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## **History and Identity Through the Conservation and Rescue of the Municipal Archive in Teziutlan, Puebla, Mexico**

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### ABSTRACT

The importance of municipal archives for general and local history is amply attested by the numerous and qualified studies that have been carried out on these materials over time. The wealth and variety of information that these archives can offer makes them essential sources for the history of our country, significantly characterized precisely by events in local communities, large or small, both in the remote past and in the present. The municipality, as a territorial and at the same time associative unit, has always constituted, in fact, a reality and an obligatory point of observation for the historian. History confirms that throughout the centuries this elementary social aggregation has been established everywhere, especially in Mexico, where municipal life has had a great development and a complex organization. The municipal archives, if preserved and made accessible by proper search keys, are the most direct reflection of our long history.

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### Introduction

The preservation and transmission over time of these memories is above all a task of the municipal administrations themselves, which, precisely as representatives of the people, have the duty not only not to disperse the testimonies of the community's identity, but also to empower them and promote their knowledge.

Obviously, it is not only a duty sanctioned by the Federal Law on Archaeological, Artistic, Historical Monuments and Monumental Zones, but also, and perhaps above all, a matter of sensitivity towards a precious heritage, however delicate and fragile it may be, that must be treated carefully and protected and transmitted to the new generations, because it can become the foundation of civil life and nourishment for the sense of belonging.

The conservation of the cultural heritage and in particular of the archives, historical or current, is in fact an activity for the preservation of the cultural heritage and attributes a particular value, making it depend on a coherence, coordinated and planned activities of study, prevention, maintenance and restoration. Having reaffirmed the character of state property and the quality of cultural patrimony of the archives of the territorial public organizations in their entirety, the municipal organizations are attributed the obligation to preserve their archives in their organic structure and order them, as well as to inventory the historical archives own, made up of documents relating to business carried out for more than a hundred years and constituted in separate sections.

However, many municipalities, including Teziutlan and its councils prior to the current one, as well as its auxiliary boards, generally motivated by a lack of resources, piled up and abandoned their documents in an unsanitary and often closed place, without order or conservation criteria and without entrusting these delicate assets to any civil association with adequate training and competence, with the consequent denial of the right of citizens to consult documents, ancient or modern, related to their history.

This happened despite the fact that the archivist's professionalism is now internationally recognized, as attested by the Autonomous University of Mexico, which has the respective career. In Mexico, the cases in which archives are managed and therefore made accessible through specially prepared services are quite rare, even explicitly declaring visiting hours and appointing personnel with proper identification and professional qualifications, by of the administrations, which in general, either do not start these services, or entrust them to the municipal libraries, which are not always endowed with the necessary competences (Bharadwaj, 2022).

In Mexico, there are also sporadic municipal websites that offer descriptive or service information about the archives. This attitude is even

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more visible if one considers that the archives of other institutions that have operated in other countries are always linked to the Municipal administration, there are also important archives in hospitals, welfare and charitable institutions, religious entities, many times that have been included in the municipal patrimony. In Teziutlan the best archive is precisely that of the Cathedral.

The Institutional Plan for Archival Development and General Chart of Archival Classification, published in 2018, establishes the principles for the safeguarding of the cultural heritage of Teziutlan:

I. Conservation: Adopt measures of a technical, administrative, environmental, and technological nature, for the proper preservation of archival documents. II. Origin: Preserve the origin of each documentary collection produced by the obligated subjects, to distinguish it from other similar collections and respect the internal order of the documentary series in the development of its institutional activity; III. Integrity: Ensuring that archival documents are complete and truthful to accurately reflect the information contained; IV. Availability: Adopt pertinent measures for the expeditious location of the archive documents, and V. Accessibility: Guarantee access to the consultation of the archives in accordance with this Law and the applicable legal provisions. (p.4)

Regarding the complex reality of archives, the protection activity exercised by the authority does not only consist of detecting and punishing behaviours that do not respect heritage and current legislation, but also promoting sensitivity towards these precious and fragile goods, which can constitute, if they are understood and valued, resources capable of growing essential factors for the development of the territory: culture, citizen awareness and identity. The meagreness of the sample of historical archives surveyed attests, as has been said, to the seriousness of the situation that existed in the municipality of Teziutlan.

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### The experience in the Municipal Archive Project

It is known that files can be effectively accessed only if they are ordered and only through the mediation of descriptive tools such as inventories, directories, indexes, transcriptions, records, information systems that manage databases and whose quality strongly conditions the results of the investigation. . An unsatisfactory or inadequate or even misleading description can complicate or frustrate any attempt to access the documents that contain the information you are looking for.

Therefore, having paved the way for initiatives to survey this heritage, such as the Teziutlan Historical Documentary Heritage Conservation project, is a case of excellence, and is undoubtedly a reason of merit for the Teziutlan City Council 2021-2024. Regardless of the amount of data actually collected, a certainly relevant result and full of notable perspectives is the start of cataloging in 2022.

The information of the files surveyed is ordered based on a standardized scheme, which facilitates its consultation, while the tools, even partial, for the description of the material, already existing or collected, as part of the ordinance, based on the information collected from the documents or held by the archivists themselves, are placed in the appendix. These tools, which reflect the multiplicity of ways in which the archives have been established and are beginning to be presented today, constitute valuable access keys, because they can provide essential information so that the archives are available for consultation and to give access to information. that contain.

The authors are convinced that the incipient work that is now being presented may constitute not only a point of arrival, but also a promising starting point for a great program of census and intervention in the regional historical archives.

Designed and compiled within the framework of a regional operational program, financed with funds from the Academic Strengthening Program - PORDEP 2021, it is the result of a first census of the historical archive and, at the same time, a useful tool for the study and research of the local history.

Published in 2023, a book is ready that focuses on documentary sources that lacked the essential aids for their consultation, which is why it constitutes an original consultation tool, preparatory to the study of the papers preserved in the municipal archive.

On the other hand, it is a full part of the debate on municipal archives, which have enjoyed renewed interest from specialists in the sector since, starting in the 2000s, the legislation regulating the function of protection exercised over them.

In any case, beyond the historiographic issue, the lists of archive funds held by the municipalities of Puebla in the Northeast region open up a glimpse of a sector of regional cultural heritage, which was not even registered in the institutional portals of the federation, but that in the context of the project carried out, although it was very clear that the conservation and enhancement of the papers necessarily requires, and preliminary, to carry out the prudent operations of sanitation to the inventory of the funds, still to be carried out.

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### Main findings of the Project

1. Lack of a regional law for conservation and enhancement of municipal archive assets.
2. There is an insufficient number or total absence of professional figures in the municipal archive.
3. Lack of financial resources in the local government budget.
4. Overload of functions that are the responsibility of the Technical Secretariat of the City Council. A vicious circle between the desertion of local archives by researchers and the demotivation of local authorities to guarantee their use.

In this context, the initiative of the project, being fully aware of the limits of the intervention, tried to keep the attention focused on the first-hand sources, of various kinds. In fact, the results of the archival itinerary certainly do not have the value of a statistical estimate, but even so they constitute an eloquent sample of the quantitative and qualitative richness of the Teziutlan municipal records. The starting point of the journey through the labyrinth of the municipal archive was the internal archive, from which the state of the funds was traced from the mid-1920s onwards.

Here we do not want to highlight the macroscopic data of the progressive worsening of the conditions of the records as we approach the present, which arises from the comparison between the reports of the historians of the last century and the files updated to 2018, even if it continues to be a very valid argument in support of the usefulness of the next stage; but it does not intend to underline the correctness of the comparative method followed by past archivists.

Rather, it seems appropriate to highlight how the reports, often unpublished and written for administrative use, represent a sure clue, and sometimes the only clue, to reconstruct the external history of Teziutlan. Outlining the chronology of the safeguarding and reorganization episodes of the last seventy years, the archive certainly does not end the history of Teziutlan's municipal assets, but it is the foundation, from an institutional point of view, of the constant exercise of guardianship over cultural heritage, of local entities and which is nourished, from the point of view of the stability of civil society, by the hard work of individuals and the cultural and patrimonial resurgence of the Teziutecos.

The objectives set by the Institutional Plan have been mostly met:

I. Manage, organize, and preserve in a homogeneous way the archival documents that produce, receive, obtain, acquire, transform or possess, in accordance with their faculties, competences, attributions or functions, the standards and principles in archival matters. II. Establish an institutional system for the administration of its archives and carry out the document management processes.

III. Integrate documents into files.

IV. Register in the National Registry the existence and location of files under its protection.

V. Form an interdisciplinary group in terms of regulatory provisions, which assists in the documentary assessment.

SAW. Provide archival documents with the necessary identification elements to ensure that they maintain their origin and original order.

VII. Allocate the spaces and equipment necessary for the operation of its files.

VIII. Promote the development of infrastructure and equipment for document management and file administration.

IX. Rationalize the production, use, distribution and control of archival documents.

X. Safeguard the documents contained in their files.

XI. Apply methods and measures for the organization, protection and conservation of archival documents, considering the state they keep and the space for their storage; as well as procure the digital protection of said documents, in accordance with this Law and the other applicable legal provisions, and

XII. The other provisions established in this Law and other applicable legal provisions. (p. 5).

We all have a constantly changing conception of heritage and cultural property, especially from the point of view of the current direct use by people, with the approach that "this can also be used". Now we must be careful not to lose the most beautiful things during this period of heritage reconstruction. Nothing is damaged beyond repair. Historical value cannot have been lost forever through carelessness, difficult access or long-term storage conditions. In such a situation, it is worth trying to preserve what remains, at least in historical memory.

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## Conclusion

Heritage values are determined by a combination of different categories and forms of perception, which are subject to constant changes over time and the change of eras. So, to determine the value of the estate, at different times, the scale for determining the value of the estate helps the specialist and the layman.

Determining the value of heritage is an essential part of the decision to rescue the municipal archive. With a value analysis, it has become clear exactly how your conservation should be planned. Determining the historical and cultural value of an asset and its object of protection is also becoming an important stage in the issue of placing assets that have the characteristics of a cultural heritage asset, such as this archive, under municipal protection. The determination procedure has a developed methodology, which analyzes and evaluates such objects from various positions. There are many criteria by which heritage values are determined. In the course of time, they are often rethought and changed, but today we can be sure that the mission of the project has been fulfilled in a first stage.

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