

ARChive: ARTIST-RUN CENTRES AS INFORMATION RESOURCES

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BACKGROUND

Artist-run centres (ARCs) are a network of non-profit, artist-run galleries. They are major contributors to contemporary art practice in Canada. Although many ARCs have been active for 30+ years, academia has paid little attention to their work.

ARCs are important cultural heritage resources. Preservation of their histories and intellectual output benefits artists, researchers, and the public. This project focuses on ARCs in Alberta and Saskatchewan. This research describes how ARCs are making documents, publications, and tacit community knowledge accessible. Grounded theory analysis identifies the gaps between ideal and current practice.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do ARCs see themselves as culture & knowledge institutions?
- What kind of documentation or archival work is being done in the ARC community and why?
- How is this work being done & what obstacles do ARCs face?

METHODS

- Unstructured interviews with directors of **9 ARCs in AB and SK**
- Interviews discuss current practices, goals, influential factors, & how work is reflective of community
- **Grounded theory** (constant comparative method) used to analyze the interview data and extant archival projects

DISCUSSION

ARCs face many of the same challenges but approach documentation, preservation, and provision of access to information in diverse ways.

Theory and practice vary, but successful projects result from: 1. connected communities of engaged culture workers; 2. spontaneous & informal collaborations within and across civic boundaries; 3. necessary responses to scarce resources.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

"a very non-traditional archive"

Many ways to archive. Diversity of approaches to archiving and limited contact with traditional archives

Archive projects require a **passionate advocate** close to the day-to-day activities of the ARC.

Value interaction with the physical. Digitization is only part of an access & preservation solution.

"...have ideas and work come out of (the archive) and for it to be a catalyst for a larger discussion around why do we keep these things and what's the best way to keep them? Is there a best way? what are we doing with them? And just looking back towards your history a little bit and being able to make work in the here and now but still acknowledging your past." (director, The New Gallery)

Acknowledgements

