equitable, and sustainable participatory archival programmes, thereby advancing both theory and practice in the field.

Study aim and research objectives

In response to this gap, the study aimed to develop a typology of participatory methods employed in archival public programming globally. Through synthesising evidence on the methods used, their outcomes, and associated challenges, the research provides an understanding of participatory archival practices. This insight informs future research, guides professional development, and supports archival institutions in implementing more effective, equitable, and sustainable engagement strategies, thereby enhancing the quality of community-archive relationships. To this end, the ensuing objectives guided this systematic review:

1. To identify and categorise the diverse participatory methods employed in archival public programming.
2. To analyse the outcomes of participatory endeavours in archival public programming.
3. To examine the challenges encountered during the implementation of diverse participatory approaches.

These objectives were formulated to address a critical gap in the existing literature on participatory archival practice. The first objective aimed to move beyond anecdotal accounts by establishing a systematic typology of engagement strategies. This analytical framework enables archivists to select and apply approaches best suited to their specific institutional and community contexts. The second objective sought to evaluate their tangible impacts on archival collections, institutional practices, and community engagement, thereby demonstrating the practical value and transformative potential of participatory approaches. The third objective was essential for uncovering the structural, ethical, and logistical barriers that often constrain effective participation. Addressing these challenges, the study sought to enhance practitioners' capacity to design more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable collaborations. As such, these objectives were designed to advance an evidence-based understanding of participatory archival public programming, shifting the discourse from conceptual advocacy to informed, practice-oriented application.

Methods

To uphold the credibility and transparency of this systematic review, its conduct and reporting strictly adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) checklist and guidelines (Page et al., 2020). This framework thus furnished a systematic and standardised approach for the review (Page et al., 2020), delineating essential stages detailed in this section. To further bolster the robustness and openness of the review process, the researchers proactively preregistered the protocol for this systematic review on the Open Science Framework (OSF). This preregistration provided a timestamped, publicly accessible record of the planned objectives, inclusion and exclusion criteria, search strategy, data charting methods, and proposed analysis (OSF, 2024). This proactive measure served to minimise the potential for post hoc biases and to foster greater confidence in the integrity of the review's findings (Pieper & Rombey, 2022; OSF, 2024).

Literature identification and screening

This systematic literature review delved into the contemporary landscape of participatory approaches within archival public programming initiatives, specifically examining how archives engage the public. The review employed a systematic and critical analytical framework to identify relevant scholarly outputs, drawing from a multi-database search strategy. The researchers searched databases such as ERIC, JSTOR, PsycINFO, and PubMed; indexing services like Web of Science and Scopus; and journals including *Archival Science*, *The American Archivist*, and *Digital Humanities Quarterly*. To maximise retrieval of pertinent studies, the researchers developed and iteratively refined the search strategies for each targeted platform (MacFarlane et al., 2022). These strategies combined keywords, controlled vocabulary (e.g., Archivists' Toolkit Controlled Vocabulary, Library of Congress Subject Headings), and platform-specific operators to effectively leverage the unique indexing and search functionalities of each resource. This systematic approach allowed for the inclusion of a diverse range of scholarly works, including peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and theses, ensuring a robust foundation for their research. This multifaceted approach was designed to acquire a broad spectrum of research outputs relevant to the study's core focus: the methods, outcomes, and challenges of public engagement in archives.

A multifaceted search strategy was employed, structured around distinct keyword categories. The first category, focused on "Community Participation in Archival Programming", explored core concepts related to public engagement within archival settings, employing the following search string: ("community participation" OR "public participation" OR "community engagement" OR "participatory approaches") AND ("archives" OR "archival institutions" OR "records") AND ("public programming" OR "outreach" OR "exhibitions" OR "education" OR "digital engagement" OR "workshops"). The second category, "Archival Public Programming", focused on activities designed to connect archives with the public, using the following search string: ("archival public programming" OR "archive outreach" OR "archive education" OR "archive exhibitions" OR "community archives" OR "co-curation" OR "crowdsourcing archives" OR "oral history projects") AND ("public access" OR "relevance" OR "influence" OR "accessibility"). The third category, "Outcomes and Challenges", encompassed the impacts and difficulties associated with these approaches, using the following search string: ("benefits" OR "outcomes" OR "impact" OR "challenges" OR "difficulties" OR "limitations" OR "best practices" OR "success factors") AND ("community participation" OR "public engagement") AND ("archives" OR "archival programming").

Engaging the public through archives

Boolean operators were also strategically employed to refine the search and eliminate extraneous studies. Specifically, publications classified as literature reviews, systematic reviews, or meta-analyses were excluded from the results, indicated by the exclusion criteria: NOT (AB = ("literature review" OR "systematic review" OR "meta-analysis")). Furthermore, to maintain a precise focus, studies predominantly centred on library science or museum studies that lacked any demonstrable intersection with archival studies were also removed, represented by the exclusion criteria: NOT (AB = ("library science" OR "museums" OR "galleries" AND NOT ("archives"))). This refined keyword strategy was designed to capture the multifaceted nature of the research, ensuring a focused and relevant search for literature on participatory approaches in archival public programming.

Eligibility criteria

To optimise the pertinence and robustness of the literature search, the Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome (PICO) framework was employed to shape both the search strategy and the eligibility criteria (Methley et al., 2014). This framework proved instrumental in streamlining the initial study selection process by highlighting pertinent articles (Methley et al., 2014). Therefore, the following eligibility criteria, established within the PICO framework, guided the selection of studies.

- Population (P): The study focused on research concentrating on individuals or entities interacting with archival items in archival environments. This included archives, special collections, and institutions involved in cultural heritage. Studies in which the archival context was essential to the research were prioritised. Exclusion criteria included studies conducted in non-archival contexts or in which the archival context was incidental.
- Intervention (I): The review examined research looking at public programming efforts carried out in archival contexts. This encompassed activities such as exhibitions, educational programmes, events, community outreach, and internet involvement. The focus was on programmes that encouraged learning, developed community collaborations, or involved users with archival collections. Studies that had no significant public programming component and that only addressed internal archival operations were excluded.
- Comparison (C): Although it was not a requirement, research that included comparative components was given preference. Such studies included baseline data, studies comparing various types of initiatives, and studies comparing public programming initiatives in archives with control groups or established practices. Strong outcome evidence was required for studies assessing programme impact without direct comparison to be accepted.
- Outcome (O): The primary focus was on research evaluating the success of public programming projects in archival environments. Main outcomes included improved learning outcomes (e.g., historical context, research skills, and material knowledge), improved user engagement (e.g., visitation, participation, material use, and demonstrated interest), and strengthened community partnerships (e.g., collaborative projects, community involvement, and improved relationships). Studies lacking explicit outcome measurements or programme impact assessments were excluded.

To further augment the search approach and ensure a comprehensive evaluation, the following additional eligibility criteria were implemented:

- **Research Design:** The review incorporated empirical studies employing mixed methods, quantitative, or qualitative approaches. Purely descriptive research, along with editorials, commentaries, and opinion pieces, was excluded.
- **Publication Format:** Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and thesis were deemed eligible. Conversely, non-peer-reviewed works and other grey literature were excluded.
- **Language:** Only studies published in English were included, with those in other languages being excluded.
- **Publication Period:** The scope of the review was limited to studies published between 2014 and 2025 (inclusive), thereby excluding earlier works. This publication timeframe was selected to capture the most recent advancements and trends in participatory archival programming, reflecting the increasing scholarly attention and evolution of practice in this domain over the last decade.

The systematic search and study selection process is depicted in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

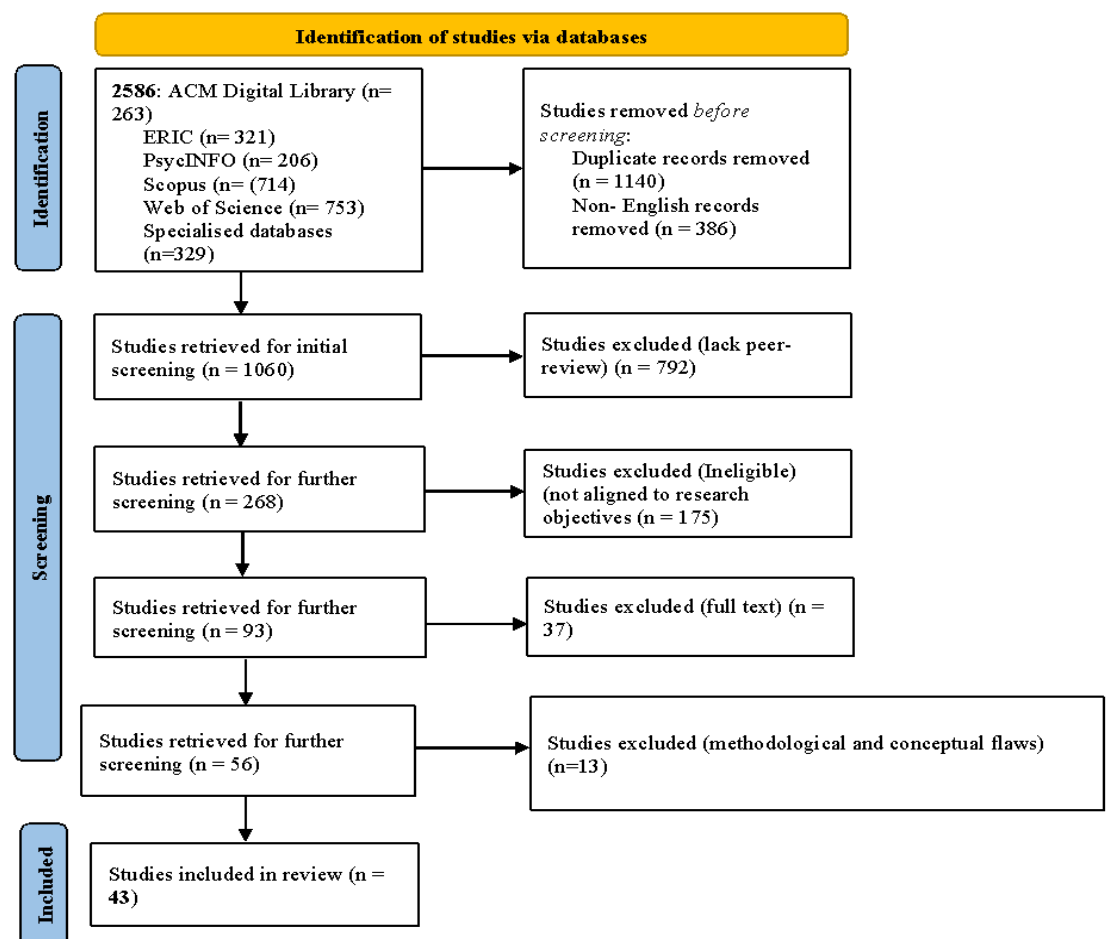


Figure 1. Study selection flow diagram (Adapted from PRISMA Statement, Page et al. 2020)

As shown in Figure 1, the initial query execution across the selected databases generated a corpus of 2 586 bibliographic entries. Management of this substantial volume necessitated a two-stage screening protocol. This process incorporated Rayyan software (version 1.5.0) for the identification and removal of duplicate records, complemented by ASReview software (version 2.0), an open-source machine learning-assisted tool, for the primary screening phase.

Deduplication and prioritisation process

An initial phase of automated deduplication and language filtering was performed using Rayyan's functionality, which identified and excluded 1 526 redundant or non-English records by comparing attributes such as title, authors, abstract, and publication details (Rayyan, 2025). This process reduced the dataset to 1 060 unique records for subsequent evaluation. Subsequently, ASReview was employed to prioritise these remaining records for full-text review (ASReview, 2025). Through comparing abstracts and titles against pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria, ASReview's machine learning algorithms predicted the relevance of each record, thereby enabling reviewers to concentrate their efforts on the most promising documents. This automated prioritisation significantly expedited the screening process (ASReview, 2025; Rayyan, 2025).

Full-text review and selection process

Following ASReview's prioritisation, a full-text review was independently conducted by two reviewers utilising Rayyan, applying the pre-established eligibility criteria to each record. This process led to the exclusion of 967 records, primarily due to their non-peer-reviewed status or non-compliance with the study's core research objectives. The resultant 93 records, all addressing issues related to public programming activities within archival institutions, were subsequently advanced for a quality assessment. This appraisal involved evaluating their conceptual clarity, methodological soundness, participant sampling strategies, and the reported findings.

Quality assessment and validity evaluation

To assure the epistemic integrity and robustness of this systematic review, a thorough quality assessment of the included studies was conducted. This study employed the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist, a validated instrument offering a structured framework for evaluating research articles (CASP, 2025). To mitigate subjective bias and enhance transparency in the selection process, the CASP checklist facilitated a uniform approach across all included research (CASP, 2025; Kolaski et al., 2023). The CASP checklist directed attention to four cardinal dimensions of study quality and reliability:

- **Validity of the Study Findings:** This dimension assessed whether the research design and execution were sound enough to produce trustworthy results. Key considerations included the appropriateness of the study design for the research objectives/questions, the presence of potential biases, and the steps taken by the authors to minimise these biases (CASP, 2025; Kolaski et al., 2023).
- **Results and Interpretation:** This dimension focused on the clarity, precision, and clinical or practical significance of the study's findings. Reviewers would examine how the results were presented, whether they addressed the stated research objectives/questions, and the extent to which the authors' conclusions were supported by the data. This included scrutinising the data analysis methods and ensuring that the interpretations were consistent with the presented evidence (CASP, 2025; Kolaski et al., 2023).
- **Applicability of the Findings:** This dimension evaluated the generalisability or transferability of the study's results to different contexts or populations. Reviewers considered whether the study's sample was representative, whether the interventions or phenomena studied were clearly described, and whether the findings could realistically

be applied to other archival institutions or public programming initiatives (CASP, 2025; Kolaski et al., 2023).

- **Clarity and Transparency of Reporting:** This dimension assessed how well the research was reported, focusing on its comprehensibility and the level of detail provided. Key aspects included the clear articulation of the research objectives/questions, methodology, participant characteristics, and findings. Transparent reporting is crucial for replication and for allowing other researchers to critically evaluate the study's processes and conclusions (CASP, 2025; Kolaski et al., 2023).

In applying the CASP checklist across all included studies, this review aimed to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of the quality of evidence underpinning the current knowledge base on participatory approaches in archival public programming (CASP, 2025; Kolaski et al., 2023). This selection process culminated in the identification of a cohort of 56 eligible research publications, which subsequently underwent quality appraisal. Following the application of the defined quality criteria, 13 studies were deemed to fall short of the requisite standards and were consequently excluded. This screening resulted in the definitive selection of 43 studies, forming the evidential basis of this systematic review. Throughout the screening and selection process, reviewer discordances were resolved through collaborative consensus. Inter-rater reliability (IRR) assessment, employing both percentage agreement and the kappa statistic (κ), revealed substantial concordance (75% agreement, $\kappa=0.68$), providing robust evidence of the selection process's validity and reliability (Li et al., 2023; Mandrekar, 2011).

Data abstraction and synthesis

In adherence to best practices for systematic review methodology, data extraction was conducted following the PRISMA checklist (Page et al., 2020). The researchers employed CADIMA, an open-access web application, to establish a consistent and efficient data extraction procedure, thereby systematically collecting relevant information from the selected research (CADIMA, 2025; Kohl et al., 2022). Key components of the data extraction form included: bibliographic details (e.g., author, publication year, location), methodological design, and significant findings related to the benefits and challenges of the study's focus (Kohl et al., 2022). Manual data coding further involved extracting and classifying crucial information, including authors, research design, place of publication, and main conclusions. An audit trail of the data extraction and coding procedure is provided in Appendix A.

Results

This section presents the findings of the research. The review initially examined and categorised the selected studies based on their regional focus, distinguishing between the Global North and the Global South. This regional classification was essential for contextualising participatory archival practices within differing socio-political, economic, and infrastructural environments. In doing so, the review underscores how geographic and systemic contexts influence the nature, scope, and impact of public programming in archival settings. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Scholarly Contributions on Participatory Archival Practices by Global North and Global South

Global Category	Country/Region	Key Authors and Publication Dates
-----------------	----------------	-----------------------------------

Engaging the public through archives

Global North	United States	Brilmyer et al. (2019); Rauch et al. (2024); Marini (2019); Roeschley (2023); Co et al. (2023); Cifor et al. (2018); Pell (2015); Cordes (2016); Barclay (2023); Lawrimore et al. (2022); Fleming & Gerrard (2014); Hartlep & Xiong (2018); Cachola (2022)
	Canada	Bushey (2023); Ruschensky (2017); Mills et al. (2020); Fritz et al. (2021); Ruest et al. (2020)
	United Kingdom	Hoyle (2018); Eveleigh (2015); Aguiar & Gillespie (2024); Perry et al. (2024); Thompson (2024); Worthen & Weatherall (2024)
	Australia	Wilson (2023); Rolan (2017)
	Ireland	Harrower (2018)
	Switzerland	Raemy (2021)
	Belgium	DeCeulaerde (2024)
	Netherlands	Opgenhaffen (2022)
	Poland, Ireland, Japan, Indonesia	Ke & Mustafa (2024). <i>(Partially representing both North and South; Ireland and Poland align with the Global North)</i>
	South Africa	Mukwevho (2018); Mukwevho & Ngoepe (2019); Maluleka et al. (2023); Ngulube et al. (2017); Saurombe & Ngulube (2016); Schellnack-Kelly (2024)
Global South	Eastern and Southern Africa (Regional)	Saurombe (2020); Saurombe & Ngulube (2016)
	Tanzania	Chami (2017); Mollel & Mungwabi (2023)
	Namibia	Magadza (2022)
	Zimbabwe	Sigauke et al. (2025)
	Ghana	Out & Asante (2015)
	Indonesia, Japan	Ke & Mustafa (2024) <i>(Indonesia and Japan align with the Global South in this context)</i>

Table 1 provides a geographic and scholarly overview of literature on participatory archival practices, categorised into the Global North and Global South. A clear concentration of studies is evident in the Global North, particularly in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, reflecting more established research ecosystems, sustained funding, and a longer tradition of critical archival scholarship. These studies often engage with themes such as inclusivity, digital infrastructure, and activist archival methods. In contrast, while the Global South presents fewer publications, the contributions from countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Ghana highlight growing interest in community engagement, oral histories, and the challenges of infrastructural limitations. The inclusion of regional and multi-country studies (e.g., ESARBICA and Ke & Mustafa's (2024) transcontinental analysis) also signals efforts to broaden the discourse and integrate diverse socio-cultural contexts. As such, the table illustrates both a disparity in scholarly output and a complementary richness in methodological and thematic focus across regions. Subsequently, the review went further to identify and categorise a range of participatory methods currently employed in archival public programming. These findings, as presented in Table 2, offer a critical lens through which to assess the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of current engagement strategies.

Table 2. Categorisation of Participatory Methods in Archival Public Programming

Category of Participatory Method	Specific Participatory Methods Employed	Scholars
Community Engagement and Outreach Events	In-person events, workshops, social media projects, oral history projects, public programming, outreach programmes, cultural archiving, exhibitions	Roeschley (2023), Worthen and Weatherall (2024), Bushey (2023), Cordes (2016), Barclay (2023), Chami (2017), Fleming and Gerrard (2014), Lawrimore et al. (2022), Magadza (2022), Out and Asante (2015), Marini (2019)
Collaborative Content Creation and Documentation	Co-design, ethnographic field data collection, participatory design, semi-structured interviews, collaborative documenting, oral history interviews, filmmaking, crowdsourced transcription	Worthen and Weatherall (2024), Co et al. (2023), Cifor et al. (2018), Bushey (2023), Ruschinsky (2017), Cordes (2016), Aguiar and Gillespie (2024)
Digital and Technological Engagement	Web 2.0 technologies, online participation initiatives, participatory archive platforms, datathon events, digital exhibitions, and archaeological knowledge hubs	Co et al. (2023), Harrower (2018), Raemy (2021), Cordes (2016), Eveleigh (2015), Fritz (2021), Rolan (2017), Aguiar and Gillespie (2024), Maluleka et al. (2023), Mollel and Mungwabi (2023), Mukwevho and Ngoepe (2019), Opgenhaffen (2022), Rauch et al. (2024), Ruest et al. (2020), Schellnack-Kelly (2024)
Educational and Learning Initiatives	Community-engaged classrooms, archival materials in curriculum, training workshops, guided tours	Mills et al. (2020), Hartlep and Xiong (2018), Mukwevho (2018), Sigauke et al. (2025)
Research and Reflexive Practices	Ethnographic readings, focus groups, qualitative participatory action research, and audience mapping	Pell (2015), Brilmyer et al. (2019), Hoyle (2018), Ngulube et al. (2017), Perry et al. (2024), Saurombe (2020), Saurombe and Ngulube (2016)
Activism and Social Justice Orientations	Community-based archivists as activists, community archives in social movements, public historical geographies	Cifor et al. (2018), Pell (2015), Thompson (2024), Cachola (2022), DeCeulaerde (2024)

Table 2 categorises diverse participatory methods in archival public programming into six key areas: Community Engagement and Outreach Events, Collaborative Content Creation and Documentation, Digital and Technological Engagement, Educational and Learning Initiatives, Research and Reflexive Practices, and Activism and Social Justice Orientations. These categories illustrate a broad spectrum of approaches, ranging from traditional in-person outreach and educational programmes to advanced digital co-creation, critical self-reflection, and methods explicitly aligned with social justice, demonstrating a dynamic and evolving landscape of public participation in archives. The extensive scholarly references validate the widespread adoption and academic significance of these diverse participatory practices. Having categorised the diverse participatory methods, the study then analysed their outcomes in archival public programming. Table 3 presents these results.

Table 3: Outcomes of Participatory Endeavours in Archival Public Programming

Outcome Category	Specific Outcomes Identified	Scholars
Enhanced Access and Discovery	Opening up access to archives, new learnings and discoveries, improving digital	Worthen and Weatherall (2024), Co et al. (2023), Ruschinsky (2017),

Engaging the public through archives

		archive access, enhancing public access and visibility, promoting scholarly access	Schellnack-Kelly (2024), Ruest et al. (2020)
Community Building and Empowerment		Constructing communities of records and memory, fostering connectivity and empathy, promoting social cohesion, facilitating community self-representation, and giving voice to marginalised narratives	Roeschley (2023), Bushey (2023), Pell (2015), Ke and Mustafa (2024), Ruschensky (2017), Cachola (2022), Wilson (2023), DeCeulaerde (2024), Mills et al. (2020)
Improved Practice and Relevance	Archival and	Redefining archival use, ensuring future relevance, promoting participatory practices, and elevating lived experience as a valid source of knowledge	Eveleigh (2015), Bushey (2023), Rolan (2017), Ruschensky (2017), Wilson (2023)
Educational Research Advancements	and	New learnings and discoveries, bridging the gap between education and archival research, providing learning opportunities, and identifying exclusion biases	Worthen and Weatherall (2024), Mills et al. (2020), Hartlep and Xiong (2018), Thompson (2024), Perry et al. (2024)

Table 3 shows that participatory archival public programming yields numerous beneficial outcomes. These initiatives enhance access and discovery by opening archives, fostering new knowledge and insights, improving accessibility to digital and web resources, and enriching the contextualisation of archival descriptions. Concurrently, they significantly contribute to community building and empowerment through the construction of collective records and memories, thereby promoting social cohesion, cultural diversity, and facilitating community self-representation. Moreover, participatory approaches improve archival practice and relevance by redefining archival use to embrace inclusivity, active participation, and effective meaning communication. Fundamentally, they drive educational and research advancements by bridging the gap between undergraduate education and archival scholarship, engaging diverse student populations, and stimulating novel research inquiries through active interaction with archival materials. This paradigm shift within archival science underscores a profound commitment to user participation, recognising individuals as pivotal social agents in the co-creation and stewardship of collective archival memory. Building on the analysis of positive outcomes, the review proceeded to conduct a comparative analysis of participatory archival practices across the Global North and Global South. This comparison was essential for highlighting regional differences and similarities in implementation, engagement strategies, and underlying institutional or socio-political frameworks. It also enabled a critical examination of how contextual factors shape participatory approaches, offering insights into both transferable practices and region-specific challenges. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Comparative Analysis of Participatory Archival Practices in the Global North and Global South

Region	Strengths	Limitations	Representative Scholarly Examples
Global North	- Advanced digital infrastructure and technological innovation support participatory design through tools such as user-friendly interfaces, web-based archives, and datathons. - Strong ideological foundations rooted in social justice, decolonial thought, and memory activism.	- Underrepresentation of ethnic minorities within dominant archival institutions persists. - Participatory approaches may be overly academic in orientation or limited to short-term, project-based models	United States: Co et al. (2023); Brilmyer et al. (2019); Rauch et al. (2024); Cifor et al. (2018); Barclay (2023). Canada: Bushey (2023); Mills et al. (2020); Ruest et al. (2020). United

	- Institutional maturity reflected in sustained funding and policy support. - Emphasis on inclusivity, affective engagement, and accessibility in archival spaces. - Communities often engaged as co-curators and collaborators.	without enduring grassroots integration.	Kingdom: Perry et al. (2024); Eveleigh (2015); Hoyle (2018). Australia: Wilson (2023); Rolan (2017).
Global South	- Increasing visibility through community outreach and public education initiatives. - Adoption of decentralised archival strategies to engage marginalised and rural populations. - Archival practice is often linked to national development, social justice, and collective memory formation. - Emergence of grassroots-led projects and oral history initiatives that enhance inclusivity.	- Digital infrastructure remains inadequate in many regions, with limited digitisation and online archival access. - Participatory practices often remain top-down, consultant-led, or episodic, lacking sustained community co-design. - Institutional weaknesses, including insufficient policy frameworks, funding, and training. - Persistent dominance of official narratives limits representational diversity.	South Africa: Mukwevho (2018); Ngulube et al. (2017); Schellnack-Kelly (2024). Zimbabwe: Sigauke et al. (2025). Tanzania: Chami (2017). Namibia: Magadza (2022). Ghana: Out & Asante (2015). Regional (ESARBICA): Saurombe (2020); Saurombe & Ngulube (2016).

Table 4 offers a comparative interpretation of participatory archival practices in the Global North and Global South, highlighting distinct strengths and limitations across regions. In the Global North, archival initiatives benefit from robust digital infrastructure, ideological commitments to social justice and memory activism, and sustained institutional support. These conditions foster inclusive and technologically advanced participatory models, where communities are often meaningfully engaged as collaborators. However, challenges persist, particularly in the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities and the tendency for participatory approaches to be short term or academic in nature rather than deeply embedded at the grassroots level. In contrast, the Global South demonstrates significant efforts to enhance archival participation through community outreach, decentralisation, and grassroots oral history projects. These practices are often closely tied to national development goals and the preservation of collective memory. Nonetheless, the region faces structural constraints, including inadequate digital infrastructure, limited funding, and policy gaps, which hinder the scalability and sustainability of participatory approaches. Furthermore, many initiatives remain hierarchical or ad hoc, with official narratives often prevailing over diverse community voices. To build on this comparative analysis, the study further examined the recurring barriers to participatory archival public programming. These inherent limitations, cutting across both regional contexts, are synthesised and discussed in greater detail in Table 5.

Table 5: Challenges and Limitations in Participatory Archival Public Programming

Challenge Category	Specific Challenges Identified	Scholars
Exclusion and Representation Biases	Event design exclusions, community-based archiving exclusivity, researching ephemeral	Roeschley (2023), DeCeulaerde (2024), Thompson (2024), Perry et al. (2024)

Engaging the public through archives

		histories, and inequity risks in audience mapping	
Limited Public Awareness and Engagement		Lack of community awareness, public underutilisation, limited online presence, passive participation, and social media underutilisation	Chami (2017), Magadza (2022), Maluleka et al., Ke and Mustafa (2024), Mollel and Mungwabi (2023), Mukwevho and Ngoepe (2019)
Institutional and Resource Constraints		Inadequate facilities, resource limitations, lack of planned outreach, insufficient staffing and funding, policy deficits	Mollel and Mungwabi (2023), Saurombe (2020), Magadza (2022), Saurombe and Ngulube (2016), Wilson (2023), Sigauke et al. (2025)
Methodological and Practical Difficulties	and	Limited research on participatory initiatives, unforeseen barriers, ethical and technical issues, and infrastructure limitations	Roeschley (2023), Co et al., Harrower (2018), Raemy (2021), Rauch et al. (2024)
Tensions in Values and Discourses		Dissonance between evidential and affective values, challenges to traditional archival practices	Hoyle (2018)

Table 5 depicts that participatory archival public programming faces significant challenges, including Exclusion and Representation Biases in event design and community-based archiving, and widespread Limited Public Awareness and Engagement due to underutilisation and misunderstanding of archives and inadequate online presence. These issues are compounded by Institutional and Resource Constraints like insufficient facilities, funding, and expertise, leading to ad hoc implementation. Furthermore, Methodological and Practical Difficulties arise from limited research on effective institutional-community connections and technical challenges in digital preservation and data infrastructure. Furthermore, Tensions in Values and Discourses emerge from the conflict between traditional evidential values and community-generated affective values.

Discussion

The classification in Table 2 presents a compelling and academically grounded framework for understanding the evolving landscape of participatory archival public programming. The six key categories identified demonstrate the progressive shift in archival practice from custodianship to community co-creation and empowerment. The first category, Community Engagement and Outreach Events, represents the cornerstone of participatory practice, wherein archival institutions actively foster relationships with diverse publics through events, workshops, oral history projects, and exhibitions. This approach reflects a postmodern reimagining of the archive as a socially constructed space, where user participation is integral to meaning-making. This is supported by scholars such as Roeschley (2023) and Magadza (2022), who illustrate how direct community interaction not only enriches collections but also legitimises lived experiences as archival material. The second category, Collaborative Content Creation and Documentation, reflects an even more profound shift in archival authority, moving towards shared authorship and curatorial agency. The inclusion of methods such as participatory design and co-documentation of memory aligns with Cifor et al.'s (2018) notion of the "radical empathy" paradigm in archives, which champions co-production with community members as a way of redressing historical silences. As demonstrated in Table 1,

such practices are not merely technical but also ideological, supporting inclusive narratives and disrupting hierarchical knowledge structures within archives.

Digital and Technological Engagement, the third category, signals the growing importance of technology in democratising archival access. The use of Web 2.0 tools, Linked Open Usable Data (LOUD) standards, and digital exhibitions not only extends the reach of archives but also facilitates interaction beyond physical boundaries. Ruest et al. (2020) and Mukwevho and Ngoepe (2019) illustrate that online platforms can foster decentralised participation, especially for underrepresented communities. However, as the authors caution, digital engagement also introduces technical and ethical complexities, especially concerning sustainability, accessibility, and digital equity. The fourth and fifth categories, Educational and Learning Initiatives and Research and Reflexive Practices, highlight the pedagogical and introspective dimensions of participatory archiving. Mills et al. (2020) emphasise the value of archives as educational tools, while Perry et al. (2024) advocate for participatory action research to better understand public needs. These methods not only bridge archival practice and academic inquiry but also support the development of historically literate, critically engaged citizenry.

The Activism and Social Justice Orientations category demonstrates that archival public programming is increasingly being harnessed for advocacy and systemic change. Community archives functioning as activist spaces, as evidenced by Cachola (2022) and De Ceulaerde (2024), challenge dominant historiographies and reposition archives as tools for empowerment and restitution. This evolution is emblematic of what the authors refer to as the "co-creation of memory," a transformative ethos that redefines archives as living, contested, and inclusive spaces. Therefore, the classification presented in Table 1 is not merely a typology of participatory methods but also a theoretical articulation of the values underpinning modern archival engagement. It affirms that effective archival public programming must be multifaceted, technologically agile, pedagogically rich, and socially responsive. These approaches offer not only innovative strategies but also provoke critical reflections on power, representation, and community agency in archival discourse.

The findings presented in Table 3 offer a robust and multifaceted understanding of the positive outcomes of participatory archival public programming. These outcomes illustrate the paradigm shift in archival theory and practice towards inclusivity, shared authority, and transformative social engagement. Rooted in the principles of postmodern archival thought, these participatory outcomes challenge traditional notions of archival neutrality, reinforcing the shift from passive custodianship to active facilitators of access, community engagement, and knowledge production. This mirrors the arguments of Ruest et al. (2020) and Worthen and Weatherall (2024), who affirm that participatory practices are instrumental in improving digital access and enriching public understanding of archival materials. As noted in Table 3, the first outcome category, Enhanced Access and Discovery, demonstrates that participatory methods dismantle structural and intellectual barriers that traditionally hinder archival accessibility. As noted by Schellnack-Kelly (2024) and Co et al. (2023), initiatives such as crowdsourced description and digital exhibitions have significantly expanded the discoverability and contextual relevance of archival resources. Furthermore, these approaches are credited with opening archives to new user groups, fostering inclusivity and scholarly utility across multiple disciplines. Ruschensky (2017) reinforces this by illustrating how participatory archival systems facilitate novel interpretations of collections, particularly when marginalised communities contribute their perspectives.

Engaging the public through archives

The second category, Community Building and Empowerment, highlights the affective and social benefits of participatory practices, such as fostering empathy and constructing communities of memory. Bushey (2023) and Cachola (2022) underscore the role of archives in enabling collective identity formation, particularly through oral histories and collaborative storytelling initiatives. These methods support the decentralisation of archival authority, aligning with Goss's (2020) emphasis on archives as democratic spaces of shared memory-making. In doing so, they give a voice to historically marginalised groups and encourage reflexive engagement with contested pasts (Roeschley, 2023; DeCeulaerde, 2024). The third outcome, Improved Archival Practice and Relevance, signifies a paradigm shift in professional practice, whereby archivists increasingly recognise the value of participatory curation. Eveleigh (2015) and Rolan (2017) argue that these practices prompt institutions to reconsider traditional notions of neutrality, enabling a more inclusive and context-sensitive archival framework. Thus, participation is not only a tool for public engagement but also a driver of internal innovation, promoting the integration of lived experience into archival theory and curatorial methodologies. This is exemplified in Bushey's (2023) work on user-driven curatorial design and Ruschensky's (2017) exploration of self-representation within community archives.

The fourth and final outcome, Educational and Research Advancements, underscores the educational significance of participatory programming. As Mills et al. (2020) and Hartlep and Xiong (2018) observed, archives that integrate participatory methods into educational frameworks can bridge the gap between research and pedagogy, particularly in historically underrepresented populations. These programmes offer experiential learning opportunities and enable critical engagement with archival silences and biases, often through methods like audience mapping and co-research initiatives (Perry et al., 2024; Thompson, 2024). Such approaches validate the archive as a pedagogical space and expand its function beyond preservation to include inclusive knowledge dissemination. Therefore, the outcomes detailed in Table 3 provide compelling evidence that participatory approaches are not peripheral enhancements but core to the mission of modern archival institutions. As demonstrated by the scholarly contributions of Wilson (2023) and Maluleka et al. (2023), these methods promote accessibility, equity, and innovation, thereby redefining the archive as a responsive, community-driven space.

Tables 4 and 5 offer an analysis of the key limitations and challenges facing participatory archival public programming, revealing the intricate barriers to achieving inclusive and sustainable community engagement. These challenges are not merely operational but are deeply embedded in institutional structures, societal inequalities, and the philosophical underpinnings of archival practice (Roeschley, 2023; DeCeulaerde, 2024). The first category (Table 5), Exclusion and Representation Biases, highlights how participatory initiatives can unintentionally reproduce marginalisation if not critically designed and implemented. For instance, poorly structured events may welcome certain demographics while alienating others, thereby narrowing participation and weakening the intended inclusivity (Perry et al., 2024; Thompson, 2024). Community-based archiving, while aiming to empower local voices, can also risk becoming insular or exclusionary if it fails to build bridges across different community groups (DeCeulaerde, 2024; Roeschley, 2023). Moreover, traditional archival frameworks often struggle to accommodate ephemeral forms of cultural expression, such as dance, oral traditions, or transient social movements, resulting in representational gaps within collections. This is echoed by Cachola (2022), who underscores the difficulty of preserving performance-based heritage within static archival systems, and by Perry et al. (2024), who caution against uncritical use of audience mapping tools that may reinforce pre-existing inequities.

The second challenge, limited public awareness and engagement, speaks to the disconnection between archives and their wider public. Many communities remain unaware of the existence, purpose, or potential value of archives, leading to low visitation and minimal engagement (Chami, 2017; Magadza, 2022). Maluleka et al. (2023) argue that such limited awareness stems from historical perceptions of archives as elite, bureaucratic institutions rather than community-oriented spaces. In the digital era, a lack of robust online presence compounds this issue, as archives often underutilise platforms such as social media and interactive websites, which are crucial for reaching younger, tech-savvy audiences (Ke & Mustafa, 2024; Mukwevho & Ngoepe, 2019). As Mollel and Mungwabi (2023) note, this digital disengagement is particularly detrimental in contexts where remote participation is essential for broadening access. Thirdly, Institutional and Resource Constraints constitute a significant barrier to participatory programming. Many institutions operate with minimal budgets, inadequate infrastructure, and limited staff capacity, which hinders both the implementation and sustainability of engagement initiatives (Saurombe & Ngulube, 2016; Wilson, 2023). Even where legislative frameworks support public service, their operationalisation is often impeded by “ad hoc” programme execution and a lack of clear outreach strategies. These issues are compounded by the absence of training and resources necessary for archivists to adopt new participatory tools and practices. Sigauke et al. (2025) highlight that under-resourced archives in the Global South particularly struggle to bridge the gap between aspirational community engagement policies and on-the-ground realities.

Methodological and Practical Difficulties, the fourth challenge, stem from the relative novelty and complexity of participatory approaches in archival contexts. As Co et al. (2023) and Rauch et al. (2024) observe, much of the existing literature focuses on logistical execution rather than critical reflection or best practices, leaving practitioners without tested models for implementation. Unforeseen barriers, such as ethical tensions around ownership and consent, regularly emerge in digital co-curation projects. Moreover, advanced technologies like LOUD standards, while promising, demand technical competencies and policies that many institutions currently lack (Raemy, 2021; Harrower, 2018). Rolan (2017) stresses the importance of sustainable digital infrastructures, warning that without them, participatory efforts risk becoming fragmented or unsustainable. Furthermore, Tensions in Values and Discourses present a more epistemological challenge to participatory archiving. A significant dissonance exists between evidential values, which prioritise neutrality, provenance, and authenticity, as well as affective values rooted in lived experience, emotion, and communal memory (Hoyle, 2018; Cifor et al., 2018). These conflicting frameworks complicate the integration of participatory contributions into formal archival systems. Addressing this challenge requires a reorientation of archival theory and practice to accommodate pluralistic understandings of memory, value, and truth. As Ngulube et al. (2017) argue, archivists must cultivate critical reflexivity and openness to community-driven narratives, which often challenge traditional hierarchies and epistemologies of the archive. Therefore, although participatory archival public programming holds immense transformative potential, its success depends on the careful navigation of complex challenges. These range from structural limitations and public disengagement to conceptual tensions that question the very foundations of archival authority. Addressing these issues is essential for developing more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable archival futures.

Conclusion and recommendations

Engaging the public through archives

In conclusion, the systematic classification and analysis of participatory approaches in archival public programming, as outlined in Tables 1 to 5, underscore a significant redefinition of the archive as a participatory, socially embedded institution. The review revealed that participatory methods, ranging from community outreach to digital engagement and activist archiving, not only broaden access and enhance relevance but also foster community empowerment and educational enrichment. These methods challenge traditional custodial models by promoting co-creation, shared authority, and the validation of diverse narratives, thereby aligning with postmodern archival theory. However, the study also highlights persistent challenges, including exclusion biases, limited public awareness, resource constraints, methodological gaps, and tensions between institutional and communal archival values. These challenges manifest differently across regions: while the Global North benefits from advanced infrastructure and sustained institutional support, it continues to grapple with representational inequities and overly academic participatory models. Conversely, the Global South demonstrates innovative grassroots practices and strong community engagement, yet is constrained by limited resources, digital underdevelopment, and policy gaps.

Addressing these regionally nuanced complexities is imperative to advancing participatory archiving from aspirational rhetoric to effective practice. As such, archival institutions should adopt flexible and inclusive participatory frameworks that are co-designed with communities, especially those that are historically marginalised. This includes ensuring that event design, outreach, and digital platforms are culturally responsive and accessible. Also, sustained investment in digital infrastructure, staff training, and policy development is essential to support long-term participatory engagement. Furthermore, research on participatory methodologies should be expanded, with emphasis on cross-institutional comparisons and empirical evaluation to identify best practices. In addition, archivists must actively interrogate and recalibrate traditional professional values, embracing reflexivity and openness to affective, community-driven modes of knowledge production. Collectively, these aspects can foster more equitable, resilient, and community-centred archival public programming.

Limitations and areas for further research

Despite offering valuable insights into the diverse participatory methods employed in archival public programming, this study is not without limitations. The reliance on secondary data from published literature may have introduced selection and publication bias, potentially omitting non-documented or informal participatory practices, especially within underrepresented regions or institutions with limited academic visibility. Furthermore, the review's temporal scope (2014–2025) may have excluded earlier foundational participatory models that continue to influence current practices. Methodologically, while the study applied rigorous screening and appraisal criteria, the absence of direct empirical validation limited the generalisability of its findings across varying socio-cultural and institutional contexts. In addition, the study's findings were primarily drawn from African contexts due to the limited availability of comparable studies from other regions of the Global South, particularly Latin America. This regional concentration may constrain the generalisability of the conclusions across different socio-cultural and political settings. Future research should prioritise longitudinal, cross-institutional studies that incorporate direct community feedback and measure the long-term impacts of participatory initiatives. Additionally, there is a critical need for empirical inquiry into the role of power dynamics, digital ethics, and sustainability in participatory archiving, particularly in the Global South, where structural disparities may shape both opportunities and constraints for inclusive engagement. Future research should also expand the scope to include empirical and comparative studies from Latin America and other underrepresented Global

South regions to develop a more comprehensive understanding of participatory archival practices across diverse contexts.

References

- African Digital Heritage. (2025). *Of memories and reels: a study of the state of Kenya's audio visual archives*. African Digital Heritage. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://africandigitalheritage.org/resources/> (Accessed 17 January 2025).
- Aguilar, L. and Gillespie, L. 2024. Using digital technology to engage people with varying degrees of sight loss with archives and filmmaking during COVID-19. *puntOorg*, 9(2): 128-143.
- Alberch i Fugueras, R. 2021. Archives for memory and justice in Colombia after the Peace Agreements. In A.T.O.L.S. & B.S. (Eds.), *Archives and human rights* (1st ed., pp. 138–151). London: Routledge.
- ASReview. 2025. *Join the movement towards fast, open, and transparent systematic reviews*. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://asreview.nl/> (Accessed 12 January 2025).
- Barclay, S. 2023. *Archives and outreach methods: how far have we really come: a comparative case study*. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.17615/213t-mb06> (Accessed 11 February 2025).
- Bhebhe, S. 2015. Overview of the oral history programme at the National Archives of Zimbabwe: implications for nation building and social cohesion. *Oral History Journal of South Africa*, 3(1): 43-56.
- Bhebhe, S. and Ngoepe, M. 2022. Political and socio-economic dynamics on the access to oral sources at national archives in Zimbabwe and South Africa. *Collections*, 18(2): 176-201.
- Brilmyer, G., Gabiola, J., Zavala, J. and Caswell, M. 2019. Reciprocal archival imaginaries: the shifting boundaries of “community” in community archives. *Archivaria*, 88: 6-48.
- Bushey, J. 2023. A participatory archives approach to fostering connectivity, increasing empathy, and building resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Heritage*, 6(3): 2379-2393.
- Cachola, E. R. 2022. Public awareness and outreach: framing archival events to bring different communities together. *Advocating for Ourselves*. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.21428/20a90772.d01cfee5> (Accessed 10 February 2025)
- CADIMA. 2025. *Evidence synthesis tool and database*. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://www.cadima.info/> (Accessed 02 February 2025).
- Caswell, M., Migoni, A. A., Geraci, N. and Cifor, M. 2016. To be able to imagine otherwise': community archives and the importance of representation. *Archives and Records*, 38(1): 5-26. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2016.1260445> (Accessed 11 February 2025).
- Chami, M. 2017. Community awareness for archives in Tanzania: A case study of Zanzibar National Archives. *Journal of the South African Society of Archivists*, 50: 56-66.
- Chaterera, F. and Rodrigues, A. 2019. Use of public programming strategies in promoting access to documentary heritage at Zimbabwe National Archives. In: Ngulube, P. (ed.), *Handbook of research on advocacy, promotion, and public programming for memory institutions*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global Scientific Publishing.

- Chigwada, J., Ncube, M. M. and Ngulube, P. 2025. Public engagement through programming in archives: a systematic review of activities and resultant outcomes. *Information*, 16(6): 471.
- Christen, K. 2018. Relationships, not records: digital heritage and the ethics of sharing indigenous knowledge online. In: Sayers, J. (ed). *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities*. London: Routledge, pp. 403-412.
- Cifor, M., Caswell, M., Migoni, A. A. and Geraci, N. 2018. What we do crosses over to activism: the politics and practice of community archives. *The Public Historian*, 40(2): 69-95.
- Co, E., Dirig, R., Halstead, J., Hendrie, M. and Masilko, T. 2023. Reimagining access: Improving access to digital archives through participatory design. *Journal of Digital Media Management*, 11(4): 324-333.
- Cordes, K. 2016. *Together we listen: generating accessible oral histories of NYC through community participatory projects*. Paper presented at IFLA WLIC 2016, Columbus, OH, 13–19 August 2016. [Online] WWW. Available: <https://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/1416/> (Accessed 02 February 2025).
- Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). 2025. *CASP checklists*. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://casp-uk.net/casp-tools-checklists/> (Accessed 20 January 2025).
- DeCeulaerde, G. 2024. Community engagement through cultural archiving: Exploring the preconditions for a community-oriented archival practice in Flanders (Belgium). *iPRES 2024 Papers – International Conference on Digital Preservation*. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.21428/5676bf2d.49a8d26d> (Accessed 19 January 2025).
- Dritsou, V., Benardou, A., Candela, G., Chambers, S., Irollo, A. and Tasovac, T. (2024). *Introduction to Europeana APIs (Version 1.0.0)* [Training module]. DARIAH Campus. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://hdl.handle.net/21.11159/019595c5-1d3a-70b7-85ac-6b4b87e7f65f> (Accessed 20 January 2025).
- Eveleigh, A.M.M. 2015. *Crowding out the archivist? Implications of online user participation for archival theory and practice*. PhD thesis. London: University College London.
- Fleming, K.S. and Gerrard, M. 2014. Engaging communities: Public programming in state universities' special collections and archives. *Archival Issues*, 36(1): 7-26. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24589921> (Accessed 31 October 2024).
- Fritz, S., Milligan, I., Ruest, N. and Lin, J. 2021. Fostering community engagement through datathon events: the archives unleashed experience. *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 15(1).
- Goss, L. 2020. Participatory archives: theory and practice. In: Benoit, E and Eveleigh, A. (eds). *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 21(1):44. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.21.1.44> (Accessed 31 November 2024).
- Gunther, A., Schall, M., and Wang, C. (2016). The creation and evolution of the Transcription Center, Smithsonian Institution's digital volunteer platform. *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*, 12(2): 87-96. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.1177/155019061601200203> (Accessed 10 February 2025).
- Harrower, N. 2018. On reflexive and participatory approaches in digital preservation today. *Hamburger Journal für Kulturanthropologie (HJK)*, 7: 63-76. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/hjk/article/view/1194> (Accessed 31 October 2024).

- Hartlep, N. D. and Xiong, B.V. 2018. The Hmong Archives as a community resource for social studies educators in Saint Paul, Minnesota. *Educational Foundations*, 31(3-4): 118-149.
- Hayes-Roberts, H. E. 2020. *Frameworks of representation: a design history of the District Six Museum in Cape Town* [PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape]. UWC Scholar. Available WWW: <https://hdl.handle.net/10566/9775> (Accessed 31 October 2024).
- Hoyle, V .E. 2018. *Who do archives think they are? Archives, communities and values in the heritage city*. PhD thesis. York: University of York. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/23153/> (Accessed 31 October 2024).
- James, J., Johnson, V. and Hunter, I. 2018. Archives matter. *Insights*, 31(26): 1-10. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.417>.
- Kandiuk, M. 2016. The rhetoric of digitization and the politicization of Canadian heritage. *Library Trends*, 65(2): 165-179. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lib.2016.0029> (Accessed 11 February 2025).
- Kasemsarn, K. and Nickpour, F. 2025. Digital storytelling in cultural and heritage tourism: A review of social media integration and youth engagement frameworks. *Heritage*, 8(6): 200. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage8060200> (Accessed 10 February 2025).
- Ke, Z. and Mustafa, M. 2024. Promoting public engagement in urban heritage preservation through participatory art case studies of practices and approaches. *Archives of Design Research*, 37(5): 221-243.
- Khare, A. and Vikas, R. M. 2022. People's Archive of Rural India (PARI) as an alternative to corporatized media: the public sphere and rural silencing in India. In R. Varman & D. Vijay (Eds.), *Organizing resistance and imagining alternatives in India* (pp. 213-240). Chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kohl, C., McIntosh, E. J., Unger, S., Haddaway, N. R., Kecke, S., Schiemann, J. and Wilhelm, R. 2018. Online tools supporting the conduct and reporting of systematic reviews and systematic maps: A case study on CADIMA and review of existing tools. *Environmental Evidence*, 7(1): 8. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13750-018-0115-5> (Accessed 11 February 2025).
- Kolaski, K., Logan, L. R. and Ioannidis, J. P. A. 2023. Guidance to best tools and practices for systematic reviews. *Systematic Reviews*, 12(1): 96.
- Lawrimore, E., Gwynn, D. and Krim, S. 2022. From peripheral to essential: the evolution of outreach as a core archival function. In: Crowe, K. M. and H  louvry, J. (eds). *Building community engagement and outreach in libraries*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0732-067120220000043005> (Accessed 12 February 2025).
- Li, M., Gao, Q. and Yu, T. 2023. Kappa statistic considerations in evaluating inter-rater reliability between two raters: Which, when and context matters. *BMC Cancer*, 23: 799.
- Library and Archives Canada. 2025. *Library and Archives Canada. Government of Canada*. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives.html> (Accessed 31 October 2024).
- Lopang, S., Venson, M. N. and Ngulube, P. 2014. The role of public archives in national development in selected countries in the East and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives region. *Innovation*, 48: 42-64.

- MacFarlane, A., Russell-Rose, T. and Shokraneh, F. 2022. Search strategy formulation for systematic reviews: issues, challenges and opportunities. *Intelligent Systems with Applications*, 15: 200091.
- Magadza, A. R. 2022. *The role of outreach services in enhancing the use of archival materials at the National Archives of Namibia*. (Honours thesis). UNAM Digital Collections.
- Maluleka, J., Nkwe, M. and Ngulube, P. 2023. Online presence of public archival institutions of South Africa. *Collection and Curation*, 42(3): 88-93.
- Mandrekar, J. N. 2011. Measures of interrater agreement. *Biostatistics in Clinical Medicine*, 6: 6-7.
- Maphorisa, O. M. and Jain, P. 2013. Marketing of archival reference services at Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS). *International Journal of Academic Research and Reflection*, 1(3): 34.
- Marini, F. 2019. Exhibitions in special collections, rare book libraries and archives: Questions to ask ourselves. *Alexandria*, 29(1-2): 8-29.
- Methley, A. M., Campbell, S., Chew-Graham, C., McNally, R. and Cheraghi-Sohi, S. 2014. PICO, PICOS and SPIDER: A comparison study of specificity and sensitivity in three search tools for qualitative systematic reviews. *BMC Health Services Research*, 14: 579.
- Mills, A., Rochat, D. and High, S. 2020. Telling stories from Montreal's Negro Community Centre fonds: the archives as community-engaged classroom. *Archivaria*, 89: 34-69.
- Mollel, W. E. and Mungwabi, H. 2023. Awareness and user satisfaction with archival services at the Archives Management Department (RAMD) in Tanzania. *Tanzanian Journal of Population Studies and Development*, 30(2): 63-81.
- Mukwevho, J. 2018. Educational programs as an interactive tool for public engagement by public archives repositories in South Africa. *Archives and Manuscripts*, 46(3): 309-329.
- Mukwevho, J. and Ngoepe, M. 2019. Taking archives to the people: the use of social media as a tool to promote public archives in South Africa. *Library Hi Tech*, 37(3): 374-388.
- Ncube, M.M. and Ngulube, P. 2025. Harnessing data analytics for enhanced public programming in archives and museums: a scoping review. *Heritage*, 8:163.
- Ngoepe, M. 2019. Archives without archives: a window of opportunity to build inclusive archives in South Africa. *Journal of the South African Society of Archivists*, 52: 149-166.
- Ngoepe, M. and Ngulube, P. 2014. The need for records management in the auditing process in the public sector in South Africa. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, 24(2): 135-150.
- Ngulube, P., Ngoepe, M., Saurombe, N. and Chaterera, F. 2017. Towards a uniform strategy for taking archives to the people in South Africa. *ESARBICA Journal*, 36: 1-15.
- Open Science Framework (OSF). 2024. Benefits and concerns of registration. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://help.osf.io/article/603-benefits-of-registration> (Accessed 23 November 2024).
- Openghaffen, L. 2022. Archives in action: The impact of digital technology on archaeological recording strategies and ensuing open research archives. *Digital Applications in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage*, 27: e00231.
- Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville,

- J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., McGuinness, L. A., Stewart, L. A., Thomas, J., Tricco, A. C., Welch, V. A., Whiting, P. and Moher, D. 2021. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372: n71. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71> (Accessed 12 September 2024).
- Pell, S. 2015. Radicalizing the politics of the archive: an ethnographic reading of an activist archive. *Archivaria*, 80: 33-57.
- Perry, S., Foxton, K., Gargett, K. and Northall, L. 2024. Centring audiences: what is the value of audience mapping for influencing public engagement with cultural heritage? *The Historic Environment: Policy and Practice*, 15(2): 248-272.
- Pieper, D. and Rombey, T. 2022. Where to prospectively register a systematic review. *Systematic Reviews*, 11: 8.
- Raemy, J. A. 2021. *Applying effective data modelling approaches for the creation of a participatory archive platform*. Master's thesis. Lausanne: École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne.
- Rauch, C., Poole, A. H., Reid, T., Weigle, M. C., Nelson, M. L., Poursardar, F. and Kelly, M. 2024. Archiving digital marketing: examining preservation of dynamic content on the web through the lens of online advertisements. *Proceedings of the iPRES International Conference on Digital Preservation*. [Online] Available WWW: <https://ipres2024.pubpub.org/pub/x38rbwuu> (Accessed 17 February 2025).
- Rayyan. 2025. *Faster systematic reviews*. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://www.rayyan.ai/> (Accessed 9 January 2025).
- Roeschley, A. 2023. They care enough to document people's stories: using ethnographic methods to understand collection day outreach events in participatory archives. *Library and Information Science Research*, 45(2): 101234.
- Rolan, G. 2017. Agency in the archive: a model for participatory recordkeeping. *Archival Science*, 17: 195-225.
- Ruest, N., Lin, J., Milligan, I. and Fritz, S. 2020. The Archives Unleashed Project: technology, process, and community to improve scholarly access to web archives. In: *Proceedings of the ACM/IEEE Joint Conference on Digital Libraries*, 157-166. New York: Association for Computing Machinery.
- Ruschiensky, C. 2017. Meaning-making and memory-making in the archives: oral history interviews with archives donors. *Archivaria*, 84: 103-125.
- Saurombe, N. 2020. Taking archives to the people: an examination of public programs in the National Archives of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives. *Archives and Manuscripts*, 48(1): 25-44. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2019.1604242https://doi.org/10.5334/kula.51> (Accessed 01 February 2025).
- Saurombe, N. and Ngulube, P. 2016. Public programming skills of archivists in selected national memory institutions of East and Southern Africa. *Mousaion*, 34(1): 23-42.
- Schellnack-Kelly, I. 2024. Accessing collective memory: the role of oral history in building an inclusive archives reflecting a people's archives. *Collection and Curation* 43(1):24-29. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.1108/CC-01-2023-0004> (Accessed 29 January 2025).
- Seeman, D. and Dean, H. 2019. Open social knowledge creation and library and archival metadata. *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies*,

- 3(1): 13. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://doi.org/10.5334/kula.51> (Accessed 11 February 2025).
- Sigauke, O., Mutsagondo, S. and Sibanda, M. 2025. Decentralisation as a marketing strategy for archival services in Zimbabwe. *Collection and Curation*, 44(1): 18-24.
- Theimer, K. 2015. Participatory archives. In: Duranti, L. and Franks, P. (eds). *Encyclopedia of Archival Science*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 261-262.
- Thompson, L. 2024. Dancing in the archive: bodily encounters, memory, and more-than-representational participatory historical geographies. *Area*, 00: e12982.
- Wilson, E. 2023. *Integrating lived experience into collaborative curatorial practices: facilitating community self-representation through an historic photographic archive*. Doctoral thesis. Hobart: University of Tasmania.
- Worthen, H. and Weatherall, C. 2024. Watery archives: reflections on doing participatory archival research for climate action and audience engagement. *Area*, 00: e12985.
- Wulder, M. A., Masek, J .G., Cohen, W.B., Loveland, T .R. and Woodcock, C.E. 2012. Opening the archive: how free data has enabled the science and monitoring promise of Landsat. *Remote Sensing of Environment*, 122: 2-10.