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Review of Communities, archives and new collaborative practices (2020)

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Simon Popple, Andrew Prescott, and Daniel H. Mutibwa, eds. *Communities, Archives and New Collaborative Practices*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2020.

In this collection of case studies, editors Popple, Prescott, and Mutibwa bring together varied projects that demonstrate the value and possibilities of participatory documentation initiatives. Many of the case studies focus on efforts to create a record of under-documented experiences and perspectives, sometimes in direct response to underrepresentation or misrepresentation in institutional archives.

The volume frames the highlighted projects within the context of the turn toward the archive as “a collaborative space bridging traditionally segregated institutions and communities of users” (10) as well as the opportunities for collaboration afforded by the internet. The projects range from collecting memories of a shuttered BBC facility through a Facebook group to documenting LGBTQ activism in Manchester to guiding elders with dementia in creating autobiographical films. Most of them were supported by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Connected Communities and Digital Transformations programs and occurred between 2010 and 2018.

The case studies emphasize storytelling as an exercise of personal and community identity and the impact of the project on participants. As a result, they focus primarily on community engagement and the creation of records rather than the long-term preservation or use of those records. In some cases, long-term preservation and access were not primary goals of the community. In others, the authors acknowledge some of the challenges to preserving and providing access to the outputs of these projects (e.g., reliance on the labor of specific community volunteers or the use of proprietary platforms like Facebook to share photos and stories) but do not discuss them in depth. Practitioners interested in taking on similar projects will find the case studies useful as a source of creative models for community engagement but should look elsewhere for more detailed guidance on managing and providing access to outputs.

The volume’s strength is the expansiveness of its scope and the diversity of projects it covers. This makes it a valuable contribution to the literature on community and participatory archives, highlighting the power and versatility of such approaches to community memory.