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A Living Open Architecture Archive

Lessons from Docomomo and Architectuul Collaboration, Challenges and Potentials

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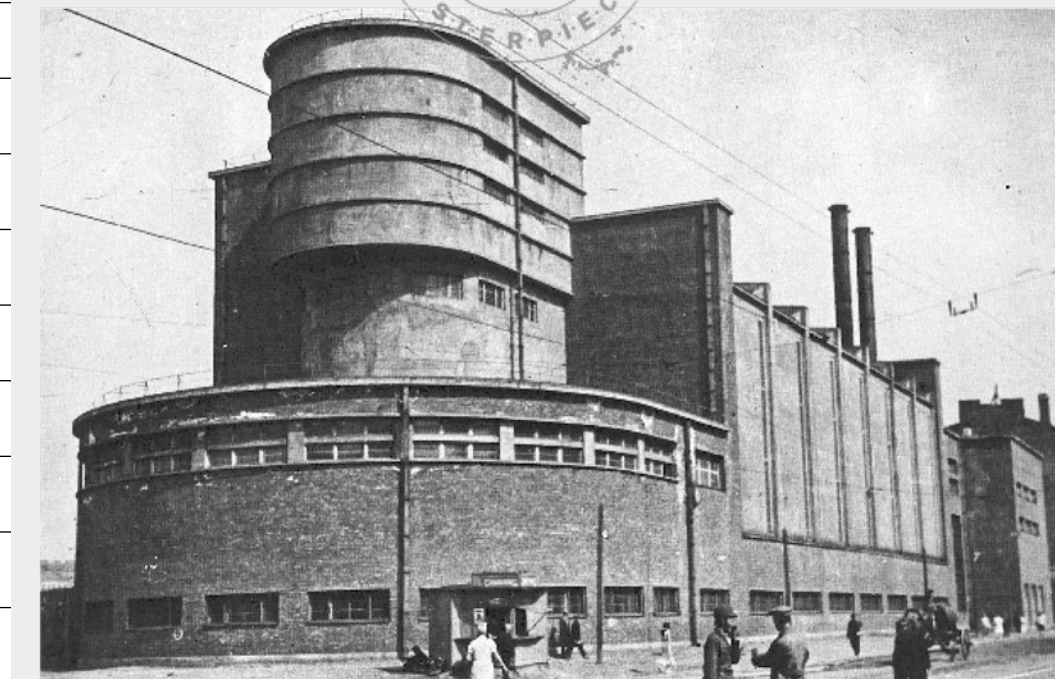
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Forgotten Masterpieces – FOMA

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A Living Open Architecture Archive: Lessons from Docomomo and Architectuul Collaboration, Challenges and Potentials

INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapid architectural evolution, the preservation of architectural heritage, particularly that of the Modern Movement, stands as a paramount challenge. This contribution aims to showcase the collaboration between Architectuul, an open data architecture community, and Docomomo International, a global non-profit organisation dedicated to the documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement, which is present with national working parties in 79 countries.¹ Since 1990, Docomomo International has been collecting, researching, and documenting information of over a thousand Modern Movement buildings in systematic ‘building fiches’, part of which have been published in the Docomomo Journal, biannual international conference proceedings, and several book publications in English and other languages.² Consequently, Docomomo has established itself nationally and internationally as a point of reference and partner for organisations like ICOMOS, UIA or the Getty Conservation Institute. Nevertheless, only a fraction of this rich material is readily accessible in digital form, and over the years, Docomomo has recognised the critical and challenging task of building a sustainable, continually updated, cost-efficient, and openly accessible archive to disseminate this architectural knowledge further across geographies and cultures, beyond the printed versions and local digital repositories.

Architectuul, launched in 2010,³ has aimed to devise innovative solutions to the archival dilemma. It began as an open data community project based on the premise of sharing knowledge of buildings and its creators online under a Creative Commons license. Originally created as a crowd-sourced community by a team of architecture enthusiasts, architects, graphic

¹ Docomomo International. Accessed September 19, 2023, <https://docomomo.com/>.

² Docomomo Journal, Conference Proceedings, Dossiers ICS/T, Books, and Digital Archives can be viewed at, <https://docomomo.com/>. In 2000, Dennis Sharp and Catherine Cooke compiled the ‘Black Book’ on Modern Movement Architecture, which includes around 800 entries sourced from the fiches within the Docomomo International Register. Dennis Sharp, and Catherine Cooke, *The Modern Movement in Architecture: Selections from the Docomomo Registers* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2000).

³ “About”, Architectuul (last updated August 4, 2023). Accessed September 26, 2023, <https://architectuul.com/about>.

designers and software engineers, its archive covers buildings throughout history, from archetypal classics to contemporary projects. All content is sourced by the Architectuul community and curated by a dedicated editorial team. Over time, Architectuul has developed into a leading open data architecture archive.⁴ As a testament to its usefulness for the dissemination of architectural knowledge, Architectuul frequently receives external requests for material usage, attracting renowned institutions like the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), Domus publisher, and the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London. Thanks to the Architectuul license policy these requests can be granted free of charge.

PREMISES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE COLLABORATION

The collaborative initiative of Architectuul and Docomomo began with a pledge – an agreement to perpetually offer architectural content freely and openly. Beneath this commitment lies a multitude of questions and challenges. How can an ‘Open Architecture Archive’ be created and maintained, and what does “open” signify in this context? Who bears the responsibility for the content within the archive, and under what licensing agreements can this knowledge be shared? How can the archive foster vibrant user interactions among professionals and enthusiasts, and, critically, how can it be sustained, updated, and kept relevant?

To explore and critically research these issues, Architectuul together with Docomomo Germany (as national working party of Docomomo International), Contineo 2020 (the North Macedonian NGO for the preservation of Modernist architecture in Skopje), and Kaunas 2022 (the European Capital of Culture program of the city of Kaunas), launched the project ‘Forgotten Masterpieces (FOMA) – a living open archive for European Modern Architecture in a joint effort, co-funded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).⁵ It leveraged institutional expertise and cross-cultural connections to curate a digital database. Ultimately, it generated two new open online archives (one for Docomomo⁶ and one for North Macedonia⁷) facilitated by the Architectuul platform and interlinked through an API infrastructure—a dynamic hub for the exchange of architectural knowledge.

This paper presents the collaboration of Architectuul and Docomomo to shed a limelight on the creation and maintenance of open digital architectural archives. It derives insights from the collaborative experience, highlighting the challenges encountered and lessons learned. The

4 “Architectuul”, Wikipedia (last updated July 5, 2020). Accessed September 26, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architectuul>.
5 The project with Docomomo Germany, <https://docomomo.de/>; Contineo 2020, <https://contineo.mk/>; Kaunas 2022, <https://kaunas2022.eu/en/> was funded by EACEA under the project number: 101056402.
6 See the Docomomo collection on Architectuul, “Docomomo Modern Architecture Archive”. Accessed September 26, 2023, <https://docomomo.architectuul.com/>.
7 See the North Macedonia collection on Architectuul, “North Macedonia Modern Architecture Archive”. Accessed September 26, 2023, <https://northmacedonia.architectuul.com/>.

partnership featured a fellowship program designed to educate and foster idea exchange among young heritage professionals, ultimately laying the groundwork for the forthcoming open archive. Navigating the intricacies of digital documentation and knowledge sharing, this endeavour demonstrates that these initiatives go beyond mere preservation of the past, inspiring innovative approaches for broader engagement and contribution within the architectural community. This exploration delves into the notion of ‘open’ within the digital archives for architectural knowledge.

THE FORGOTTEN MASTERPIECES (FOMA) FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The Forgotten Masterpieces (FOMA) Fellowship Program, a six-month immersive experience for young academics and professionals, focused on re-discovering Modern Movement architecture and archives through digital means while reviving the quest for forgotten treasures of twentieth-century architecture in Europe, while forming an integral component of the collaborative efforts between Docomomo and Architectuul. The program aimed to explore and experiment with the digital transformation in documenting architecture, and novel strategies of knowledge generation and dissemination. It leveraged rich cross-cultural connections in collaboration with the participants and scholarly expertise of different and very diverse institutions. Fellows contributed to the development of written and visual material through scientific writing, photography, representations, and digital publishing, providing inputs for creating a digitised database. The program culminated by establishing two open online archives, facilitated by the Architectuul platform, promoting a digitally-supported, collaborative exchange of architectural knowledge.

The methodology of the fellowship program entailed a two-fold approach. The initial stage involved digital data collection, verification, and the creation of comprehensive written and visual materials for archive entries.⁸ The collected data, consisting of texts, drawings, and photographs, posed the main challenge of identifying reliable sources and utilising copyright-free materials. Subsequently, the materials were formatted and organised within a collective database among the fellows, ensuring a streamlined transfer to the Architectuul platform. Through the process, further visualisation and dissemination techniques were explored, mainly by the use of mapping, utilising the archive database. Following the completion of the transition and the establishment of the curated archives online, the fellows worked on refining individual building ‘articles’ on the Architectuul platform, addressing minor issues arising from technical errors. The second stage of the program comprised of a hybrid discussion and dissemination of results organised as a 24-hour Hackathon⁹ that brought together participants and mentors from

8 The Docomomo Germany fellows relied on the “Das Neue Frankfurt” map by the Ernst-May-Gesellschaft (<http://karte.ernst-may-gesellschaft.de/>) and Docomomo ‘Documentation Fiches’ as their principal sources, complemented by supplementary information and updates sourced from university databases, archival documents, and scholarly publications.
9 “Forgotten Masterpieces Cultural Hackathon – LINA” (last updated 15 April 2023). Accessed September 26,

various locations worldwide in a collaborative environment. The Hackathon, conducted partly online and partly in-person, encouraged participants to explore emerging issues and themes that arose during the archival process.¹⁰ By fostering dialogue among participants, as well as engaging online audiences and experts, this methodology addressed the challenges and implications surrounding architectural archives, including issues of data accessibility, authorship, and copyright while emphasising the need for transparent and collaborative platforms.

In conclusion, the FOMA fellowship program,¹¹ in conjunction with the Architectuul platform, represents a forward-thinking initiative to expand the open online archives for architecture communication. By nurturing the collaborative digitisation of architectural data and ways of knowledge sharing, this project has encouraged cooperation and dialogue among young professionals and experts within the architectural community. The project outcomes invite critical reflections on archival practices,¹² while also inspiring innovative approaches for broader engagement and contribution.

EXPLORING OPEN DIGITAL ARCHIVES FOR
ARCHITECTURAL KNOWLEDGE

One major output of the FOMA fellowship was the exploration of ‘open archives’ and its benefits and drawbacks. What is an open archive? Documentation involves the systematic collection and organisation of information pertaining to a work, encompassing its condition, content, context, and the preservation measures undertaken. In conservation practices, it is an essential tool for reconstruction and preservation purposes.¹³ Likewise, documentation and inventory building are pivotal in architectural knowledge generation. They serve as vital tools for capturing, organising, and preserving architectural information, including designs, structures, materials, and techniques. Open architecture archives provide

2023, <https://lina.community/programme/event/36/forgotten-masterpieces-cultural-hackathon/>.
10 The Hackathon consisted of various sessions in which a ‘digital champion’ (fellow) was paired with an external mentor to address specific digitisation concerns related to Forgotten Masterpieces. This included efforts to enhance data verification, improve keyword search functionality, and refine methods for defining architectural characteristics. Additionally, the program sparked discussions on the subjects of continuity, promotion, AI-tools, protection-transformation barometer, all of which deserve further attention in archive building. See “FOMA: Cultural Hackathon”, Architectuul (last updated 26 April 2023). Accessed September 19, 2023, <https://architectuul.com/digest/foma-cultural-hackathon>.
11 See the Lithuanian fellows who worked on an archive for Modern Architecture in Kaunas, “FOMA – virtual archive – Modernism for the Future | Kaunas 2022”. Accessed September 26, 2023, <https://modernizmasateiciai.lt/en/virtual-archive/>.
12 The Docomomo Germany fellows also authored concise essays regarding digital documentation and publishing within the context of the Modern Movement, sharing their reflections and further exploring the questions raised during the FOMA experience. They highlighted themes like mapping the archive, employing AI-tools and ChatGPT to enhance documentation, and addressing issues related to reproduction and Creative Commons licensing. These essays will be published by TH-OWL: Uta Pottgiesser, Anica Dragutinovic, and OWL University of Applied Sciences, eds. *MoMove Modern Movement and Digital Archives*. Presented at the 20th Docomomo Germany Conference. Lemgo: Technische Hochschule Ostwestfalen-Lippe, 2023.
13 Annet Dekker, “Methodologies of Multimedial Documentation and Archiving.” in *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives*, eds. Julia Noordegraaf, Cosetta G. Saba, Barbara Le Maître, and Vinzenz Hediger, (Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 149–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wp6f3.12>.

a dynamic platform for enthusiasts, professionals, and scholars to access, contribute, and share architectural content freely. These living repositories evolve with the field, promoting engagement and the ongoing relevance of architectural knowledge.

Expanding on the notion of an ‘open archive’ within the context of architecture, it’s essential to clarify ‘openness’. Beyond financial freedom, ‘openness’ in architectural archives encompasses principles of universal accessibility, unrestricted sharing and collaborative knowledge exchange, and ultimately the application of open licenses. This definition draws inspiration from pioneers in open-source and open-access movements, such as Richard Stallman (Free Software Foundation), Linus Torvalds (Linux), Bruce Perens and Eric S. Raymond (Open Software Initiative), and legal scholars like Lawrence Lessig (Creative Commons).

However, this raises a fundamental question: Who owns the archive? Unlike traditional archives governed by well-established legal frameworks, open architecture archives often challenge conventional ownership boundaries – a repository of collective architectural knowledge that is owned by the architectural community as a whole. This notion reflects the democratic and collaborative ethos of open-source and open-access movements, revolutionising how architectural knowledge is perceived and shared.

On an alternative perspective, collectors are categorised by their choice of collection items and their perspective on the relationships between items in their collection, with some favouring similarity and others embracing diversity. In fields like architecture, where collected artifacts may differ significantly from the final product, this distinction is significant.¹⁴ This also underscores the importance of recognising the diverse target audiences, making it crucial to distinguish between scholarly-focused archives and community-driven platforms.

COMPARING DOCOMOMO AND ARCHITECTUUL APPROACHES

Docomomo archives showcase 20th-century modern architecture, providing academic scrutiny and curation, while acknowledging expert perspectives and recognition. Whereas, Architectuul functions as a community-supported/-driven platform, relying on open-source materials. Even so, both archives hold value for both specialists and the general public. Their hierarchical layouts provide a level of control over the depth of information presented.

Docomomo focuses on documentation and conservation of 20th century architecture, specifically from the Modern Movement, and operates through a network of National Working Parties (NPWs) worldwide, allowing for localised expertise and regional-specific documentation. They use standardised formats, known as ‘Documentation Fiches’ for data collection

14 Matt Roam, “You Are How You Collect”, *Perspecta* 48 (2015): 161–69. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45215807>.

to maintain consistency in recording architectural information.¹⁵ This structured outline is particularly suitable for a digital archive, as it enables various categorisations and filtering options for the collected information. In 2015, Docomomo International has adapted to the fast-paced digital landscape and globalisation by expanding its role as an international platform, offering new online channels for dissemination and knowledge exchange, and creating the Docomomo Virtual Exhibition (MoMove). This initiative aimed to consolidate the information collected by the NWP, unifying the dispersed archives for cohesive online presentation and dissemination.

In contrast, Architectuul has a broader scope, covering various architectural styles and historical periods, and serves as an open data project promoting the free sharing of architectural content online. It encourages community contributions and user engagement, allowing users to add, curate, and freely access architectural information. While it prioritises architectural documentation, it also fosters a community of architecture enthusiasts for knowledge sharing and discussions.

In today's expansive contemporary digital archives, emphasising their distinct aesthetic character is crucial. This uniqueness changes how individuals interact with information and underscores the importance of well-designed access and organisational systems, preventing it from becoming a generic evidence repository.¹⁶ Numerous scholarly initiatives are exploring the use of digital tools for sharing research findings and improving audience engagement.¹⁷ Leveraging contemporary digital visualisation and communication technologies, including websites, apps, films, and immersive experiences like 360-degree images, virtual reality, and gamification, these efforts experiment innovative means to protect and celebrate recent architectural heritage.¹⁸

Both initiatives, Docomomo and Architectuul, share a commitment to open archives in architecture, emphasising accessibility and openness in architectural documentation, but they differ in their specific focus, organisational structure, and community engagement approach. Maintaining an open architecture archive involves multiple facets, encompassing technical infrastructure, content management, quality assurance, backup strategies, and user support. Contributors, curators, moderators, and platform providers share responsibility for the archive's content, typically

15 Docomomo International formulated two distinct formats: the "Minimum Documentation Fiche" and the "Maximum" or "Full Documentation Fiche". Both contain similar sections tailored for the digital archive, with the latter offering more comprehensive details. The shared outline in both fiches helps structure the information collected, covering aspects such as the identity of the building/group of buildings/urban scheme/landscape/garden, history of the building, description, evaluation, and documentation. The fiche report at the end acknowledges the reporter's contribution.

16 Sylvia Lavin. "Today We Collect Everything." *Perspecta* 48 (2015): 182–91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45215809>.

17 Uta Pottgiesser, Anica Dragutinovic, Marzia Loddo, and OWL University of Applied Sciences, eds. *MoMove Modern Movement and Infrastructure*. Lemgo: Technische Hochschule Ostwestfalen-Lippe, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.25644/3m9j-0f94>.

18 Uta Pottgiesser, Anica Dragutinovic, and OWL University of Applied Sciences, eds. *MoMove Modern Movement and Industrial Heritage*. Lemgo: Technische Hochschule Ostwestfalen-Lippe, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.25644/4d3d-2v96>.

under open licenses like Creative Commons, enabling sharing, reuse, and adaptation. Engagement is encouraged and stimulated through community forums, user-generated content, and interactive features. Ensuring the archive's long-term sustainability requires active dissemination through various channels, regular updates, collaborative maintenance, and a commitment to improved archival practices, all collectively contributing to the ongoing relevance and vitality.

CONCLUSION

In the next phase of their collaboration, Architectuul and Docomomo International are embarking on an ambitious journey to further implement the 'Open Architecture Archive'. This transformative initiative aims to shift 32 years of documentation, including fiches, photographs, and articles, by translating them into the digital era as Registers 4.0. To achieve this and explore the possibilities, AI-tools may play a pivotal role, automating content tagging, offering content recommendations, and enhancing quality control. Through content analysis and tagging, AI simplifies categorisation and facilitates searches within the archive. Moreover, it provides users with relevant content suggestions based on their interests and search history, encouraging exploration and broadening the archive's audience reach. Additionally, AI can assist in maintaining content quality by identifying errors, inconsistencies, or missing information, thus ensuring the accuracy and reliability of archive materials.

This evolution prompts critical questions: will it mark a paradigm shift for organisations like Docomomo, transitioning from 'expert documentation' to 'open crowd documentation'? Furthermore, the challenge of migrating the existing data, which includes partly proprietary Docomomo archives like the NWP, into the Open Archive will undoubtedly be an essential aspect of this ambitious journey. It will inevitably raise questions regarding ownership rights within distinct national or regional initiatives, and individual efforts.