

# Transforming a provincial archive through the collection of sports memories: experiences of the Gauteng province in South Africa

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – South African public archives have not been able to transform into active documenters of society. As a result, they cannot carry out their mandate of collecting non-public records of lasting value and national significance and recording aspects of the country's experience that have previously been ignored by archives repositories. This paper aims to discuss efforts by the Gauteng Provincial Archives to transform the archival landscape in South Africa by collecting sports memories. This is because, in democratic South Africa, the archival landscape was expected to change and reflect the nation's diversity, despite the fact that it still largely reflected the Western-dominated global mainstream.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study is based on the authors' personal experiences with the development and operation of the Gauteng Provincial Archives. The authors are also involved in the Gauteng Provincial Archives' oral history project, which aims to build an inclusive archive by recording oral histories of sports memories across the province.

**Findings** – The construction of the Gauteng Archives Repository has ushered in a chance to decolonise South African archives by collecting sports memories. These are windows of opportunity through which ordinary people can include their own experiences, filling in the gaps left by colonial and apartheid archives.

**Originality/value** – This paper offers practical experience in transforming and decolonising archives through collecting sports memories.

**Keywords** South Africa, Oral history, Archives, Decolonisation, Gauteng Provincial Archives, Sports memories

**Paper type** Case study

## Introduction and historical context of archives in South Africa

This paper explores the journey of the development and operationalisation of Gauteng Provincial Archives, one of South Africa's final archive repositories to open among other provincial repositories in South Africa. Unlike other repositories, such as KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Archives, Free State Provincial Archives and Western Cape Provincial Archives, Gauteng Provincial Archives did not inherit archival infrastructure from the previous apartheid administration. With the enactment of the Gauteng Provincial Archives and Records Service Act No. 5 of 2013, the Gauteng Provincial Archives was the last archival repository to be established. The paper describes the legislative journey and the transformation of archival holdings through the collection of sports memories. The paper concludes by arguing that, despite being one of the last to be opened and operational, Gauteng Provincial Archives

is now in a better position to be the best practice model in South Africa, thus the saying "the last shall be the first and the first the last".

South Africa inherited a public archives system that had been developed over many decades of colonial and apartheid rule. Because records before 1994 reflected the colonial and apartheid regimes, it is claimed that Jan van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape in 1652 marked the beginning of South African history. When European settlers arrived in this part of the world, most of the current archival records held in South Africa's well-established archives were created. These documents, the majority of which are in paper and microfilm

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formats and are kept in archive repositories, make no mention of indigenous people.

Even though South Africa has a long history of archives dating back to the eras of the Dutch East India Company (1652–1795), the First British Occupation (1795–1803), the Batavian Republic (1803–1806), the Second British Occupation (1803–1909) and the Union of South Africa (1910), the current archival system was conceptualised in the early 1990s. The task was completed during the convention for a democratic South African negotiation process just before the first democratic elections.

Historically, South Africa has had a unified system of public records administration since its creation in terms of the first archival legislation in 1922, within which physical decentralisation at the provincial level was accommodated. The purpose of the legislation was based on the Jenkinson Canon of the same year, the *Manual of Archive Administration*, which provided the basis of archival theory and practice in many countries, especially British colonies. For example, the current archival legislation in South Africa was derived from the canonical work with regard to what Jenkinson calls the primary (safeguarding of archives and custody) and secondary (meeting the needs of researchers) duties of an archivist.

Since its inception, the national archives has operated under the mandate of providing custody for all central and provincial government records. Only after the 1962 Archives Act was enacted that “the State Archives Service developed a significant records management capacity sustained by wide-ranging regulatory powers”. Until the 1980s, this service was highly centralised, with its head office in Pretoria and archives repositories in the old provincial capitals (Transvaal, Orange Free State, Natal and Cape Colony).

With the dissolution of the apartheid government in 1994, the South African government adopted the new Constitution in 1996 and promulgated the National Archives and Records Service Act (No. 43 of 1996). The Act converted the State Archives Service into the National Archives and Records Service (NARS). The Act established the framework within which a new archival system for the country was built and laid the foundation for a public archives function consisting of the NARS at the national government and nine more or less autonomous provincial archives services (Harris, 1996).

The basis for establishing a new archives and records management system for South Africa was provided for in Schedule 5 of the 1996 Constitution, which stated that “archives other than national archives are a functional area of provincial competence”. By virtue of this provision, each province should promulgate its own Act on Archives and Records Service and should establish and maintain its own archival infrastructure. The Constitution requires the devolution of the state’s responsibility for archives from the central government to the country’s nine provinces. However, provinces are not autonomous enough to work independently from the national archives. To ensure a coherent and compatible archives system, the National Archives and Records Service Act contains specific provisions that impact the archival and records management services delivered by provincial archival services. For example, section 3(g) provides for the National Archives and Records Service to assist, support, set standards for and provide professional guidelines to provincial archives services. Flowing from this, the National Archives and

Records Service determines the broad policy framework within which the provincial archives services operate. Therefore, the system comprises National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (NARSSA), the National Advisory Council of the National Archives and the nine provincial archives structures with their advisory councils.

With the implementation of Schedule 5 of the Constitution, South Africa began to witness the establishment of new repositories. Each province developed its own archival system based on the national system, resulting in ten distinct archival and records systems. Some archives repositories are well equipped and inherited their archival infrastructure from the previous dispensation, such as KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Archives, Free State and Western Cape Provincial Archives. In contrast, other provinces did not inherit any infrastructure, while others inherited dilapidated Bantustan archival buildings, such as Limpopo Province and Eastern Cape Province. Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, North West and Gauteng did not inherit any archival structure.

### The journey for building the Gauteng Provincial Archives

Gauteng Provincial Government did not have an archive repository when the provincialisation of archives was implemented in 2004. Some provinces built archive-purpose buildings, for example, Mpumalanga Provincial Archives, Limpopo Provincial Archives, Northern Cape Archives and North West Archives. The National Archives repository in Pretoria became the national archives, although people in Gauteng believed it was only for the province. Gauteng Province lacked an archive repository, legislation, infrastructure and staffing for a long time.

Gauteng attempted, without success, to develop archival infrastructure between 2004 and 2008. Consultations were restarted in 2009, culminating in the founding of an archival bill. Only North West remained after Gauteng and the Northern Cape passed archival legislation in 2013. Gauteng is also one of the last provinces to establish an archive repository. Gauteng Provincial Archives and Records Service Act No. 5 of 2013 became law. Therefore, the Member of Executive Council (MEC) of Sports, Arts and Culture, to activate the Act, was required to establish a provincial repository and appoint an advisory council and a provincial archivist.

Following the enactment of the Act in 2013, the then-MEC, Hon. Lebo Maile, secured funding to build a repository. Unfortunately, there was a land issue because the identified location in Woodmead did not belong to the government. The land was then offered by the Mayor of Mogale City, located west of Johannesburg. The repository’s construction began in the 2014–2015 financial year. This repository was built per section 6 of the Gauteng Provincial Archives Act to preserve Gauteng’s memory. While most public archives are located in cities, the Gauteng Provincial Archives was built in a township, bringing archives closer to previously marginalised communities. This move satisfies the archival community’s rhetoric that “we should take archives to the people rather than away from the people”.

It was only in 2015 that the Gauteng Provincial Archives Advisory Council was appointed in terms of Section 9, whose function is to:

- consult and advise the MEC on matters relating to the operation of the Act;
- advise the provincial archivist in carrying out the objectives and functions of the provincial archives;
- promote the coordination of archival policy; and
- maintain a provincial list of non-public records in the province.

The inaugural Provincial Archives Council was established in April 2015 in terms of section 9 of Chapter 4 of the GPARSA, and the following members were appointed in terms of section 11:

- Prof Mpho Ngoepe – University of South Africa (Chairperson).
- Mr Preshen Sewdass – Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (Deputy Chairperson)
- Ms Letitia Myburgh – Standard Bank
- Prof Sekibakiba Lekgoathi – Wits University
- Mr Paul Mullon – Cor Concepts
- Ms Virginia Hendricks – The Document Warehouse.

The Council was only inaugurated on 28 June 2016 by Hon. MEC Faith Mazibuko. The Council was tasked with assisting in the operationalisation of the archive's repository because most of the functions prescribed by the Gauteng Provincial Archives and Records Service Act (Act No. 5 of 2013) were not being fulfilled.

Even though the repository's construction was completed in 2016, some challenges caused the archive's opening to be delayed. Some of these activities included community engagement, as most community members were unaware of the archives' purpose. Some believed it was only for Mogale City, while others thought it was only for the provincial Department of Sport, Arts and Culture. There was even an adverse media report about the repository as an 'empty vessel'. This was because the building was complete but empty of records and staff members. As a result, there was an urgent need to transfer records of enduring value that were ready in identified governmental bodies, such as Sedibeng Municipality. Finally, on October 24, 2018, Gauteng Premier, Hon. David Makhura officially opened the repository, signalling Gauteng's time to shine.

### **Operationalisation of the archives**

The mandate of the Gauteng Provincial Archives, like that of other archives repositories in Africa and, in particular, South Africa, was not easy to implement. Staffing, resources, ICT, and building the archival collection were among the challenges. Gauteng Archives operated for a long time without a building and with only two and a half staff members because one was also in charge of provincial library services. Most of the archives repository's functions, as prescribed by the Gauteng Provincial Archives and Records Service Act (Act No. 5 of 2013), were not being carried out.

The provincial archivist was appointed in early 2019 by the then-MEC of Sport, Arts and Culture, Hon. Faith Mazibuko, following Chapter 3 Section 7(1) of the Gauteng Provincial Archives and Records Service Act, 2013. According to the Act, this person is in charge of managing and preserving archives in the province. Furthermore, the repository was staffed per Section 7(2) of Chapter 3 of the Act. As a result, the repository

could now request the transfer of archival materials from municipalities and provincial departments.

In order to operationalise the Provincial Archives, the Department went a step further and established bursaries in Information Science and Archival Studies, which are administered by the Library and Archival Services business unit under the Cultural Affairs directorate.

Once the archives repository was operational, the archival holdings needed to be transformed to reflect the diversity of South African culture. In this regard, non-public records in the province are collected as a long-term objective under Chapter 4, section 10(e) of the Act. In this regard, it was decided at the Gauteng Archives Repository that the emphasis should be on sports archives, as this genre had previously been marginalised. As we decolonise the archives, we believe the Gauteng Provincial Archives Service can serve as a best practise model for other provinces. The Council initiated the following initiatives: a proposal to decolonise the content of archives through an oral history project on sports archives and the creation of a province-wide inventory of non-public records. A memorandum of understanding was signed with the University of South Africa in this regard in order to reach an agreement on the project. Masters students were enlisted to help with the project. It is hoped that the recorded oral history will assist the Gauteng Archives Repository in attracting new users in addition to the traditional users found in other archives repositories. Given Africa's high levels of illiteracy, orality is the medium through which most people express themselves. As a result, orality can be documented as a record. Oral history should be viewed as one of the most important, but not exclusive, sources in the project of documenting history and heritage. The Gauteng Provincial Government, through the Office of the Premier, entered into a series of agreements with the Regio-Amilia Municipality in Italy. Members of the Gauteng Provincial Archives visited the Soncini archives in Italy in 2017 to look through South African records, mostly from exiled African National Congress members. Hopefully, these records will be made available in digital format in the future.

Recognising that the Provincial Archives was not centrally located and that it would be nearly impossible for all Gauteng citizens to access it, the Provincial Archives developed an outreach strategy to educate and popularise archival services to all Gauteng citizens through National Archives Week, school visits, and holiday programmes.

The repository is also forming Friends of the Archives groups in all five (5) corridors, namely East, South, West, Central, and North, in collaboration with established NGOs/NPOs in those areas. These non-profit organisations (NPO) will be crucial in mobilising communities during outreach programmes and organised trips to the Archives. Working with these NGOs/NPOs in future projects such as the historical origins of townships, establishing family archives or memory boxes, and township school archives is part of the plan.

The main challenge that Gauteng Archives Repository is currently facing is ensuring that all holdings are accessible through the arrangement and description of archives. The repository must also negotiate with the national archives' repository for the inter-repository transfer of Gauteng records in the custody of the national archives. Furthermore, the repository must prepare to be relevant during the Fourth

Industrial Revolution and the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, the repository must implement preservation and digital access archival systems such as Archi Access to Memory (ATOM) and Archivematica.

## Oral history project

The Gauteng Archives Repository's vision of becoming a transformed repository with records that reflect the communities it serves inspired the oral history project. The concept was conceived during advisory council meetings. Following that, colleagues from the University of South Africa's Department of Information Science, Witwatersrand University, and the repository met in April 2019 to plan and implement a project that would bring in records and narratives reflecting Gauteng's diverse cultures and heritage. There have been numerous oral history initiatives in South Africa (NARSSA, 2022), most aligned with various causes, such as the South African liberation struggle. Working with sports memories became very appealing to the project team because they wanted to focus on a neutral cause that would unite communities. In 2006, the late President Nelson Mandela stated that:

[...] sports has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. Sports can awaken hope where there was previously only despair.

This oral history project aimed to collaborate with communities and the Gauteng Provincial Archives to create a history of community sport activities from 1960 to 2010. This was the first step in building a community archive; in other words, the project's success may lead to additional initiatives to create an inclusive archive.

Funding is an essential component of any project, and the Gauteng Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation is committed to supporting it. However, the department would use these funds primarily for operational purposes rather than research. As a result, the University of South Africa's (UNISA) Department of Information Science applied for a research grant from South Africa's National Research Foundation in 2019 to cover the research costs. The Grant was issued from 2020 to 2022 (three years). The project was officially registered at the University of South Africa as a community engagement project in 2021. Community engagement projects at UNISA serve as a vehicle for social development and engaged scholarship, which forms part of the university's vision of being "the African university shaping futures in the service of humanity". The objectives of the project were, therefore, to:

- educate archivists from the Gauteng Provincial Archives, Gauteng Communities, and Postgraduate students from UNISA about oral history and the contribution oral history can make towards building an inclusive archive;
- collect and preserve oral history accounts on sports heritage—particularly previously undocumented communities;
- collaborate with the Gauteng Provincial Archives in raising awareness about sports heritage in the province and beyond; and
- document the project's experience transforming archives and disseminate this information by producing research outputs. These research activities were completed by the postgraduate students and the rest of the research team. The research outputs so far have been in the form of journal articles, conference presentations and completed qualifications.

The team comprises five academic staff from UNISA's Department of Information Science, two postgraduate students from UNISA and three archivists from the Gauteng Provincial Archives. The primary research method was participatory action research (MacDonald, 2012), a common strategy used by individuals researching the transformation of society or marginalised communities. This type of research is based on interpretivism (McIntyre, 2008; Pickard, 2013).

The sport collection focuses on previously undocumented Gauteng Province communities. According to Hatang (2000), the oral source is an integral part of recreation and rethinking the past, especially for those who have never had the opportunity. Archival Platform (2015) paints a bleak picture of public archives struggling to transform themselves through active societal documentation. Nonetheless, the situation is not hopeless; collaborative efforts like those of this project have the potential to make a significant difference in Gauteng communities and at the archives.

The project began in 2020 but was hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which halted all interaction with communities. Regardless, the project team decided to prioritise training. As a result, four online training workshops on oral history as a research method were completed. The two postgraduate students continued their research virtually as well. One student completed a master's degree by the end of 2021. This student has since registered for the PhD programme within the same project in 2022. The following are the topics of research projects for postgraduate students:

- Towards inclusive archives through the collection of sports athletics at the Gauteng Provincial Archives Repository (master's in information science completed).
- Inclusion of citizen archives in the Gauteng Province: a case of township sports games (PhD in Information Science ongoing).
- Voices of marginalised sports heroes at the Gauteng Provincial Archives (master's in information science ongoing).

The following black athletes were profiled in the completed project on sports athletic legacies:

- Rosina Sedibane;
- Margaret Sedibane;
- Titus Mamabolo;
- Linda Hlophe;
- Enoch Skosana;
- Johannes Kekana;
- James Mokoka; and
- Joseph Leserwane (Matshotshwane, 2021).

The project has sparked an increased interest. As a result, some of the project's findings and information were presented at two local conferences, the South African Society of Archivists and the Oral History Association of South Africa, as well as one international conference, the International Council on Archives.

Two project team members also created open educational oral history resources for archivists, recently uploaded to the UNISA institutional repository. These resources are available to archivists across the country and beyond for free.

The project held its first community event at the provincial archives in October 2021. Members of the community were kept up to date on the project's progress and invited to suggest additional accounts that would be valuable additions to the

Table 1 Sporting heroes' accounts

Name	Sport	Location in Gauteng
Woola Aphane	Softball	Benoni
Mpho Madi	Wrestling	Tsakane
David Khoza	Soccer	Vosloorus
Jonas Sekese	Soccer	Vosloorus
Flora Mudjezi	Athletics	Kagiso
Dipuo Maneke	Athletics/Aerobics	Kagiso
Shadrack Sekoto	Soccer	Vosloorus
Matthew Kutumela	Softball	Benoni
Rosina Sedibane-Modiba	Athletics	Atteridgeville
Dolly Mtshali	Tennis and Netball	Katlehong
Nyalleng Motsoeneng	Netball and Athletics	Katlehong
Tebogo Seroto	Tennis	Kagiso
Molefi Molefe	Body-building	Kagiso
Benjamin Ramphele	Cricket	Kagiso
Gabriel Putsue	Golf	Kwa-Thema
Bester Masango	Golf	Kwa-Thema
Vusi Gqeba	Karate	Kwa-Thema
Lydia Kapari	Tennis	Kwa-Thema

Source: Table by authors (2023)

collection (snowball sampling). The Gauteng Provincial Archives has appointed the Azikhwela Research Arts and Heritage entity to conduct 50 oral history interviews on Unsung Sporting Heroes in Gauteng in September 2022. These are people from previously marginalised communities in Gauteng whose sporting achievements have gone unrecognised due to the former apartheid government's unfair regulations and practices. As a result, the repository's objective is to gather these accounts for posterity while also raising awareness about sports heritage in Gauteng communities. To date, as indicated in Table 1, the following accounts have been collected during this phase of the project:

A significant proportion of these interviews have been transcribed, and more are planned in Gauteng, including Soweto, Vereeniging and Pretoria.

Apart from collecting, preserving and promoting the collection is also necessary. So far, the promotion has been successful at community events. On the other hand, the team plans to collaborate with the repository to conduct more outreach activities with schools and other community spheres. Due to the pandemic's setback, preservation training has been delayed, and this significant factor will be addressed and implemented beginning in 2023.

## Conclusion and the future

To summarise, the construction of the Gauteng Archives Repository has allowed South African archives to decolonise archival content to a certain extent. These are windows of opportunity through which ordinary people can pour their own experiences, filling in the gaps left by colonialism and apartheid archives. The new archival era has thus arrived, and it is time for South African archivists to don 4D archival glasses to align their fuzzy vision. Gauteng Archives could take advantage of an

opportunity to create inclusive archives, and the adage "first will be last, and last will be first" would apply to them because they would be leading those repositories that inherited archival infrastructure.

The project empowers master's and doctoral students, informs archival and oral history curricula, produces actionable outcomes and influences archival collection policy. Furthermore, the project intends to create more Open Educational Resources (OERs) for the UNISA Institutional Repository that archivists can use for free across the country for oral history research methods training. In addition, we hope to expand our postgraduate archives and oral history research programme.

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