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Commons Archives, Political Subjectivity and Participation in Urban Networks

COLLECTION: COMMONS, COMMONING, AND SOCIETAL CHANGE THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIONS

RESEARCH ARTICLES

DIMITRIS PETTAS
MINA DRAGOUNI
MARTHA MICHAILIDOU
VASILIS AVDIKOS

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the incorporation of commons archives in broader networks of public institutions, civil-society organisations, social movements and market actors, through the cases of Oral History Groups (OHGs) and Contemporary Social History Archives (ASKI) in Greece. These initiatives constitute a specific mode of urban and cultural commons and offer valuable insights into how grassroots cultural entities mobilise a series of resources including funding, spaces, equipment, digital infrastructure, expertise, legitimacy and dissemination channels through relations with external actors, while negotiating the risks of dependency and institutionalisation. The case studies employed in this work are created and sustained by loose communities that prioritise decentralised modes of governance and collective stewardship, while often using their work towards challenging contemporary hegemonic socio-political and economic conditions, especially through their interventions in the field of public history. Drawing on 24 semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation and focus groups, we conceptualise grassroots archives and their networks as commons assemblages. This approach enables us to understand their capacities, autonomy and sustainability not as fixed organisational attributes, but as relational outcomes of the ways people, labour, knowledge, archival materials, infrastructures and institutional relations are formulated. We show that pre-existing political affinities and everyday archival practices jointly shape collective political subjectivities, which in turn inform which relations are pursued and on what terms. Across these historically distinct cases, OHGs' informality supports horizontal self-organisation but constrains access to formal funding and digital infrastructure, while ASKI's legal status facilitates institutional partnerships alongside dependencies on external funding and political support. We therefore argue that incorporation into broader networks is not inherently a process of co-optation: selectively composed relations can extend the capacities and autonomy of commons archives without displacing their constitutive political and organisational practices.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Dimitris Pettas
Department of Economic and Regional Development, Panteion University, Athens, Greece
pettasdimit@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Over recent decades, academic and policy debates around the commons have expanded beyond the management of natural resources, to include the "new commons", namely modes of governance that develop around urban, cultural and digital resources and infrastructure, prompting a re-examination of the ways the commons are sustained and incorporated in broader networks. More specifically, a growing stream of research has looked into the operation of the new commons within complex and often conflictual relations with the state, the private sector, civil society, social movements and organisations operating within the social and solidarity economy. Within these debates, the commons are increasingly approached not as bounded, institutional arrangements but as systems produced through relational processes which are assembling, sustaining and transforming heterogeneous components (people, labour, knowledge, narratives, infrastructures) which circulate across initiatives and institutions of the commons, as well as social movements and actors rooted in the public sector and the civic society.

The case studies employed in this work, namely the Oral History Groups (*Omádes Proforikís Istorías,* henceforth OHG) and the Contemporary Social History Archives (*Archeía Sýnchronis Koinonikís Istorías,* henceforth ASKI), are created and sustained by loose communities that prioritise decentralised modes of governance and collective stewardship, while often using their work towards challenging contemporary hegemonic socio-political and economic conditions, especially through their interventions in the field of public history. Relevant initiatives in the fields of community archives and oral history groups, have been conceptualised not merely as repositories of records but as social and political bodies related to struggles over representation, power and access (Flinn, 2007; Flinn et al., 2009; Caswell, 2014; Wakimoto et al., 2013). Within this body of literature, grassroots archives are shaped by relational ethics, participatory and democratic governance and constant negotiations and contestations over institutional embeddedness (Gilliland & Flinn, 2013; Caswell & Cifor, 2016). The paper attempts to bridge this literature with commons and assemblage theories.

In this work we look into the ways grassroots archives sustain themselves by building relations with public institutions, civil-society organisations, social movements and market actors, and what role collective political subjectivity plays in shaping those relations. In this frame, we explore them as commons assemblages, continuously (re)composed through the circulation of material, immaterial and expressive components. Drawing on 24 semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation and focus groups with participants in OHGs and ASKI, we trace how legal status, organisational capacities and historical affiliations condition access to funding, spaces, equipment and digital infrastructure, and how collective political subjectivity, shaped by both prior affinities and everyday commoning practices, informs which relations are pursued and on what terms. We argue that incorporation into broader networks is not inherently a process of co-optation: selectively composed relations can extend the capacities and autonomy of commons archives without displacing their constitutive political and organisational practices.

GRASSROOTS ARCHIVES AS COMMONS ASSEMBLAGES

Grassroots archives are most often created, maintained and disseminated by activist and civic society groups, local communities, cultural groups and social movements, unlike 'traditional' ones which are mostly created by state and private actors (Flinn, 2007). We use "grassroots archives" throughout to denote the empirical initiatives themselves, and "commons archives" specifically when referring to their status as commons within the theoretical framing developed here, while the two terms refer to the same initiatives. According to Caswell (2014), grassroots archives tend to adopt decentralized, horizontal modes of governance, along with participatory processes concerning archival creation, while at the same time they promote the increased representation of voices and actors that have been neglected or excluded in conventional, top-down historical narratives. These attributes of grassroots archives situate them within broader debates on the commons as collective practices of stewardship, democratised access and shared responsibility over cultural resources (see Avdikos et al., 2023), while challenging power asymmetries between archivists, narrators and users (Oral History Association, 2025; Wakimoto et al., 2013).

Aligning with broader principles of the commons, grassroots archives prioritise community stewardship and collective action, representing collective efforts towards preserving and disseminating local history, knowledge and cultural practices, often on the antipodes of dominant and established historical, cultural and political discourses, contributing to fostering and maintaining community identity and collective memory (Cifor and Gilliland, 2016; Millar, 2006). In this sense, archival practices themselves and the logics that run through them (horizontality, collective management) are the generative and reproductory basis for grassroots archives. This bottom-up approach to archival creation empowers marginalised groups, enabling them to assert their histories and collective identities in the public sphere (Bastian, 2003).

Moreover, apart from practices related to archival creation, grassroots archives often contribute to struggles against gentrification and displacement by preserving the histories and contributions of longstanding communities, which can then be mobilised as evidence of place-based belonging when resisting displacement claims (Cocciolo, 2017), while also serving educational purposes through collaborating with schools, universities and research institutions working in the field of history and beyond (Wakimoto et al., 2013). Through these collaborations, grassroots archives along with their broader networks extend their functions beyond collection and preservation to operate as cultural and political infrastructures (see also Sellie et al., 2015).

At the same time, grassroots archives face several challenges that can hinder their sustainability and effectiveness. A major challenge lies in the limited access to resources and their dependence on volunteer labour and crowdfunding (Flinn et al., 2009; Stevens et al., 2010). Moreover, new challenges derive from the need to catch up with new technologies through employing digital means, tools and environments concerning both the process of archival creation and their connection with broader audiences and local communities (Huvila, 2008). The aforementioned challenges underline the fact that grassroots archives are shaped by their capacity to mobilise external resources and infrastructure. To overcome these challenges, grassroots archives often create temporary or stable partnerships and collaborations with academic institutions, cultural organisations and public libraries towards securing access to resources and dissemination networks (Flinn, 2011).

In this frame of relational development and reproduction, we conceptualise commons archives as assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) of:

i) urban actors that – up to different degrees – adopt commoning practices concerning internal organization aspects and modes of governance and

ii) encompass a series of human, material and immaterial components such as pools of people that participate in the creation, maintenance and sharing of the archives through various roles (members, informants, local communities etc.), different modes of labour (wage, volunteer, communal), oral testimonies in a variety of formats (voice and video recordings, transcripts), technical equipment, archival materials (photographs, documents) provided by informants, spaces employed for meetings and dissemination activities, relations of mutual support and solidarity, knowledge and cultural products created by transformations of the archives (theatrical plays and movies, books, scientific works, educational programs etc.).

This approach shifts the analytical focus from fixed and bounded organisational entities to processes of (re)composition, endurance and transformation, demonstrating that interactions with broader networks, circuits and flows is a defining factor for the emergence and reproduction of commons archives. Building on that, emphasis is placed upon the emergence and the role of collective political subjectivities in the formation and operation of grassroots archives and on the ways the latter become parts of broader assemblages. In this frame, we argue that grassroots archives emerge as political actors through a desire to create archives otherwise. This desire is understood, following Deleuze and Guattari (1983), not as a lack the archive answers, nor as the enactment of a prior ideological programme, but as the generative capacity through which participants assemble new relations, practices and forms of collective life around the archival material itself. This capacity precedes ideological coherence: where shared political views emerge among participants, they are a secondary effect of sustained collective practice, not its precondition, directly affecting their opening up to broader networks. Moreover, we understand the political as a mobilising and constituting force of desire, circulating through the archive's activities. Concerning their partaking in broader assemblages, we trace various modes of engagement (such as provision of support, co-organisation of projects and events, provision of access to the archives etc.) with actors of different attributes (institutional, third sector and market actors, civic society and social movements etc.).

METHODOLOGY AND INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDIES

This paper builds on a qualitative methodology, where data were collected through 24 semi-structured interviews with members of the OHGs, ASKI, and the Association of ASKI friends. Recruitment of participants was performed through snowball sampling. In particular, the interviewees from the OHGs were invited to participate following an open call that was announced during a network assembly, where the research project was presented. Additional information regarding the aims and objectives of the study was subsequently communicated via email. We interviewed 19 OHG members from 8 different groups. Among them, one is developed thematically (i.e. around feminist issues) and the rest of them have specific geographical references, based on both neighbourhoods within the Athens metropolitan area and peripheral cities and islands. In the case of ASKI and the Association of ASKI Friends, the identification and recruitment of interviewees

took place through the organisations' internal procedures, following the distribution of an invitation to participate in the research. More specifically, 5 interviews were conducted with the director and permanent employees who engaged in the day-by-day operation of ASKI and a founding member of the Association of ASKI friends.

All 24 interviews took place from October 2023 to May 2024 in Athens, were conducted in Greek, recorded and transcribed by the authors. Interview transcripts were coded and organised thematically, allowing patterns to emerge from participants' views and experiences. Quotes presented in the paper were selected because they were representative of recurring themes identified across interviews and because they illustrated particularly clearly the mechanisms and dynamics discussed in the analysis. Moreover, the authors also participated in two general assemblies of the OHGs, as non-participant observers and the collection of data was enriched by 3 hybrid focus groups/workshops with members of the OHGs. This qualitative design captures the mechanisms of how political subjectivity and network relations are negotiated in participants' own terms, but cannot establish how representative these dynamics are across grassroots archives more broadly, nor quantify the informal/formal trade-offs identified.

OHGs were established in 2011 as a collaborative initiative aimed at bringing history to the public sphere and fostering citizen participation. Drawing on a growing network of participants from both metropolitan and peripheral regions of Greece, OHG develops oral history archives covering diverse themes and historic periods, in line with the interests of its members. At the time of the study, the network comprised 19 active teams (ca. 250 members), representing mostly geographically based groups operating at the neighbourhood, city or island level. The network operates through an informal, self-organized model of collective work. Decisions are made democratically between group members and open assemblies of a coordinating network committee where all teams are represented.

ASKI was established in 1992 as a civic non-profit organization based in Athens, dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of Greek political and social movements, with particular emphasis on the Greek New Left. The institution was founded by a community of historians, researchers and scholars interested in documenting the genealogy and historical development of left-wing political and social activism in modern Greece. At the time of the study, ASKI comprises approximately 70 members, primarily historians and academics, whereas its daily operation is supported by a small team of professional staff. ASKI maintains an extensive archival collection comprising approximately five million documents and related materials. The holdings include the archives of political parties and organizations of the Greek Left, official records relating to major episodes of recent Greek history (e.g. Resistance during the Axis Occupation and the Greek Civil War), personal archives and collections documenting grassroots initiatives and the life of ethnic minorities in the post-war period. These collections are preserved, curated and made publicly accessible through reading rooms, library facilities and digital repositories, all of which are available without entry or usage fees. Governance is exercised through a General Assembly of members, which elects a Board of Directors.

POLITICAL AFFINITIES AND COLLECTIVE PRACTICE: SUBJECTIVITY IN OHGS AND ASKI

ORAL HISTORY GROUPS

The first OHGs formed in 2011, amid a wave of social mobilisation against the austerity measures imposed on Greece by the government, the EU, the ECB and the IMF, and the resulting cuts to wages, pensions and public services (Hadjimichalis, 2013). This crisis produced the occupation of Syntagma Square in spring 2011, part of the same cycle as the Arab Spring, Occupy and Indignados movements (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Leontidou, 2012), and, subsequently, a wider landscape of smaller, self-organised initiatives built on solidarity, mutual aid and horizontal governance across the Athens metropolitan area and beyond (Arampatzi, 2017; Malamidis, 2020; Pettas & Daskalaki, 2021). OHGs emerged as part of this broader landscape of horizontal, prefigurative practices.

Since the creation of the first group in 2011, we argue that OHGs have contributed to the diffusion of political activity throughout both the Athens metropolitan area and peripheral cities, emerging as significant political urban actors. The political subjectivities of OHGs are built on: i) loose, yet coherent political references among their members, ii) the adoption of horizontal, non-hierarchical modes of governance, and iii) efforts to relate their work to contemporary socio-political issues to support and raise visibility for disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Regarding the first attribute, even though there is no formal 'screening' process for new participants, OHG members acknowledge that most individuals involved come from Left or broadly progressive backgrounds, consistent with the wider profile of the post-2011 mobilisation cycle from which OHGs emerged (Varvarousis and Kallis, 2021). Ideology in this case does not relate to strict alignment to specific, coherent political plans. What is common among participants is a desire to produce history from below

through horizontal and collective practices. Additionally, the perspectives under which archives are created and discussed are often influenced by analytical approaches derived from critical academic and political schools of thought:

> *"It would be very hard to incorporate someone who has no class-consciousness or is racist, we have to be able to speak the same 'language'. For us, the triptych gender-class-race is the way to approach and analyse things"* (Femin OHG).

According to OHG members, the "history from below" approach widely adopted by the groups serves as a defining factor that makes them more appealing to individuals with left-wing and progressive backgrounds. This approach stands in opposition to dominant narratives about specific historical periods and events, and advocates for the democratization of who is entitled to produce historical archives:

> *"It's hard for me to imagine someone coming from a background that considers history as a product of authorities having the inclination to share this history. I mean, what's the point? Why do we care about testimonies here? We have history in books, in school textbooks, in university textbooks. That is the official version. So, in this sense, and also in a period of revisionism, even from high political levels, this history here can be an answer. That is, for things that we, who have a common, broadly speaking, political origin, consider as given"* (Chalandri OHG).

The evidence suggests a reciprocal relationship between pre-existing political affinities and collective archival practice. Participants often enter OHGs with broadly progressive orientations, which help explain their preference for horizontal, assembly-based governance; repeated decisions about archival work, collective organisation and collaborations then reproduce and further specify these shared orientations. We understand the latter as the orientations, commitments and ways of relating to political questions that participants develop through repeated collective involvement. Following Graeber (2009; 2013), the transition from the movements of the 1960s and 1970s to the movements of alternative globalization involved two significant shifts: an increased emphasis on process and practice, and the development of horizontal structures where strict ideological coherence and uniformity no longer play a central role in the emergence and operation of social movements. These trends are explicitly reflected in the operation of the OHGs. In this way, the model of governance and decision-making itself both undertakes specific political connotations and relates to practices adopted by prefigurative social movements.

> *"The 'political' is something broader that has to do with the ways we choose to be together and work together, so the fact that we work in a collective way is a political choice"* (Eptapyrgio OHG).

Moreover, the political constitution and role of the OHGs are also reflected in their numerous attempts to connect their work with contemporary socio-political issues and struggles. These efforts reflect an orientation toward transformative political work, which participants themselves describe in terms of reframing dominant narratives, operating at the intersection of archival practices and social justice (see Gilliland and Flinn, 2013). The participatory processes adopted seek to widen the representation of marginalized groups (Caswell and Cifor, 2016) by including them in the production and dissemination of the archives and by developing counter-narratives that challenge top-down representations of these groups. Participants understand these activities as forms of "archival activism" (see Findlay, 2016; Gómez and Vallès, 2020) that seek to intervene in ongoing struggles; our evidence documents these practices and intentions rather than establishing their wider political effects. This approach seeks to challenge asymmetries of representation in the public sphere and reflects the aim of grassroots archives to support the communities from which they originate or from which they obtain archival material (Caswell & Cifor, 2016). In the case of OHGs, relevant practices focus on: i) contemporary migrant and refugee populations, particularly through tracing common themes and issues with the migratory waves from Asia Minor following the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922, ii) Roma populations, and iii) claims related to the right to the city and the defense of public and communal spaces.

Finally, the collective political subjectivities within OHGs also build on the assembling and co-existence of individual, yet related, political identities, knowledge and engagement of their members. A substantial part of these members is also engaged in other political, syndicalist, civic society initiatives and associations, enabling the adoption of previous and ongoing experiences in the operation of OHGs, along with the creation and establishment of ties with broader networks and communities. Through this circulation and emerging overlaps, imaginaries, organisational attributes, practices and experimentations circulate across contexts, space and time, allowing collective capacities to endure and (re)emerge in different occasions.

> *"Yes, most people participate in other initiatives. They are, or had been, involved in unions in their workplaces for example. And locally, many participate in local political organisations and municipal parties but also in cultural groups, environmental movements etc."* (Nea Ionia OHG).

Overall, the OHGs illustrate how partially overlapping political orientations are reproduced and specified through collective organisation and archival activity. Their horizontal governance and efforts to broaden participation resonate with autonomist approaches to the commons (see De Angelis, 2017; Hardt and Negri, 2009; Kioupkiolis, 2019; Stavridis, 2016), which emphasise prefigurative political possibilities. The evidence presented here concerns organisational practices and forms of public engagement rather than demonstrated wider social transformation.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL HISTORY ARCHIVES (ASKI)

ASKI's political foundations are rooted in their emergence and operation within political organisations and parties of the New Left in Greece. The first archival resources upon which ASKI started their operation comprised of the archives of the Coalition of the Left (Synaspismos) political party, which was founded in 1989 as a coalition around the Communist Party of Greece, Interior (*KKE Esoterikou*) which was active from 1968 to 1987 and operated as the main political branch of the Eurocommunism movement in Greece. In 1992, a group of historians who were also members of Synaspismos, moved to the foundation of ASKI by opening up the party's archive to the scientific community and the broader public, while working on ways to enrich and expand the archive through contributions from people who experienced the turbulent periods of the German occupation, the civil war and the dictatorship:

> *"A very major breach was that a political party's archive was rendered openly accessible. And this is unprecedented on a pan-European level, it is not the norm. In the early '90s, late '80s this idea of the ASKI is starting to be worked on, by Elias Eliou and other historians and party members. So, this was a novelty for that times. The fact that an archive is open and one can access and see it without a requirement to be a party member. Anyone can come in and see the archive [...] Following that, a community of people, older National Resistance fighters, provided a lot of records and also contributed with both labour and ideas in the first decade of ASKI's operation"* (ASKI).

Building on this pool of people, mostly including historians, party members and people from a Left political background who participated in major historical events of the 20th century, gradually the ASKI opened up to new people who were not necessarily maintaining strong ties with the political party of Synaspismos (or SYRIZA, a new coalition that was formatted in 2004 and evolved into a political party in 2013). This opening up signifies a gradual shift from a rather politically bounded entity to a broader assemblage around historical archives.

> *"So, our founders, were active political members of the Left, and at the same time some of the most important historians of the post-dictatorship era. So, there was the first core which is gradually opening up [...] Nevertheless, we don't have an organic relationship with SYRIZA. Because if you look at the statute, it doesn't mention any party, either then or now. We have no organic relationship at any level. That is, board members or employees are not necessarily SYRIZA members, many are not even SYRIZA voters or supporters"* (ASKI).

Nevertheless, as also discussed later, ASKI's budget partly comes from the SYRIZA party, while their offices and a large part of their archive is hosted in the headquarters of the party. The opening up of ASKI to both broader audiences of Left and progressive political backgrounds and members of the scientific community constitutes a shift from their early stages of operation and people running ASKI in the present recognize the limitations deriving from their association with a specific political party. Overall, ASKI members along with the broader community developed around them (e.g. in the form of the "Association of ASKI friends") do come from related political and ideological backgrounds, yet their matching with the political party of SYRIZA is becoming growingly weakened.

As for their legal form and modes of governance adapted, ASKI is operating as a Civil Non-Profit Company, run by an administrative board elected by the company's members (approximately 70 people of relevant academic background), permanent and project-based employees, while the "Association of ASKI friends" which was founded in 2003 operates as both an opening up of ASKI to non-academic audiences and a means to ensure resources that will contribute to ASKI's sustainability. Compared to the case of OHGs, ASKI constitutes a distancing from modes of governance that are adapted by the commons as i) decision-making responsibilities are allocated to an administrative board and ii) the participation to the "core" bodies of ASKI (the administrative board and the general assembly) is limited to people coming from specific educational and professional backgrounds.

Nevertheless, similarly, to attempts made by OHGs, ASKI is trying to relate their work to contemporary socio-

political developments and to create archives concerning contemporary political events. In this frame, ASKI has worked on creating archives concerning the December 2008 riots in Athens and other Greek cities, following the assassination of a 15-year-old student by a policeman, along with archives related to the activity of the neo-Nazi political party of Golden Dawn. Additionally, ASKI aspires to expand their outreach beyond the scientific community through reaching out to larger audiences and creating an alternative culture concerning history and contribute to ongoing discussions in the public sphere.

Overall, we argue that ASKI rather than operating as an open forum that allows collective political subjectivities to emerge through encounters and negotiations, constitutes a more "professional" network that assembles mostly academics of similar political and ideological backgrounds related to the New Left. The public-facing significance of ASKI is more directly visible in its opening of archival materials and historical debates to audiences beyond its original political community. The evidence presented here documents these forms of access and engagement, but does not establish their longer-term transformative effects on the public sphere.

COMMONS ARCHIVES AND THEIR BROADER NETWORKS

In the course of their operations, the OHG and ASKI have developed relationships with a wide range of actors (see Tables 1 and 2), including public ones, third sector and market actors, as well as social movements and actors from civic society. Rather than treating these relationships as an external environment, we examine how particular collaborations alter the capacities and dependencies of archives: municipal ties provide equipment and venues, university partnerships support research and dissemination, and institutional funders can enable digital infrastructure while making its continuation dependent on external decisions. These combinations of people, resources, practices and institutional ties constitute the archival assemblages examined here. We distinguish inputs (relationships securing resources) from outputs (relationships enabling dissemination), analysed throughout as relational flows rather than one-off transactions, since the same relationship can both extend autonomy and create dependency.

ORAL HISTORY GROUPS

As mentioned earlier, OHGs have no official legal status, operating completely informally. This choice results in a series of restrictions, especially concerning access to resources (i.e., equipment, spaces, finances) which are essential for the operation of OHGs. To overcome these barriers, OHGs have developed collaborations explicitly towards gaining access to resources. The main set of actors that provide access to these resources comprises local authorities. Despite the lack of legal status, OHGs, building on interpersonal networks, manage to secure access to infrastructure and equipment through local authorities. These interpersonal ties constitute a maneuver on behalf of grassroots archives, allowing flows and sharing among, otherwise, "incompatible" entities (as public actors cannot officially collaborate with informal ones), allowing OHGs to remain informal while, at the same time, gaining access to key infrastructure and resources.

> *"From the beginning, when we decided to do the seminars (i.e., for the creation of the OHG), we informed the Municipality, the Mayor, and the responsible deputy mayors and got them to be involved. At least to help us financially to get the cameras and the material that we needed to do the interviews, but also to help us in any way to integrate it into a framework of the administration of the Municipality"* (Ilioupoli OHG).

A notable exception among the OHGs under study is the one based in Chalandri, which is officially affiliated with the Municipality, a collaboration that constitutes a stable state-commons partnership. In the frame of this collaboration, the Municipality has granted access to equipment (audio and video recording devices) and spaces for events, incorporation of the OHG in European funded projects, support in publishing efforts, and the creation and maintenance of a digital platform through which the archive can be disseminated. It is noted that, since 2014, the Municipality of Chalandri has been administered by a coalition of the Left, which has also been supported by the majority of the OHG members. This kind of institutionalisation equips the OHG with legitimacy and stable access to resources, nevertheless renders its operation dependent on electoral cycles as it remains associated with specific political formations within the city council.

Moreover, OHGs have also developed collaborations with universities (e.g., Panteion University, Harokopeio University), especially departments that are engaged with the fields of history, geography, sociology and political science. Relevant modes of collaboration undertake a rather two-way character compared to those between OHGs and local authorities. Given the fact that – up to date – OHGs' archives are not openly available due to the lack of relevant infrastructure, OHGs provide researchers and students with access to their archives, so that the former can process and employ them towards producing scientific

outputs. Also, on several occasions, OHGs' members who come from an academic background, present the work they do in the frame of the OHGs, along with their findings in academic conferences and publish relevant scientific work in the form of articles and chapters.

Apart from local authorities and universities, recently, several OHGs have established stable collaborations with primary and secondary schools. These collaborations involve either or both the presentation of OHGs' work through talks and lectures that focus on issues of local history and training activities addressed to teachers and students, so that the latter can design and implement oral history projects on their own. Finally, concerning institutional actors, some OHGs have worked with museums, public authorities (such as ephorate of antiquities) and political party foundations (such as the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung). These collaborations involve the provision of access to spaces for events and the common organization of exhibitions and walking tours.

Building on the progressive and prefigurative political attributes of OHGs, the latter are hesitant towards working with market actors and private cultural institutions (even not-for-profit ones) as their members consider the logics under which the latter are operating to be distant from the ones of OHGs. On the contrary, OHGs are more flexible concerning collaborations with NGOs and small, not-for-profit organizations, which are mostly built on the basis of participation in events with public talks and presentations and activities in the frame of larger projects. This selective formation of networks demonstrates that the emergence of relevant assemblages is not mainly need-driven (as possible collaborators are not primarily evaluated as for what they can offer) but desire-driven in the sense discussed earlier, prioritising the compatibility with OHGs ethical and political orientations and, mostly, the ways of functioning and the attributes of practices employed.

Nevertheless, the constraints deriving from the inability to acquire funding through conventional channels has led to indirect collaborations with market actors on two occasions. In this frame, a local producers' association has approached an OHG in order to provide financial support, since the latter is intending on creating an archive on the history of these producers' communities and practices. The second, indirect channel of support concerns the provision of access to infrastructure and equipment by a major Greek bank's cultural foundation which is mediated by a not-for-profit association.

Moving to collaborations developed between OHGs and actors from the civic society and social movements, they mostly comprise of the organisation of common events around thematic areas and historical periods that can trigger discussions on contemporary socio-political issues, such as the refugees who arrived in Greece from Asia Minor in the 1920s. Concerning prefigurative social movements, OHGs have been invited to present their work in squats and self-organised social centers with references to Left and anti-authoritarian groups. One of the OHGs is based in such a space, sharing it with local political and cultural groups and participating in the collective processes over its administration.

Apart from political spaces, OHGs have also participated in events and have shared their archives with urban and environmental movements, especially regarding struggles over public, open and green spaces in the neighbourhoods they are located in. Additionally, OHGs, especially those that have looked into the civil war and dictatorship periods, have developed collaborations with associations of imprisoned and exiled people of these periods. Another common pool of actors with which OHGs work with comprises the cultural associations, which operate as venues for people of same geographical origins and they operate either in metropolitan areas or the areas of reference themselves. Modes of collaboration include both the presentation of oral testimonies that are related with these areas and the direct support of OHGs through direct, yet informal, funding, such as crowdfunding.

Apart from the collective actors already mentioned, OHGs seek for support and work with both individual and other sets of actors towards disseminating their work and activities. As for the first part, support comprises volunteer work provided through OHG members' interpersonal networks, regarding specific tasks that require skillsets that are not existent within OHGs such as graphic design and language proof reading. Moreover, OHGs often resort for funding, mostly through in-person, crowdfunding events, to a broader circle of people who know and support their work. These specific modes of labour and circulation of resources like finance demonstrate how specific codifications and modes of incorporation of resources (which, under different terms, such as funding reliance on a state or market actor could lead to dependencies) sustain and increase the autonomy of OHGs.

> *"We also needed to raise money. We held a social event, we held several times, two or three times at least, these types of events and we raised some money to buy what we needed and whatever came up. Small things, small expenses, not a huge amount, but still important for us to run things"* (Ilioupoli OHG).

Concerning dissemination through digital means, OHGs are struggling with catching-up with the digitalisation of their archives and the lack of resources towards creating and maintaining a platform through which they could

openly share their work. Lacking access to resources that could enable the creation of such a digital or hybrid structure, OHGs are considering options towards collaborating with institutional actors that both have the resources or the capacity to host and render accessible their archives and can secure the use and sharing of the archives according to the organisational and ethical principles under which OHGs operate (e.g., securing the non-commercial use of the archives through relevant creative commons licences). Such actors include the National Library of Greece, the General State Archives, university and municipal libraries.

Currently, due to the lack of a relevant platform, OHGs store their archives in hard drives for which specific members are rendered responsible. Access remains open upon request, nevertheless physical presence is required for individual access. Additionally, apart from archive sharing practices through collaborations that were described earlier (including participation in events through talks and presentations, historical walks etc.), OHGs are regularly organising both individually and collectively (through the Oral History Festival which is organised by the coordinating body of the OHGs every two years) events through which they disseminate their findings, mainly targeting local communities and the people who provided the oral testimonies. For OHG members, rendering the archives known and accessible to the communities which they both concern and derive from is of essential importance. This 'return' of the archive to the communities is brought out as both a recognition of their role in archive creation and as a practice that can empower them and transform local dynamics and social relationships. In this sense, the sharing practices concerning the archives is something more than "dissemination": they constitute processes that are not disentangled from the core of collective archival work and affirm the unified processes that sustain the archives and the equally important role of providers, producers and audiences.

All in all, the networks in which OHGs under investigation partake to are presented in Table 1.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL HISTORY ARCHIVES (ASKI)

ASKI's partaking in broader networks is affected by i) its legal form that, contrary to the case of OHGs, enables the development of stable collaborations and the receiving of support, especially by state actors, ii) the scientific "legitimization" and strong academic foundations of the organization and the ties of its members with academic and research institutions, iii) the increasing interest in the domain of public history, followed by attempts to reach broader, non-specialised crowds and iv) the pursuit to catch-up with digitalisation trends and to render their archives digital and enable remote, online access to them. Compared to OHGs, ASKI constitutes a more codified and stratified assemblage. Its legal status and organisational form attributes legitimacy and increases its capacity to collaborate with institutional actors but, on the same time, renders it more restrictive to experimentations with collective governance and decision-making.

As mentioned earlier, part of ASKI's budget and the provision of resources – especially concerning operational and storage spaces – comes from the SYRIZA political party. Until the crisis period, party funding, along with state funding through the Ministries of Culture and the Ministry of Education were sufficient towards covering the running costs for ASKI. Nevertheless, both the cutting down in state support after the pandemic and the pursuit for financial autonomy, led ASKI to seek for alternative sources of funding. Building on that, a substantial part of ASKI's collaborations is developed in the frame of research programs with state actors and Greek or international research and academic institutions. Currently, ASKI partake in three consortia in the frame of Greek and international research projects towards covering labour costs of project-based workers while also directing funds to the digitalisation of their archive. At the same time, ASKI has also developed collaborations with local authorities through subcontracting towards i) conducting historical studies which are of interest for the local authorities and ii) assisting the latter with issues related to creating, organizing and maintaining archives.

ASKI, due to its strong scientific foundations and reputation, maintains stable, long-term collaborations with institutional archives such as the General State Archives, the Greek Parliament's Library, the Hellenic Archival Society and the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive, mostly around archive and knowledge exchange. Furthermore, the strong ties between ASKI and universities is not limited in participating in research projects but also expands in the field of educational activities.

> *"Numerous ASKI members are working closely with universities and have been part of postgraduate programmes at Panteion University, at the Department of Political Science at the University of Athens, at the Historical Archaeology Department. But again, these seminars had an open participation logic, they weren't solely addressing graduate students. They are also organised in a logic of equity in speech and expression, not a logic that there is a leading expert, and everyone is listening to them without participating. A character which is more participatory and open"* (ASKI).

PUBLIC ACTORS	THIRD SECTOR/CIVIC SOCIETY/OTHER COMMONS	MARKET
Accessibility (Outputs)		
Universities: Provision of access to OHG archives, presentations in conferences, interviews on the OHGs' activity, academic publications	NGOs: Talks & presentations, provision of access to OHG archives	Urban experts (planners, policy-makers, architects etc.): provision of access to OHG archives
Municipalities: dissemination activities	Not-for-profit cultural enterprise (funded by a bank's cultural branch): Provision of access to OHG archives, co-creation of theatrical plays, short films, events	Media: participation in TV and radio shows
Schools and lifelong learning institutions: Talks and lectures, historical walks, co-creation of educational material	Self-organized political venues: Presentations and public talks	
Museums and Ephorates of antiquities: co-creation of exhibitions	Residents' & cultural associations: Historical walks, talks & presentations, provision of access to OHG archives, co-creation of educational and training activities	
	Environmental groups & movements: Provision of access to OHG archives, co-creation of events	
	Political Party foundations (e.g., Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung): Oral history walks	
	Photography groups: co-creation and participation in exhibitions	
	Association of imprisoned people during the dictatorship: co-exhibition in former prison premises	
	Local community festival & broader cultural events: Public talks & presentations, co-creation of theatrical plays building on oral testimonies	
	Residents: Public talks & presentations, historical walks	
Resources/Financial sustainability (Inputs)		
Universities: provision of space, co-creation of lectures and seminars	Residents: Financial support through events with entrance fee	Producers' association: Provision of equipment
Municipalities: Provision of space & equipment, provision of digital infrastructure, co-creation of research and practice-oriented projects	Not-for-profit cultural enterprise (funded by a bank's cultural branch): provision of space and equipment, covering running expenses (e.g., flyers' printing)	
Libraries (University and Municipal): Provision of space, provision of digital infrastructure	Self-organized political venues: co-existence with other collectives – sharing of duties, expenses, responsibilities	
Museums and Ephorates of antiquities: Provision of spaces	Residents' & cultural associations: Financial support, provision of spaces & equipment	
	Interpersonal networks: undertaking of technical tasks (e.g., graphic design), provision of spaces for meetings, provision of equipment	

Table 1 The participation of OHGs in broader networks.

Finally, concerning institutional actors, ASKI has also worked with teachers through seminars which are co-organised with the Social and Cultural Affairs Welfare Foundation, the French School of Athens and political parties' institutions such as Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. Collaborations with the latter involve the exchange of archives and the common organisation of public events.

As for ASKI collaboration with the third sector and market actors, it is limited to the acquisition of funding from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation towards creating an archive concerning Albanian migration to Greece. Moving to civic society and social movements, a key entity which enables the activity of ASKI in various ways is the Association of ASKI friends. This association constitutes an attempt to create a broader community around ASKI which undertakes the twofold role of i) supporting the long-term sustainability of ASKI through the expansion of its activities and the acquisition of funding and ii) assisting with the

dissemination of ASKI's work beyond specialised audiences and further empower its intervention in the field of public history. This opening up to crowdfunding modes, also mediated through the Association of ASKI friends, recently expanded to the organisation of a round of paid seminars conducted by ASKI members, addressed to broader, non-specialised audiences. Apart from increasing its reach beyond expert audiences, such practices are targeting to reducing dependence from state and party funding through alternative financial flows from their audience and supporters.

Additionally, ASKI have collaborated with civic society groups and social movements, mostly through contributing to events by organising public talks, presentations and historical walks. These collaborations are not restricted to the presentation and narration of historical events but are on most occasions related with contemporary socio-political issues and undertake an empowering role.

> *"We organised a walk in Athens with a group named XXX, comprising of some girls who had started an initiative to take testimonies concerning the history of the LGBTQ community in Greece. We approached them because we liked their work, and we said we have an idea to do a walk because it was important. It doesn't have to be a formal or institutional group to work with someone, we have several such synergies"* (ASKI).

Concerning non-collective actors, ASKI members often resort to former collaborators, colleagues and supporters for specialised tasks, especially related to the dissemination of their work. This support undertakes the form of volunteer labour which is further enhanced by more formal channels, such as internship programs. Finally, as for the dissemination and communication of their work and activities, ASKI is maintaining social media profiles in relevant platforms, while hosting a weekly radio show in which they present and discuss their work. Through these means, ASKI aspires to further contribute to the production of public history and the engagement of broader, non-specialised audiences. Through this engagement with public history, along with the possibilities provided by the Association of ASKI friends or a change of legal status that would enable further activities that could provide additional income, ASKI members also explore ways to support their future financial sustainability and independence.

> *"The advantage of our legal form is that we are excluded from VAT obligations. On the contrary, the Association of ASKI friends is not excluded from VAT but is allowed to organise activities, which we could also take place under, for example, a cooperative or a social enterprise status. We could create a digital app or do historical walks for a small fee. That can't be done now. We would like to be able to have some limited commercial activities that could generate revenue and enable us to be more viable in economic terms"* (ASKI).

The total of networks in which ASKI participate are presented in Table 2.

Tables 1 and 2 provide a mapping of the broader assemblages in which OHGs and ASKI partake and through which archival work and the archives themselves are continuously produced, managed and shared. In this sense, these collaborations do not offer temporary support or occasional access to resources, but they constantly shape the collective capacities of grassroots commons archives, while creating fields of possibilities and ongoing/future actualisations of these capacities. The two cases underline the variety of modes of stabilisation and circulation of resources and capacities. For OHGs, informal interpersonal ties can secure equipment and spaces without requiring legal incorporation, although the absence of legal status restricts access to formal grants and durable digital infrastructure. ASKI's recognised legal form opens routes to institutional funding and longer-term partnerships, but its permanent staff, archival holdings and operating costs also make continued external support more consequential. The differences observed cannot be attributed to formal versus informal status alone.

DISCUSSION

As seen through the two case studies, the networks that grassroots archives build can be seen in two distinct levels: those that are built to support their autonomy and financial sustainability (inputs) and the networks that help them disseminate their work, reach out to different audiences and make their works accessible to others (outputs). Nevertheless, rather than treating these two levels as distinct, they should be analytically approached as intertwined relational circuits through which commons archives assemblages and their capacities are continuously constituted and reconfigured. The networks built in these two levels are dictated by the decisions made in the level of governance and management, as the ways grassroots archives are governed (bottom-up, horizontal decision-making system, legal or no legal form etc) enables them or disables to do certain things: informality enables trust-based access to infrastructure and rapid organisational experimentation but disables access to formal funding instruments and durable institutional partnerships. On the

PUBLIC ACTORS	THIRD SECTOR/CIVIC SOCIETY/OTHER COMMONS	MARKET
Accessibility (Outputs)		
Universities (In Greece and abroad): Lectures, seminars, provision of access to archives, scientific publications, hosting foreign students	Niarchos Foundation: co-design and implementation of projects (e.g. archives for the history of Albanian migrants)	Media: participation in TV and radio shows
Schools: seminars organised with the Social and Cultural Affairs Welfare Foundation (KIKPE)	ASKI's Friends Association: co-organisation of seminars and events	
Other archives (General State Archives/ Parliament's library/Hellenic Archival Society): Provision of access to archives, co-creation of projects	Migrants' Forum: Public talks and presentations, historical walks	
Political Party foundations (e.g., Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung): Co-creation of research projects	Informal social movements and civic society organisations: historical walks	
French School of Athens: Co-creation of research projects	Broader public: seminars, podcasts and social media, History Festival	
Resources/Financial sustainability (Inputs)		
SYRIZA political party: Financial support, provision of permanent space	ASKI's Friends Association: Financial support	
Ministries (of Culture, Development and Investments, Education): Direct and indirect funding	Broader public: Financial support through paid seminars, participation in events with entrance fees	
Universities and research centres: Co-participation in EU funded research projects	Interpersonal networks: undertaking of technical tasks mostly associated with dissemination activities	
Municipalities: Funding for the design and implementation of research projects		
Other archives (General State Archives/ Parliament's library/Hellenic Archival Society): knowledge exchange		

Table 2 The participation of ASKI in broader networks.

contrary, formal legal status enables the establishment of stable funding streams and institutional partnerships while narrowing the space for organisational experimentation and concentrating decision-making in a smaller body. Overall, governance and political subjectivity are mutually constitutive: an existing collective orientation shapes which mode of governance a group adopts, and that mode of governance then reinforces and specifies the political subjectivity of participants through the collaborations it makes possible or denies. In this way, governance, and especially the functions of it that relate to the selection of collaborations can be understood as a set of micropolitical practices that gives shape to the directions and tendencies of the assemblages developed around commons archives.

The informal status of their operation puts all connections in an informal manner that has a trust base on the collective political subjectivity of the OHG. Moreover, in the OHG we also find that volunteer labour is the main driving force of their reproduction. Again, the collective ethos and political subjectivity of the OHG, along with a collective desire to bring to the fore the local history from below, is something that unites members of the OHG and brings additional resources from their personal support networks. From an assemblage perspective, this ethos is entangled with the desire-led production of the archives and the broader assemblages, bringing together people, skills and materials into compatible constellations.

On the other hand, the ASKI case shows a somewhat different picture. As ASKI have a legal status and several permanent employees, their networks concerning their financial sustainability are mainly based on connections with public bodies, such as municipalities, ministries, and universities, but also with certain political parties of the Left. Through these networks they usually acquire funding to do new projects (e.g. digitalisation of the archives). Their legal status renders them also eligible for funding that comes through specific funding instruments (the ERDF-EC, or national research funding schemes). As such, their networks with other third sector entities or informal groups are limited to their close range of friends and supporters

(ASKI's friends association). However, OHGs' financial needs are much lower than ASKI's, which has permanent employees and more extensive operational commitments. The two initiatives also differ in age, scale and historical institutional affiliations; their funding relationships cannot therefore be explained by legal status in isolation.

Turning to the networks found in the level of the outreach activities of the two case studies we see a more homogenous picture, as both cases rely a lot on connections with public bodies, third sector entities or informal groups. All of them provide free access, under certain agreements, to their archives to researchers from universities and the public (especially through the digitalisation of their material). All of them engage in co-creation projects and in the co-organisation of events and exhibitions with municipalities, universities, residents' groups etc.

A difference here is again made by the legal status of ASKI that enables them to engage in the co-organisation of events with more institutional entities, like the Presidency of the Hellenic Republic or the National and Parliamentary Libraries. Moreover, it is interesting that most of the interviewed members of the OHG believe that their overall digital repository should be under the National Library, a public institution. This intention reflects their desire for a further legitimisation of their work, similarly to the case of relevant initiatives in the UK, whose archives have been made available through the British Library. Within this pursuit, whether this transformation will be enabled by grassroots commons assemblages in which archive communities maintain high levels of control or through more institutionalised ones that may subject them to external evaluations, codifications and dependencies is of crucial importance. It is noted that, interestingly and despite the increasing importance of digital tools and mediations in the broader cultural sector, neither OHGs nor ASKI have developed collaborations and synergies with digital commons initiatives.

The findings cannot be generalised directly to all grassroots archives. The OHGs have been strongly shaped by the socio-economic crisis that unfolded in Greece after 2008 and by the social and political mobilisations that accompanied it. ASKI emerged from the historical trajectory of the Greek Eurocommunist movement and its associated political and intellectual networks, rendering both cases highly context-specific. They also differ in organisational age, scale, staffing and access to established institutional partners. Accordingly, our comparison shows how legal form operates alongside these conditions; it does not isolate the independent effect of institutionalisation. Nevertheless, similar tensions concerning autonomy, institutionalisation, resource dependence, and public engagement have been identified in studies of community and grassroots archives in a variety of national and local contexts. Therefore, while the empirical findings presented here should not be interpreted as universally applicable, they contribute to broader discussions on the opportunities and challenges faced by grassroots archival initiatives internationally.

CONCLUSIONS

By approaching OHGs and ASKI as commons assemblages, this paper has examined how archival capacities are produced through particular combinations of voluntary and paid labour, spaces, funding, digital infrastructure and institutional ties, rather than through internal governance arrangements alone. The same external relation may extend access to resources while creating exposure to funding decisions, changes in political support or limits on collective control. This is the analytical value of treating autonomy and sustainability as relational outcomes rather than fixed organisational properties.

Legal status matters to the funding relationships observed in these cases, but its implications are not uniform. For ASKI, non-profit status provides institutional visibility and eligibility for formal funding, while also increasing the importance of securing recurrent resources for staff and operations. For OHGs, the absence of legal status sustains informal decision-making but restricts access to certain funding schemes; members instead mobilise interpersonal ties and municipal support to obtain spaces and equipment. The contrasts must also be read in light of the initiatives' different histories, scales and organisational needs.

Nevertheless, the impacts of legal forms and degrees of institutionalisation cannot be reduced to trade-offs between legitimacy/recognition and autonomy as, as the two cases explored here demonstrate, the impacts highly depend on the specific relations within which they are incorporated and mobilised. In turn, autonomy itself cannot be reduced to a separation from institutional bodies but as a capacity to preserve key organisational and practice principles through managing openness. Thus, it entails selectively entering relations that "feed back" the core attributes and desires of the archival communities and contribute to the expansion of their capacities. Future research could shed more light on the ways political subjectivities can be a generative force for the formation of commons assemblages (not only in the field of commons archives, but also in other domains of cultural and urban commons) and also how these subjectivities are actualized and reproduced/expanded through everyday commoning practices. Another field for future inquiry could be the ways that networking with various assemblages (policy-state, market) raise further issues of autonomy/dependency and control over shared resources. Moreover, it would be valuable to assess the ways that commons cultural

assemblages are providing their capacities and political subjectivities to other grassroots commons assemblages that have similar challenges (e.g. limited resources, no legal status), while recomposing and transforming them.

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AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Dimitris Pettas orcid.org/0000-0002-9889-5513
Department of Economic and Regional Development, Panteion University, Athens, Greece

Mina Dragouni orcid.org/0000-0003-0251-9968
Department of Economic and Regional Development, Panteion University, Athens, Greece

Martha Michailidou orcid.org/0000-0003-0527-5444
Department of Communications, Media and Culture, Panteion University, Athens, Greece

Vasilis Avdikos orcid.org/0000-0002-2601-0712
Department of Economic and Regional Development, Panteion University, Athens, Greece

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