

NEWS

PROJECT

CULTURAL H.ID.RA.N.T. -CULTURAL Hidden IDentities ReAppear through Networks of WaTer

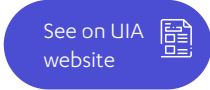
📍 Halandri, Greece

TOPIC

Culture and cultural heritage

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A thing we call public history



The establishment of a digital tool combining institutional and everyday knowledge, collecting, organizing and systematizing raw material into an open access platform has been undertaken since Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T. project early stages. This process went beyond content collection and production, working as a significant and useful opportunity to activate the local network of stakeholders. Its actual appearance is the outcome of a process that evolved the initial idea into the activation of an independent initiative. On the days of the first working session of the newly established local archive management group, this article explores the evolution from the initial concept to the current state of the art, focusing on how public history in Halandri is becoming a cooperative matter.

As a **content** and as an **institution** [archalandri](#) (halandri's local archive) has been built from scratch, it is an original new tool that results from the implementation of the Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T. project. As better explained in [Journal](#) no.2, during the last months a number of dimensions have been explored in the direction of granting the archive a sustainable development model, capable to support its functioning beyond the project duration: the establishment of a board and a direct connection to the local community; the stabilization of a staff granting the operability of the archive (not only as an online platform, but also as an organization performing own activities); the definition of a business model and of a financing scheme on the long run.

“The major challenge, at least for me, was that the archive was built from scratch. We didn't have a pre-fixed (municipal, family, ...)collection to handle. We had to create the collection, think what we should gather and then do all the other stages that follow this” (Ioulia Skounaki)

THE LOCAL ARCHIVE IN A NUTSHELL

The imagined solution

The archive has been designed to offer documented information in an understandable and attractive way for the general public: it currently includes material on the history of Hadrian's Aqueduct (as a water and a cultural resource), on the relationship of the inhabitants with this (almost) invisible monument and, more generally, with past and present aspects of the water element in their area. Now that the archive is online and operating, tested and used by an enlarged community of practices, the evolution in the scope and dimension it underwent since the initial phases is becoming evident. Differently then what initially imagined, the archive is not secluding its content only to Hadrian related topics, but it has expanded into **a wider permanent repository of collective memories**

embracing the entire territory of Halandri.

“What is the value of a local archive? What purposes may it have? How can it be local? How can it support a local community to perform collective memory?”(Ioulia Skounaki)

A collective output for an enlarged audience

From the very beginning the archive was imagined as **the product of an enlarged governance**, co-designed and co-managed by a variety of actors, following the principle of **democratizing the access to cultural resources**, and to the intention of giving a substantial meaning to the concept of common goods. The idea was to build up a tool that could be interesting, useful and usable by a larger audience reconciling two conditions: meet the scientific standards of an archive and involve the local community in its creation and future management. These operative principles strongly influenced the way in which the archive came to life, conditioning its trajectories of development, and finally expanding its domain.

Expanding the semantic scope

The decision to broaden the semantic scope of the archive was made for different reasons. Initial research actually demonstrated that the focus on the aqueduct as an infrastructure, a source of local memory and identity for the Halandri community was too limited: memories of the wells, or of the use of El Alamein reservoir as a shelter during the war and before emerged, but very few testimonies were directly related to the aqueduct itself. So a decision was made for the archive to include material that would help the users to get an idea of the historical framework, to understand more about the aqueduct itself (who built it, how long it was, when it was built and how, why it was forgotten, etc.). This enriched the archive collection with certified documents relating to the water history of Athens, and helped incorporate in the archive a selection of technical and historical documents provided by EYDAP (Athens water company), by the Ephorates for Antiquities and others. In parallel the topic of water was recognized as relevant, and the research went also in the direction of investigating other water-related issues, such as water provision before the construction of the modern piped water supply system, the long-forgotten profession of the “water man” (seller), the wells and their relationship to the system of the aqueduct, the hard living conditions in the settlements of Asia Minor refugees (1922) around Rematia stream. Finally, the interaction with local groups (i.e. the Oral history group, the Association for environmental and river protection of Pentelis-Chalandri, etc.) underlined the need to have **a broader vision for the archive to be more profoundly connected with local history, collective memories and experiences, in order to bring the community on board.**

“How to create a source pool of knowledge, inspiration, education for the local community and with the contribution of the local community?”(Ioulia Skounaki)

Setting up the content

The aggregation and combination of different documents and sources of knowledge was playing a crucial role in the definition of the archive framework: a lot of effort was spent in fact in collecting material that was scattered in other online archival databases and to connect them to the Local Archive. The basic concept in this sense was the idea of providing sources of knowledge to a variety of different users interested in having an idea of how the territory was inhabited in the past. At the same time, the interaction with the local groups, brought to the combination and the integration in the archive of the information, databases and knowledge that they originally produced and promoted independently (i.e. the collection of stories of the oral history group). This not only enriched and articulated the cultural footprint of the archive, but also provided a space for development and growth to the local groups, intercepting their expectations and desires, and finally recognizing them as key actors for the archive to further expand. To do so, the very way in which **the archive was built and imagined to accommodate different sources of knowledge had to be reframed, while the production of specific documents and outputs had to be put in place** (i.e. videos to incorporate local memories, texts collection and editing, raw material and transcripts treatment, etc.).

“The point at first was to make the existing archives, a local archive, a common idea”(Christos Giovanopoulos)

Cooperative paradigms and open access tools

Local archives are not so common in Greece: there are State archives, and there are collections, but very often these different repositories do not communicate or interact, the different silos/systems develop autonomously, and accessing the information can be complicated (or rather denied) for non-expert users. It is also because of

this that the effort produced through the establishment of the Local Archive is meaningful: promoting a **different cooperative paradigm** (between the municipality, the local groups and people that have an interest in sharing local cultural heritage, as much as intercepting more institutional and traditional archives), and at the same time **introducing an open source system of management and fruition** that would allow for multiple databases and sources of information to be made available. The content of the local archive in fact, is freely accessible to users for individual, educational and research use (but not for commercial purposes).

“The archive is a tool in the hands of the municipality in order to not only to document the history but to create the sense of community and knowledge about the city” (Christos Giovanopoulos)

Actors and roles

In march 2023 Halandri Municipality organized a public meeting to present and discuss the management plan of the local archive and its funding system: the Oral History group and the Municipality signed an agreement and Medina (the Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T. project partner in charge of the development of the archive) handed the archive to this **newborn local management group**. A scientific advisor has also been hired, to provide scientific support to the work of the group until June 2024. The municipality supports the operation by undertaking the hosting maintenance and every upgrade of the digital management systems of the local archive and the online platform. It also supports the work of the team with financial resources, provides working space (in the municipality library) administrative and technical support.

With this agile (but formalized) decision making body (management group + scientific advisor), the infrastructure provided by the Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T. project and held by the Municipality, the operativity of the digital archive is granted: the management team makes decisions by consensus, while the scientific advisor participates with veto power exclusively in matters related to the scientific integrity and credibility of the project. Individuals or other groups and institutions may take part in the meetings where proposals for the further development of the archive are presented and discussed. 1st December 2023 is the day for the first open meeting: the occasion to discuss the 2024 annual programme, to gather the proposals of the local community, and finally to **collectively decide on new topics and opportunities to enrich the archive heritage**.



Discussion taking place during the first local management group meeting

“The local archive is a tool in the local communities to continue exploring its connection with the past. The purpose of the management team is to find ways to enrich and renew the local archive collections through actions, collaboration, events with residents, school, communities, local associations, academics, I don't know, institutions,... This is a way for the archive to become a shared affair of the local community”. (Ioulia Skounaki)

A special thanks goes to Ioulia Skounaki and Christos Giovanopoulos for the inspiring conversation that preceded this article (and made it possible)

Culture and cultural heritage

See on UIA website

