Preserving the intangible: From Dispersed Memory to Shared Infrastructure. The *ITArchives* project for Italian Performing Arts Archives

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Abstract

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This paper aims to contribute to current critical discussions on the nature and function of archives in the field of performing arts, focusing on the Italian context and its specific infrastructural challenges. The starting point is the persistent fragmentation of the Italian archival system, characterised by the lack of a centralised repository, poor interoperability among archival holdings, and limited accessibility. The intention is to explore how a dynamic, digital and participatory archival model might address these shortcomings, while responding to the inherent ephemerality of performance as an artistic and cultural practice.

The analysis unfolds along two interconnected lines. First, the paper will offer a comparative overview of significant international experiences — such as AusStage in Australia, SAPA in Switzerland, and Les Archives du Spectacle in France — to identify operational models and best practices for the mapping, digitization and dissemination of theatrical archives. Second, it will introduce the conceptual framework underlying the ongoing project ITArchives, developed within the extended PNRR CHANGES partnership and currently under construction.

The project represents one of the first structured attempts to build a digital platform designed to map, archive, and interactively present Italian theatrical heritage. This paper aims to critically reflect on some of the project's key methodological and technological choices, such as the use of open-source GIS for georeferenced mapping, the implementation of the Strapi content management system for database construction, and the exploration of immersive environments (VRChat) to foster reenactment and user engagement. A particular focus will be placed on the profiling of users as not merely passive recipients but as active co-creators within the archival narrative.

From an epistemological perspective, this paper seeks to interrogate the evolving notion of the archive — no longer a static repository but a generative narrative infrastructure capable of producing knowledge and inspiring creative practices. The archive is thus understood as a hybrid and rhizomatic landscape in which material and immaterial dimensions — documents, objects, practices, processes — intersect and co-construct meaning in a relational and constantly shifting space.

By offering both a critical framework and a speculative design for an open, accessible, and performative archive, this paper aims to contribute to the broader discourse on knowledge infrastructures in the performing arts. It emphasizes the need for archival models that integrate digital innovation, historiographical awareness, and artistic experimentation. Ultimately, the paper argues for a new archival paradigm — one that bridges the gap between preservation and creation, between the document and the performance — while outlining the potential of ITArchives as a model for collaborative and critical cartography in the field.

Archives of the performing arts in Italy: Present state

This study starts from the fundamental premise that to date in Italy there is still no national centre for collecting and preserving the archives of the performing arts, prompting reflection on their fragmentation nationwide and the frequent difficulty of consulting them. Apart from the historical-methodological issues, which explore how to construct a theatrical archive and what its actual objectivity is in the process of historical reconstruction, we observe first of all the lack of a system for mapping the places of conservation, in terms of geolocation and effective accessibility. This lack of unity raises difficult questions concerning how to define, preserve and enhance the value of an ever-growing mass of documentation; it means that the primary objective for the archives of the performing arts is to establish an efficient, effective and easily accessed network.

Unlike the situation in Italy, internationally there are projects experimenting with the mapping and creation of a network of archives and documentary collections of a specifically theatrical and performative nature. Listed in chronological order, they are: AuStage, *Australian Live Performance Database* founded in 1999 and launched in 2003;[1] *Les Archives du spectacle,* a search engine for live performance inaugurated in France in 2007; *Frankfurt Performing Arts for Theatre and Dance Studies* from 2015; the Swiss foundation SAPA (*Swiss Archive of Performing Arts*), established in 2017 by merging the Swiss Dance Archive with the Swiss Theatre Collection, which collects, documents, archives and disseminates material relating to creative processes in the performing arts (dance, theatre and performance) produced in Switzerland; the National Portal of Theatre Museum of Russia and the Digital Pina Bausch Archive, respectively from 2019 and 2020. Other initiatives, projects and databases of international importance include: the Digital Performance Archive (DPA) of the University of Bristol, directed by Barry Smith (Nottingham Trent University) and Steve Dixon (Salford University); the online La Mama archive project; and the recent project *From Stage to Data, the Digital Turn of Contemporary Performing Arts Historiography* (ERC Advanced Grant 2024, PI: Clarisse Bardiot) mainly dedicated

1 AusStage provides an accessible online resource for searching live performances in Australia and New Zealand. Its development is headed by a consortium of universities, government agencies, industry organizations, and data-collecting institutes, with funding from the Australian Research Council, Australian Research Data Commons, and many other sources. AusStage was accepted into the UNESCO Australian Memory in World Register in 2021 as a database of national cultural heritage and significance. Website: https://www.ausstage.edu.au/ausstage/pages/search/ [accessed 25 June 2025].

to the Avignon Festival Archive and hosted by Rennes 2 University.[2] Also noteworthy as a promoter of interesting initiatives and annual international conferences on the subject[3] is SIBMAS - *International Association of Libraries, Museums, Archives and Documentation Centres of the Performing Arts*, an international network wholly devoted to the performing arts since 1954.[4]

The methodological premise in the challenge of creating a single system for consulting and archiving the theatrical memory in Italy is, first and foremost, an awareness of how archival practices profoundly affect historical understanding. Creating an archive, in addition to having bureaucratic, administrative and institutional purposes, also means engaging in the practice of storytelling, namely a narrative with different degrees of objectivity. In fact, the isolated document says nothing about itself, being refractory to the process of aesthetic enhancement that still persists in some museum attempts to use archival spaces:

Every part of the cultural heritage, in order to live, needs to be studied and made available to those interested. For archival documents this is the very condition of their existence. Whether ancient or recent, documents speak to an expert reader thanks to an institutional mechanism that has selected and ordered them within a scientifically founded narrative. The material supports of a memory, whether familial, urban or national, near or far, are only really activated when they become part of a story (Donati, 2015).

The debate on the conservation and consultation of documents relating to the performing arts is closely bound up with the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. This was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference during the proceedings of its 32nd session, on 17 October 2003 (and ratified in Italy only in 2007), to protect the maintenance and safeguarding of the heritage in question. The protection of archives had been the subject of debate and discussion since the 1980s, with the emergence of the need for recognition and preservation of bibliographic sources as part of the material cultural heritage. But it was only in the

2 Websites: https://lesarchivesduspectacle.net/; Website: https://sapa.swiss/it/; https://www.pinabausch.org/archives; https://www.bristol.ac.uk/theatre-collection/explore/live-art/digital-performance-archive/; https://www.lamama.org/la-mama-archive/ (to access the catalogue: https://catalog.lamama.org/); https://stage-to-data.huma-num.fr/en/.
3 In particular, the 33rd SIBMAS Conference, Warsaw 2020: *Performing the Future: Institutions and Policies of Memory,* which focused on how becoming a user of a library, archive or museum often means, whether willingly or not, entering a political arena. Institutions that preserve, organize and disseminate information about the past have powerful tools in the construction of a cultural image of themselves, and certainly this also applies to institutions dealing with the theatre and the performing arts.
4 Website: https://www.sibmas.org/?lang=fr.

2000s that the performative (and therefore intangible) section of this heritage was also recognized, through a series of declarations and conventions.[5]

With respect to the situation in Italy, to date we can point to a series of events and projects (with objectives and forms of fundraising differing in kind and extent) that have developed or are developing a database for the performing arts. However, they are not yet linked to each other to ensure the interoperability of the systems, open access, non-redundant data storage, efficient metadata and duration of the storage over time. Initiatives devoted to the archives of the performing arts and their reenactment[6] since the 2000s, include first of all the pioneering video-installation by Studio Azzurro, *Geografie italiane*, at the Museo MAXXI in Rome, on 5 October 2014. This represented both a journey through Italian architecture of the last sixty years, and a database that could be consulted at touch-screen workstations. The International Conference (6-7 June 2019) organized by the Università di Roma Tor Vergata *Open Data – Open Access: New frontiers for archives and digital platforms dedicated to the performing arts*[7] focused on the significant results of research and interdisciplinary work for the application of new technologies to the design of innovative digital archives and platforms, the reconstruction of historical representations and the creation of virtual stagings of live shows. Held more recently, on 15 and 16 February 2024, at the Biblioteca della Biennale ASAC, were the two study days *Codici d'Archivio, guardare è digitare. Una mappatura digitale per le arti contemporanee*, curated by Cristian Cappucci (actor, director and creative producer). They all dealt with the potential of new archiving systems with the advent of digital innovation.

Here we will leave aside the broad theoretical debate concerning the aspects of digitization applied to iconographic and visual material in general, hence to the problems of analysis, transposition and audiovisual cataloguing of the memory of theatre in video.[8] Rather, our concern is to report the present state of projects devoted to archives of the performing arts in Italy. The most significant certainly include the

5 Some of the fundamental steps were: UNESCO 1992 *Memory of the World*, which recognizes archives and libraries as places where the memory of the world can be reconstructed (https://www.unesco.it/it/iniziative-dellunesco/memoria-del-mondo/); *Universal Declaration on Archives* approved by the 36th session of the UNESCO General Conference, Paris, 10 November 2011, which declared that archives constitute a unique and irreplaceable heritage, transmitted from generation to generation.

6 Cf. Carlson (2014: 84–90); on the passage of the term from the context of historical reconstruction to artistic and curatorial practice, see also Sacco (2017: 340–51).

7 This was the opening conference of a series as part of the project *The "États Généraux" of the performing arts*, conceived by Donatella Gavrilovich, professor of performing arts at the Department of Literary, Philosophical and Art History Studies of the University of Rome Tor Vergata.

8 On this subject, cf. De Marinis (1985 and 1994: 15–21). See also Monteverdi (2011); Sabatini (2022 and 2023).

ECLAP (European Collected Library of Artistic Performance). This project, funded by the European Commission's ICT-PSP CIP Programme from 2010 to 2013, brought together and related various documents regarding the performing arts in order to aggregate the data contained on EUROPEANA, the European Digital Library, in keeping with a system compatible with the European data model (EDM). Among other things, the project sought to enrich the metadata by revising the terminology and definitions to improve the description of each performance, with the encyclopedic purpose of organizing and distributing the content provided by the various member countries. Unfortunately, problems such as the difficulty of gathering resources, the slowness of navigation and the impossibility of updating and improving the portal, as well as the cessation of dedicated European funding, put an end to this monumental operation, which has had no sequel.[9] Another project worth mentioning is *INCOMMON: In praise of community. Shared creativity in arts and politics in Italy (1959-1979),* launched in 2015 and lasting five years, funded by the European Research Council (ERC Starting Grant 2015, PI: Annalisa Sacchi) and hosted by the IUAV Università di Venezia. This is the first study to systematically analyze the performing arts by starting from the practice of commonality, theorized and experimented with between the 1950s and 1970s. The project proposes an exhaustive mapping of commonality practices related with performing arts in Italy and the creation of a network of materials. The goal is the creation of a digital archive of the performances of Italian artists in the period in question. Its innovative feature is the development of a relational (and not hierarchical) back-end, which involves the Density Design Lab of the Politecnico di Milano in the creation of the front-end, proposing an interesting visual representation of complex phenomena.[10]

Other projects include *HYPERSTAGE. An Open knowledge base for the semantic reconstruction of theatrical performances through the harvesting and processing resources from the New Italian network of theatrical digital archives* (PRIN 2022, PI: Donatella Gavrilovich). This project seeks to create an innovative open knowledge base by relying on many decentralized and interconnected databases, enabling the connection of digital archives of the performing arts without problems of translation from one language to another. Hence it focuses on the interoperability of linked open-

9 Cf. Scaturro (2012); Berlangieri (2018 and 2020).

10 In particular, the project aims to study the history of the Laboratorio Italiano as a place where the artistic counterculture developed, represented by the performing arts that arose in an environment characterized by a profound relationship between philosophy, politics and revolutionary practices. In this context, the goal is the creation of backend and databases and APIs, collaborating with the greatest experts in data visualization in Italy and in close contact with the representatives of the Università IUAV in Venice, especially Annalisa Sacchi, the leader and creator of the project. For more information see the project site: https://in-common.org/the-shape-of-community. Cf. Cipollone (2024).

-data digital archives, making all the metadata usually scattered across different archives, libraries and websites available on a platform, where it will be organized and ready for use according to the phases of creation, production and documentation of the theatrical event.[11] Among the initiatives is *Archivi teatrali in rete*, a project that involved various institutions, unfortunately no longer active. It included the Civica Scuola di Teatro Paolo Grassi in Milan, the Università degli Studi di Torino (DAMS), the Biblioteca Museo dell'Attore in Genoa, the Università degli Studi di Milano La Statale and the Archivio Multimediale Attori Italiani (AMAtI).[12] With funding from the Fondazione Cariplo, it sought to bring together in a single portal the bodies that individually pursued different objectives in the theatre by creating a search engine identical to the OPAC SBN consultation system. When its funding was discontinued, it closed down.

In historical-critical and aesthetic terms, there are two prevailing approaches to the creation of performance archives. One maintains the non-reproducibility of performance, as part of an irredeemable ephemeral (Phelan, 1993), while the other (more recent) contemplates the possibility of preserving a documentable historical resource by redefining the concept of performance itself with analogue media as well as the new technologies (Auslander, 2006: 1-10). A third way, however, can be identified in the observations of Marco De Marinis (2013: 21-27). He proposes to focus on what is durable and persistent, namely on the permanence of practices, considering the theatrical performance as a complex, syncretic phenomenon composed of several partial texts, in keeping with a methodology that favours the study of the process over that of the product.[13]

Building an archive of the performing arts therefore also means rethinking their historiographical categories, with an approach centred on historical awareness as a developing process rather than the process of formation and stratification of history in

11 The definition of the elements that make up the concept of a 'theatrical performance' is part of the methodological research that guides the subsequent modelling of the data. The user interface is designed on the basis of the requirements defined by domain experts according to the user-centred design method. In addition to the connection with digital archives, the ontology of HYPERSTAGE will allow the management of experimental products: for example, theatrical reconstructions in immersive virtual reality environments and virtual museums. Of note is the *Global Congress for Digital Innovation in the Performing Arts* held in Venice, in the Auditorium of the former church of Santa Marta on 3 and 4 October 2024, organized by the University of Rome Tor Vergata (research unit 1) and the Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia (research unit 3).
12 The Archivio Multimediale degli Attori Italiani (AMAtI) is a relational database containing information about actors who, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first century, practiced their profession in drama, opera, dance, cinema, radio and television. See https://amati.unifi.it/app/#/.
13 Cf. De Marinis (2014: 353–78); Guarino (2005); on the archival practices of the immaterial and the creative process, see also the recent Dragone (2023: 109–23).

itself. Memory, transmission and transformation are therefore the cornerstones of a new archival conception that considers the theatrical document in its constituent ephemerality, but above all in dynamic terms, as the driving force of new creative processes. Hence it proposes the possibility of a reenactment[14] of the documentary materials for the purpose of immersive reception and relocation in the future of the whole artistic process. The challenge would therefore be the creation of an archival structure that will also become an information structure, and transmit its digitally enriched material and immaterial content, retracing the existing boundary between documentation and new creation. In this respect, the issue of profiling also becomes central, and should take into account the dual function of recipient/co-creator, experimenting with syncretic narrative forms in which databases, editing, audio-video, 3D reconstruction and mobile games give rise to stratified information.

In this context, it is advisable to bear in mind the highly heterogeneous nature of the theatrical document, since the construction of the performative event rests on activities and practices in which overlapping eras, skills, social uses and languages are entwined, as well as reuses, adaptations and consumption. It can therefore be defined as NBM (New Book Material), in which iconographic relics, photographic collections, literary materials (textual and para-textual), audiovisual products, models, maquettes, masks, objects and costumes converge and combine: everything that lends itself to reconstructing the totality of a spectacle, the whole artistic process, the mode of production and the final outcome. In short, 'the theatrical heritage is made up of whatever directly or indirectly documents the theatrical event itself, in its preparation and outcomes' (Calendoli, 1990: 22).

In Italy, perhaps due to the itinerant tradition of touring companies and the absence of a centralized production system (at least until the post-war period, when the permanent theatres were established), this heritage has undergone the highest degree of dispersal and decentralization. The gap could be partly filled by exploring new technologies. The first requirement is to acquire a nomenclature to enable its unified cataloguing and so its effective retrieval, depending on the type of search conducted, with the construction of a controlled vocabulary that will group together the greatest number of variants and synonyms that can be used for each term. Some of the projects mentioned above tried to develop the indexing criteria by adopting metadata systems to specifically allow search, selection and time synchronization. But they have remained without a sequel, despite the extensive results achieved in this respect.

14 On this, see also Giannachi (2011); Baldacci and Franco (2022).

The era of the digital revolution has also now broken the spell of the authoritativeness of the source. There is ambiguity in the very term archive, which offers itself to investigation as a mixture of technical support, physical place and archived content. However, it can be defined as a *mise-en-scène* of memory that 'passes through the opening of a supplementary technographic space' (Marra, 2023: 341), while, at the same time, 'technical evolution takes place in the forms of the presentation, reproduction and conservation of writing' (*Ibidem*). The idea of the online database grew out of these assumptions, and was consolidated as an alternative to the classic chronological and sequential narrative, bringing content out of diachrony to sow it in a space where the users, in their turn, have the opportunity to modify, publish, share and remix the multimedia content.

The PNRR and the *ITArchives* project

The extended partnership PNRR CHANGES (Cultural Heritage Active Innovation for Sustainable Society) was created in response to the MUR D.D. No. 341 call for proposals on March 15, 2022. It is a program carried out by widespread networks of universities, EPRs, and other public and private entities engaged in research activities. It is an international reference point for training, research, and technology transfer with a focus on humanistic culture and cultural heritage. The organizational structure of the partnership involves the division of fundamental interdisciplinary skills in the humanistic, technological, and cultural fields into nine thematic *Spokes*, which aim to support the protection, valorization and sustainable transformation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, addressing challenges such as digital preservation, the creation of creative ecosystems, the promotion of sustainable tourism and the management of natural and man-made risks to cultural heritage.[15]

The CHANGES Foundation was established to set up a hub.[16] Of the nine thematic areas, Spoke 2 (Creativity and Intangible Cultural Heritage) focuses on enhancing the intangible cultural heritage particularly through mapping and representation (in line with the objectives of WP1)[17] in the performing arts, music, audiovisual me-

15 https://www.fondazionechanges.org/en/pnrr-en/ [accessed 26 June 2025].
16 The Changes Foundation was established in September 2022 as a hub and non-profit organization to coordinate the research activities carried out by individual partners.
17 Of the five work packages (WPs) that comprise the activities of Spoke 2, the first aims to develop an interdisciplinary digital platform that will facilitate the mapping, description, and enhancement of the intangible cultural heritage in all its forms.

dia, design, and fashion, including crafts and linguistic diversity. Within this vast ecosystem of multidisciplinary skills put in place by the PNRR, the *ITArchives* (Italian Theater Archives) project was born. It aims to map the conservators, producers, and archival complexes related to theatre and performing arts as a culture system to promote knowledge, consultation, and data sharing. This will enhance and digitize the documentary heritage and facilitate effective interoperability between archival systems.

ITArchives is developed along two lines: first, as a permanent memory laboratory, managed through censuses, descriptions, and the digitization of documentary materials; and second, as an educational tool for creating a digital archive to promote the transmission of the performing arts and enhance the theatrical heritage. The project consists of five research units involving the University of Milan La Statale (the lead partner), Sapienza University of Rome, Confcooperative, and Coopculture, in collaboration with Culturmedia/Legacoop. These units work closely with IT experts affiliated with the CHANGES project in digital curation, front-end development, and metadata activities. They are divided as follows:

1. Mapping of theater archives in the Milan and Rome areas;

2. Census of training centers for performing arts professions in Lazio;

3. Archiving and digitization of the Luciana Novaro collection on the history of dance;

4. Mapping of cooperative theatres on a national scale;

5. Interactive and immersive presentation of the archives of Italian female stage designers.[18]

The primary objective of *ITArchives* is to develop a digital platform whose structure provides different degrees of usability and accessibility. The platform is available at https://itarchives.changes.unimi.it/ and consists of three sections: a database based on the Strapi content management system (CMS), which organizes archival and do-

18 The scientific leaders of the various units are listed below: Section 1: Arianna Frattali (UniMI) and Ilaria Lepore (Sapienza University of Rome); Section 2: Alma Mileto (Sapienza University of Rome); Section 3: Vito Lentini (UniMI); Section 4: Giovanna Barni and Debora Violi (coordinators), Stefania Bruno, Francesca Caderni, Antonella Di Marsico, Silvia Floria, Giusy Palumbo and Elisa Rota (scientific advisors); Section 5: Anna Maria Monteverdi and Michela De Carlo (both UniMi). The research units are coordinated by Alberto Bentoglio (UniMI) and Emiliano Morreale (Sapienza University of Rome).

cumentary objects; a website; and a web interface designed for data management, content representation, and user interaction. The first level, which we will call 'instrumental', provides access to a georeferenced map of archival subjects related to the theatrical culture sector. This map is based on open-source geographic information systems (GIS) and intends to facilitate the identification of relational dynamics and indexed, layered descriptions. This level constitutes a repository of essential information that allows users to search descriptive records imported from the database and provides content that identifies archival resources. It clarifies the various aspects and elements of the mapping.

In addition to the descriptive summaries of theater archives and collections drawn up according to the model proposed by previous SIUSA (Sistema Informative Unificato per le Soprintendenze Archivistiche) censuses,[19] new acquisitions resulting from the research activities of various units are added. These acquisitions constitute a systematic collection of data aimed at increasing the visibility, as well as the geographical and thematic recognition of collections and archives related to multiple subjects – theaters, public bodies, private companies, amateur theater companies, academies, associations, foundations, libraries – and individuals whose activities relate to this field – actors, directors, playwrights, costume designers, set designers, stage photographers, musicians, choreographers, writers, journalists, theater critics, etc.

This mapping system allows us to explore the complex nature of theater archives, particularly within the context of preserving and transmitting creative processes associated with the concept of the 'artist's archive'.[20] How else can we evaluate the

19 The SIUSA national database is part of the National Archival System (SAN) and remains the primary point of access for consulting and researching the non-state, public, and private archival heritage held outside the State Archives. Since 2021, a new thematic section dedicated to the *Archivi dello Spettacolo* (Performing Arts Archives) has been online. Website: https://siusa-archivi.cultura.gov.it/cgi-bin/siusa/pagina.pl?RicProgetto=spettacolo. Since 2022, the Central Institute for Archives (ICAR) has been engaged in a project to reorganize digital information system architecture, involving the creation of a unified access point to integrate SIAS, SIUSA, and their associated portals, such as Online Research Tools and Digital Archive. The new *Archivi Nazionali* portal will be accessible online starting in autumn 2025 and will preserve the numerous thematic search paths developed within the individual systems.

20 In this regard, the work of Marco Scotini, curator of the exhibition *L'inarchiviabile/The Unarchivable* (Milan, Frigoriferi Milanesi-Centro per l'arte contemporanea, April 8–June 15, 2016), which was later merged into *L'inarchiviabile: L'archivio contro la storia* (Scotini 2022) is fundamental. Scotini expounds on the concept of 'unarchivability', understood as the *excess* of the creative process with respect to the work. It is a condition of 'appearance and existence in this impossibility, or reluctance, to be archived' (see the exhibition press release, downloadable from the FM-Centro per l'arte contemporanea website). The website is https://www.fmcca.it/it/scheda-mostra/eve/1-l-inarchiviabile-the-unarchivable-italia-anni-70/. This concept takes on a specific meaning in relation to the theatrical document that remains to be explored. We would also like to mention Mineo et al. (2023).

growing number of organizations in the theatrical culture sector that, throughout their artistic lives, decide to consistently and methodically pay selective attention to how memory related to their processes is transmitted? How can we evaluate the function of those who participate directly in constructing their memory (not just the memory of the performance) and transmitting traces within a discourse on possible archive structures? *ITArchives* aims to include all the spaces that produce theatrical memory, such as companies, theaters, and training venues operating in the performing arts sector throughout the country, in mapping the historical archives that preserve, protect, and make accessible the theatrical heritage.[21]

The extensive principle of geolocation and critical cartography defines the objective of representing the intangible cultural heritage inherent in the performing arts sector. *ITArchives* consists of additional thematic itineraries structured as subdomains with direct access from the landing page.

Its sections expand on the map's content by providing in-depth information on specific geographical areas, such as Milan and Rome, and on particular archival subjects, such as the collections of training schools for the performing arts in Lazio, the Luciana Novaro Fund for the History of Dance at the APICE Functional Center at the University of Milan, the national cooperative theater archives, and the collections of prominent Italian female set designers. This additional level of remote access provides digitized archival materials and multiple multimedia content (audio and video), which is freely viewable in the individual sections. It is possible to link individual data to the central information system and the map of archival collections. The collections provide further contextual information, which inspires countless narratives and significantly contributes to the historical readability and aesthetic accessibility of the documentary material. It suggests reconstructing the connection between cultural heritage, its context of production, and its social purpose. This contextualization inspires countless narratives and significantly contributes to the historical readability and aesthetic accessibility of the documentary material. It suggests a process of reconstructing the relation between the cultural heritage, its context of production, and its social purpose.

This level, which we will call 'participatory', also has a concrete representation in *ITArchives*. Developed within the VRChat platform, the virtual environment is ac-

21 Cases such as the Living Archives LAFLIS — Living Archive Floating Islands of the Odin Teatret — and the Archivio del Teatro delle Albe, together with numerous other theatrical realities that focus on archival practices, contribute to rethinking the function of the archive. This rethinking shifts the archive's function from a purely conservative one to a productive and creative perspective. See Perrelli (2024) and Mineo et al. (2023).

cessible via a direct link and is usable in VR mode or on a desktop. Created from sketches or models of sets designed by some of Italy's leading set designers and reworked in 3D as interactive, immersive game environments, it is configured as a sort of 'inhabited archive'. Here, users can access multimedia content, such as interviews and critical-thematic itineraries, and consult digitized documents added to the central database through the graphic presence of interactive objects. The platform is therefore a virtual space where users can experience and explore the various locations comprising the digital structure of *ITArchives* by activating or selecting a particular navigation method or type of content. It is an archive landscape[22] amplified by dynamic and fluid digital information systems that seeks to overcome the static nature of traditional archival document use in favor of integrating the various components of theatrical archival heritage into intuitive and participatory environments.

The primary objective of this digital environment, as constituted by the platform, is not merely to provide a guide to sources (understanding the archive as a place of consultation based on the principle of documentary sedimentation), but also to promote a performative experience of re-enactment (understanding the archive as a place of production). The construction of such an archival landscape could allow for testing a new approach to theatrical documents, resolving their inherent fragility or fragmentation in favor of a rhizomatic data connection system that allows for multidirectional expansion. Only in this way can the archive contribute to productive communication, highlighting not only the unity of sources but also the subjectivity of experience and the various functions of enjoyment and communication. In summary, *ITArchives* could present itself as a digital ecosystem in which the following aspects coexist simultaneously:

- a map of performing arts archives;
- a digital platform created to promote the sharing and consultation of paper and multimedia materials;
- an interactive archival landscape;
- an innovative communication system between territoriality, narration, and hybridization.

22 Vittorio Lingiardi's reflections are particularly relevant to defining this liquid, multifocal archive-landscape space, especially given its performative resonances: '[...] our relationship with the landscape is not limited to looking and contemplating. It involves the body and its sensory participation, becoming charged with emotions and memories and becoming an element of identity' (2017: 23).

Looking to the future, it would be appropriate to reflect on how to manage the resources made available by the PNRR within which the project originated. This should be done with a view to integrating and cooperating with archive mapping initiatives already underway or to be launched at various national (e.g. DGA or ICAR) or regional (e.g. archival and bibliographic superintendence) archives or institutes.[23]

ITArchives could serve as a model for other critical and collaborative mapping projects, and as an aid to historical and critical research in the performing arts, continuing in the direction of osmosis between archival and theatrical skills and disciplines.

A bibliographic survey

In the appendix, we provide a concise bibliographic overview that, while not exhaustive, aims to highlight valuable contributions to the study of the relationship between archives and performing arts. This selection is intended to provide sufficient organized and accurate documentary support for conceptual elaborations and reconstructions of the historical and cultural context relating to performing arts archives. In the case of the bibliography we have compiled, we have therefore favored compactness and contiguity with reflections on the relationship between performing arts, documentary resources, and archives and their uses.•

23 For example, we summarize some significant projects for the census and reconnaissance of archival sources for the theatrical culture sector at a regional level. In 2015, in Lombardy, an initiative was promoted and funded by MiBACT and the Lombardy Region, and carried out by Dr. Anna Gasparello and Dr Silvia Tisano for the Mondadori Foundation. In 2016, a process of cataloguing the archives of theatre companies was launched in Sardinia (by the Archival Superintendency of Sardinia) and in Tuscany (by the Archival and Bibliographic Superintendency of Tuscany).

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