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The established archives: a bibliometric overview of archival research (Poster)

1. Introduction

Archives have a long history of working 'behind the scenes', fulfilling document preservation purposes for organizations such as libraries and government organizations (Jenkinson, 1922; Schellenberg, 1956). The concept of archive was historically understood to be passively engaged with documentation and preservation processes that are integral to the profession (Harris, 2002). Wick (2017) describes the archival field as emerging from the status of "professional custodian" (p.15) to a more interactive and accessible space. Despite and increased visibility in recent decades, the fields isolation from other disciplines has been widely criticized (Caswell et al., 2016; McKemmish & Piggott, 2013); researchers have noted that the field of archives has been a "failure of interdisciplinary" study (Caswell, 2016, p.2), even in closely related disciplines like the humanities. Archivists used to be trained "primarily in history departments" (Caswell, 2016, p.3), and have had public ties to libraries, government, and museums. Predominant understandings of the core values and goals of the field have changed, and the field increasingly acknowledges inherent biases in archival communities and within archival practice, as well as the intricacies of defining information as evidence versus memory (Caswell et al., 2016; Cook, 2013; Sutherland, 2017). Through this scholarship, the field of archival studies continues to distinguish itself from the fields of history, museum studies, and the wider LIS field. This work-in-progress paper uses bibliometrics to map the structure of the archival fields and investigate its relationship to scholarship from other disciplines.

2. Methods

We collected a list of journals in the archival science field from the Publishing in the Archives Profession Blog[1]. Using Dimensions and the Microsoft Academic Graph, we were able to collect 4,762 papers from 46 journals (including seven that were not in the Publishing in the Archives Profession Blog). We used citation links to build a publication network and used the Louvain community detection algorithm (Blondel et al., 2008) to identify communities. Our analysis is limited to the 532 papers that form the giant component of the network. The citations to and from these archival papers are used to shed light on the insularity of the field.

3. Results

Figure 1 show a decrease in references to and citations from other fields over time, indicating that archival studies are increasingly becoming a field of their own.
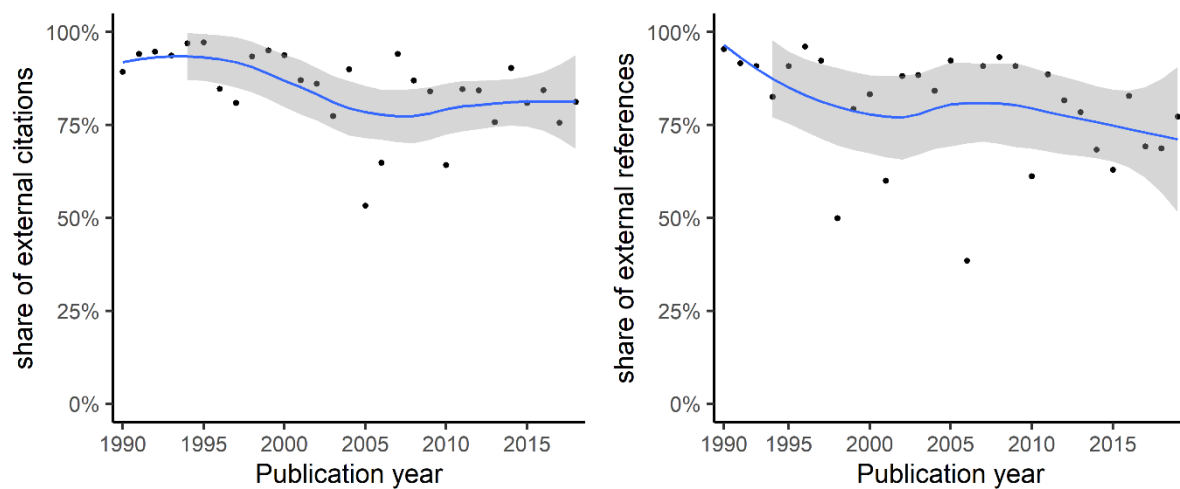

Figure 1. Share of references made to (left) and citations received from (right) non-archival journals.

Figure 2 presents the network of archival papers included in this study and the identified communities within it.
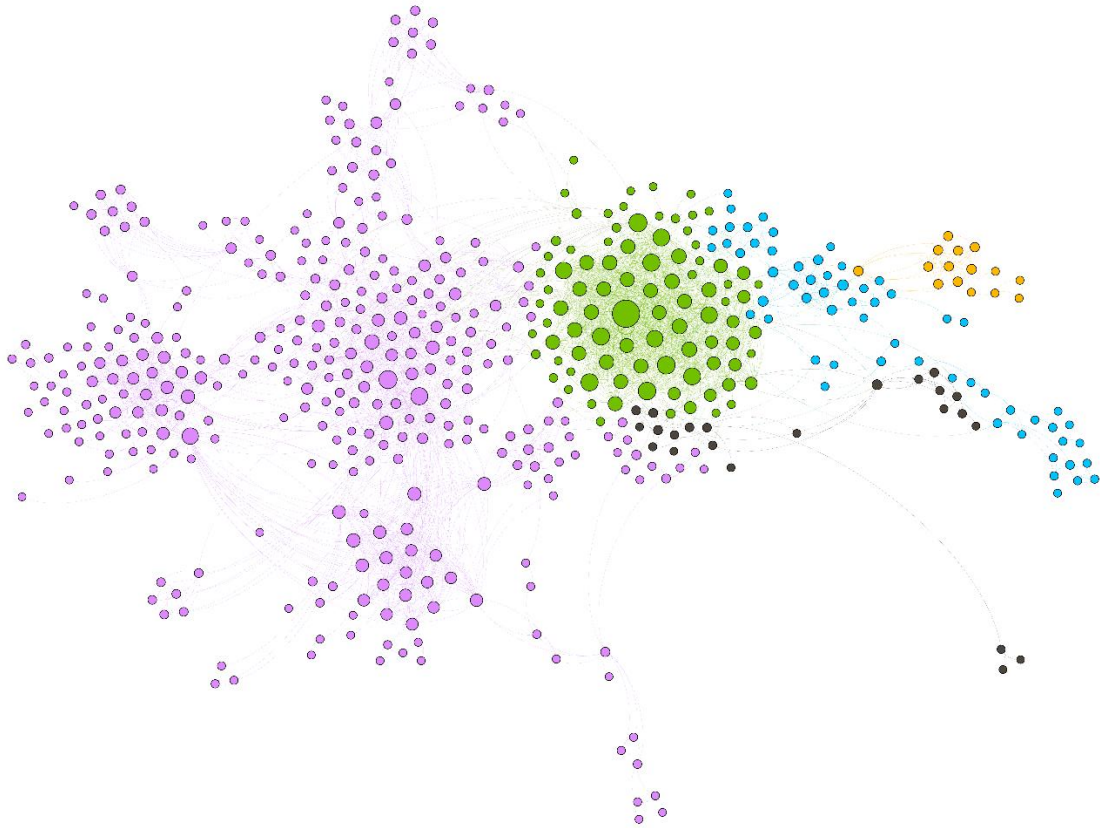
Figure 2. Giant component of the archival publication network

Table 1. Number of publications, most frequent words, and share of external references and citations for each network clusters

Cluster	Number of papers	Most frequent words	% external references	% external citations
1	322	archival, data, records, digital, research, curation, approach, community, recordkeeping, services	72.0	81.2
2	85	study, resins, corrosion, fading, humidity, relative, adhesives, bronze, chemical, deteriorated, pest, soluble	89.6	95.4
3	47	preservation, investigation, records, solvents, strategies, biochemical, combination, faience, gallery, gowns, ground, ladies, silk	90.5	91.9
4	26	dyes, fibers, identification, pigments, blue, mordant, textile, chromatographic, gas, microscopy	72.7	97.6

5	15	archives, disaster, plan, fire, libraries, recovery, royal, Saskatchewan, time, war	83.3	87.5

Figure 2 and Table 1 illustrate the overlaps in archival scholarship. Cluster 1 focuses in the literature about archival theory, while clusters 2-4 focus on preservation. We also note that clusters 1 and 4 have fewer external references, implying that both clusters have a more internal focus on archival theory and practice.

Because cluster 1 appears to have multiple subgroups, we re-applied the clustering algorithm to this cluster alone. The resulting network is presented in Figure 3 and described in Table 2.
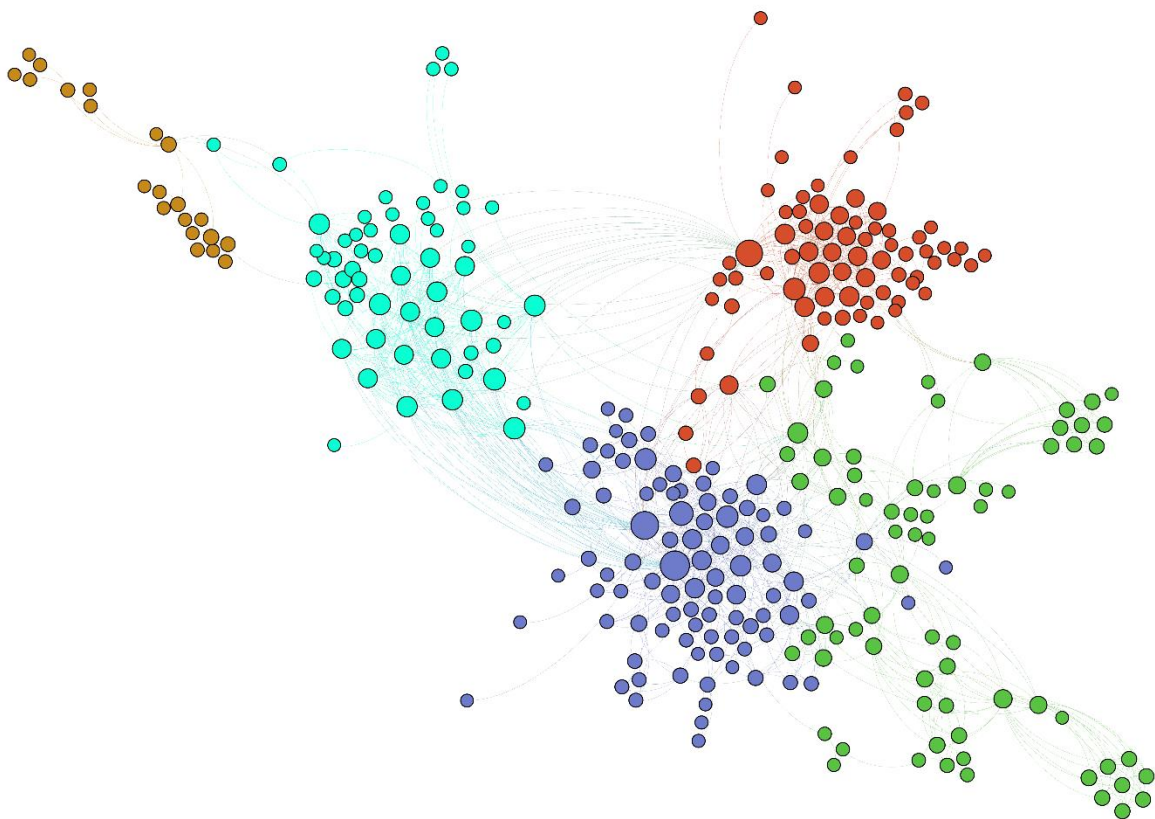

Figure 3. Visualization of the sub-communities identified in cluster 1 (see figure 2 and table 1)

Table 2. Number of publications, most frequent words, and share of external references and citations for each subclusters in the network.

Cluster	Number of papers	words	% external references	% external citations
1.1	96	archives, memory, identity, personal, rights, decolonizing, provenance, colonial, continuum, justice	73.5	72.3
1.2	79	archival, south, user, africa, aids, finding, genre, botswana, controlled, generic, keeping, subject, world	70.1	66.3
1.3	72	data, digital, curation, research, management, education, standards, sharing, designing, lifecycle	78.0	91.7
1.4	57	egyptian, deterioration, limestone, overview, adhesive, american, book, boston, canada, determining, en, global, interview, inventory, mutilation, porous, problems, region, retrieval, salts, silicone, stone, structural	66.7	88.2
1.5	23	conservation, treatment, intent, artists, examination, fine, lacquer, preventive, technology, workflows	70.0	91.2

Again, we observe several sub-communities of research with their focus such as decolonization and identity politics (cluster 1.1) and digitization and management (cluster 1.3). The low share of external references and citations for some of the clusters supports the idea that archival studies is increasingly a field of its own.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Our overview of the structure of archival field aims to enrich our understanding of archives as a concept and as a field. The results point to a field that is slowly developing its own identity with a decreasing share of references and citations coming from other fields. Primary limitations of our paper include the scarcity of citation links between papers and the fact that journals were used to identify archival papers. Further work will aim to address these issues by using alternative methods to map the field and seek to explore in more depth the relationships between archives and other disciplines.

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