

# **ASSIGNING VALUE TO THE ARCHIVE: ARCHIVIST VERSUS USER**

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# INTRODUCTION

- *“As the professionally trained staff who work in the facility, archivists have a direct role to play in identifying and preserving the small percentage of records of enduring value found amid the mass of records generated in the course of daily affairs.” Roper and Miller (1999:6).*
- *Archivists determine what eventually constitutes an archival collection*
- *Few records creators are interested in the archival value of a record. This empowers the archivist to determine the value of a record from point of creation*

# Cont....

- On the other hand the public or the researcher attaches value to the archive as a result of its informational resourcefulness or research value
- Had it not been limited storage facilities ideally archivists would want to keep everything to avoid judgment errors on what would be valuable or invaluable tomorrow (Moathodi and Kenosi 2012)
- From the point of creation to preservation in the life cycle of a record there is no direct engagement of the users of the public archive but users of public record
- Selection of archives through appraisal is largely government controlled
- Why has the archivist privileged users of public records and silenced users of public archives in the appraisal process?

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- The research made use of a case study approach - NAZ

## RESEARCH DESIGN

- The design was qualitative in nature.
- Use of both statistical evidence and opinion gathering
- Analysis of existing literature

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Who assigns to value to an archive?
- Who should be assigning it?
- Can the user and archivist cordially work together to assign value?
- What challenges can they face in doing so?

# Assigning Value - the link or lack of it

- The role of assigning value to the record has been largely the preserve of the creators and users and public records, the archivist and the National Archives Records Committee at the expense of users of the public archive
- The process of assigning value to archival records should be undertaken inclusively rather than exclusively (Craig 2004)
- Archivists must balance their interests, that of records creators, users of public records, users of the archive

# The National Archives Records Committee

- Set up under the provisions of Section 8 (1) of the National Archives Act No.8 (25:06)
- R.C acts as an advisory body to the Director of National Archives - make recommendations
- 2 members of the NAZ staff, 2 members from other Government Departments and in terms of Section (1c) any other persons the committee may invite from time to time
- The R.C is there to assign value to the record
- R.C normally looks for evidential value, informational value and intrinsic value

# Cont...

- The RC has often picked from University of Zimbabwe. 1992 it selected Prof N. Bhebhe, later Dr J. P Mtisi and Dr K. D Manungo.
- Were these members invited to represent users of the public archive?
- The selection of these historians or any other prominent user of the archives has been attributed to the intuition of the Director of NAZ or the RC.
- But these individuals cease to be neutral members by virtue of being employees of the government (creators of public records as well), some being former archivists
- Why not invite mere users without other portfolio?

# Access Dynamics at NAZ

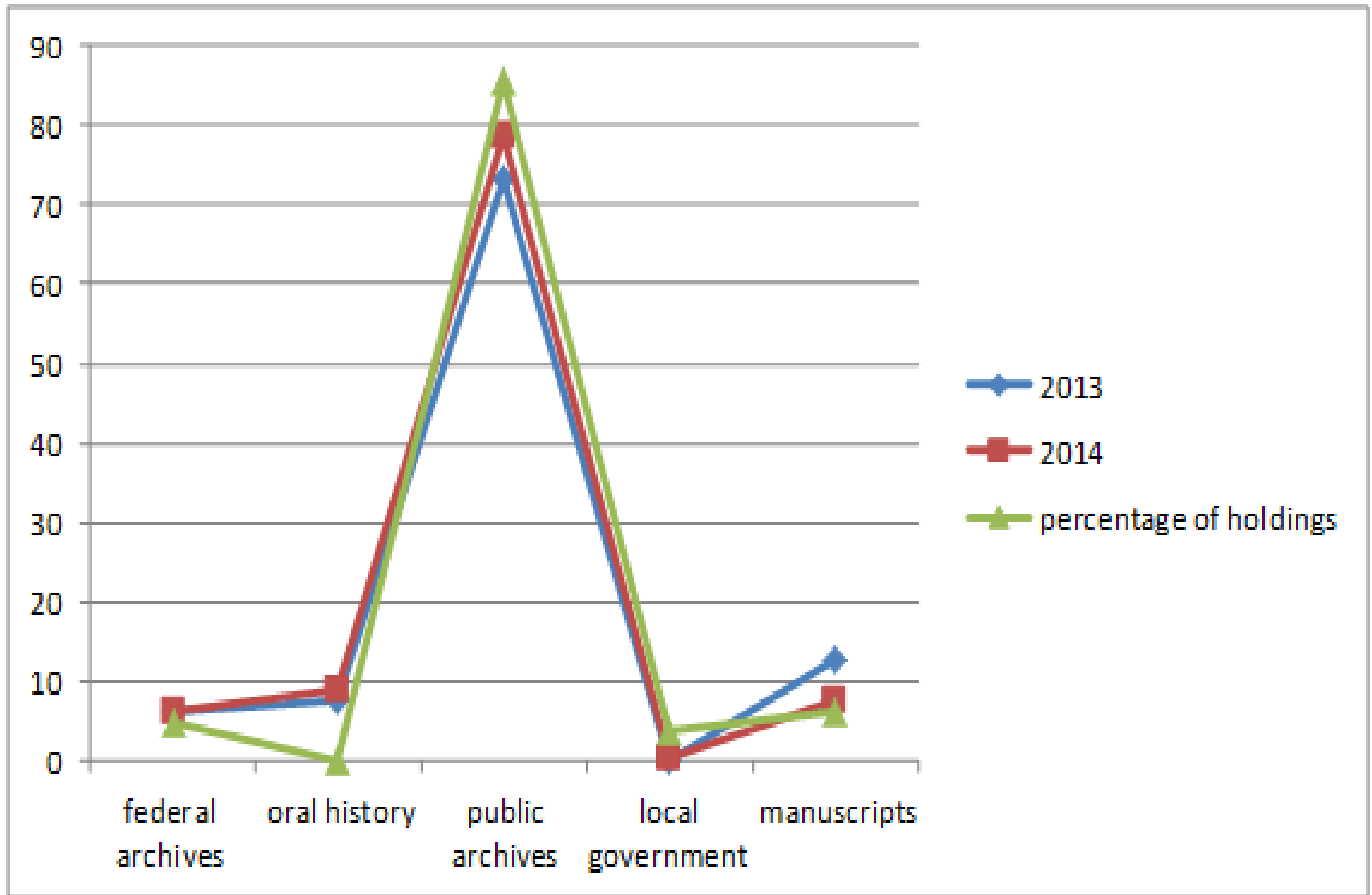
- Archivists should promote the widest possible access to archival materials and provide an impartial service to all users (ICA 1996 Code of Ethics, Principle 6)
- The 2010 Universal Declaration on Archives emphasizes that key to the duties of an archivist is making these records available for use
- Murambiwa and Ngulube (2011) challenged archival institutions to invest in measuring access.
- NAZ has 27 000 c.ft of processed public archives, 22 000c.ft of unprocessed archives



# Access frequency and percentage of holdings

Type of archive	Access Frequency %		Percentage of total holdings
	2013	2014	
Federal Archives	6.3	5.03	4.6
Oral Interviews	7.54	8.94	0.1
Public Archives	73.39	78.58	85.6
Local Government	0.11	0.12	3.6
Manuscripts	12.64	7.43	6.02

# The Chart



# Interpretation

- Frequency can be directly be attributed to research value
- Percentage of the collection is determined by the archivist and frequency by the user
- Oral history and manuscripts constitute greater access frequency
- This should inform the archivist in terms of processing priorities
- Public archives justifiably occupies greater chunk and resources
- Some records are of historical importance but of less research value

# Recommendations

- ❖ The access scenarios discussed above have severe implications on both access and acquisition:
  - a) Records Centre staff involved in surveys, appraisal and disposal must have users` of public archive in mind
  - b) The records committee must comprise veteran users of archives to help determine research value of records
  - c) Backlog clearance must be driven by the desire to increase access of collections of high public interest
  - d) The archivist must be on drive to publish materials to work as guidelines for users

# Conclusion

- How far does the archivist educate the user on the collection?
- How far does the archivist in the public archives take into consideration users` research trends in determining processing priorities?

The Archivist and the User have intertwined roles in helping shaping the collection and giving it visibility and significance to the community it serves