‘Where the Wild Things Are’: Community Records on the Web

Amalia S. Levi

**COMMUNITIES**

**Research**
- Transnational communities: diasporic, ethnic, racial, or subaltern
  - Today individuals use the Web to
    - communicate with community members (family or not)
    - express affinity with various groupings (circulars/associational)
    - emphasize distinctiveness (ideology, religion, culture)

**Records**
- They produce ‘big data’ on web platforms—new ephemera of our age

**Challenges**
- Pervasive web resources
  - Exacerbate dispersion of primary sources in community research
  - Are computationally variable—use of access/use to researchers
  - Quantifiable ‘big data’ can seem more “authoritative”

**SCHOLARS**

**New records require new, computational methods**
- Web resources though not readily used as primary sources in history
  - Dynamic nature and shear amount of material
  - Obsolescence of platforms and degradation of electronic objects
  - Lack of user-friendly interfaces

**Beyond the item, the network (of people, records, and interactions)**
- Historical research today has to
  - Span borders and institutions
  - Balance the online and “offline”
  - Integrate LAM holdings with community ‘big data’ on the Web

**ARCHIVES**

**The archival angst to archive the Web and its challenges**
- ‘Data trash’ or records?
  - Pre-custodial approach in appraisal
  - Preservation, curation, and contextualization
  - Provision of navigation and access for users

**Networked records need cross-repository linking, and sophisticated access**
- Scholars question archival appraisal
  - Selective in nature
  - Does not foresee, or accommodate future users and their needs
  - Promotes collecting biases in existing collections

**CASE STUDY**

**SAMPLE:**

- Established 1892
- New York City, NY
- Presently, no web archiving

- Founded 2005
- Dearborn, MI
- Web archiving: thematic collections

- IHRC established in 1965
- Minnesota 2.0 project, 2009
- Minneapolis, MN
- Web archiving: screenshots, PDFs

**DATA COLLECTION**

**Interviews**
- Personal memoirs
- Institutional Websites
- Historical background information

**Archival material**
- Collecting Policies

**DATA**

**Qualitative Content Analysis**
- Collecting policies
- Mission statements
- Interview transcripts

**Emergent coding**
- Coding methods:
  - Descriptive, process, value, versus and in vivo

**Coding stages**
- Initial ➔ axial ➔ theoretical
- Codeweaving ➔ analytic narrative ➔ theory building

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- How do web resources affect the notion of ‘recordness’ in the context of ethnic archives?
- What strategies do ethnic institutions in the US employ in order to collect, preserve, and curate web resources by their communities?
- What are the barriers to, and enablers of, this process?

**SELECT FINDINGS**

1. **Recordness’ concept**
   - Underlies archivists’ decision mechanism
   - Guides appraisal
   - Affects acquisition/access to community records

2. Divergent institutional approaches for web archiving
   - Deciding how to circumscribe web resources as records
   - Defining the place of these records in their communities

3. **Tensions at play**
   - The archives as a controlling mechanism,
     - vs. enabling and facilitating new scholarly practices
   - Web archiving as a means to enhance existing collections
     - vs. allowing multiple identities and unexpected uses of resources
   - Value in volume of data that can be computationally analyzed,
     - vs. value in scarcity and uniqueness
   - Costly and time-consuming pre-custodial intervention by the archivist
     - vs. including scholarly communities in a critical cycle
   - The ethnic institution as representing the community
     - vs. the rise of the individual articulating multiple belongings