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Authors of this paper: Luciano Monti, Bruno Castro, Caterina D'Ubaldi, Camilla Russo, Giulio Vannini.

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Italian Historical Archives: Family Historical Archives and level of conservation

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Introduction to the survey and the national legal framework

Historic homes represent a fundamental historical, cultural, and architectural component of Italy's heritage. Historical archives, with their documents, memoirs, and artistic assets, in turn, constitute a considerable and precious part of this treasure. As Giovanni Spadolini – who was Italy's Prime Minister at the beginning of the '80s of the last century- emphasised: "The history of our archives is the history of our mentors and ultimately of ourselves. A history marked by the unbreakable link that exists between culture and freedom, which archives preserve in various forms and ways"¹.

Therefore, enhancing their preservation and consultation allows to strengthen and increase a major asset not only for the cultural sector but also, inevitably, for tourism and the economy. However, in order to establish a successful and profitable relationship with a certain cultural resource, it is undeniable that it needs to be understood and analysed in detail. In this sense, on the occasion of the fourth edition of the Report on private cultural heritage, Fondazione Bruno Visentini, in its customary survey aimed at analysing Italy's cultural heritage, dedicated an in-depth study to historical archives.

This was possible thanks to the participation of ADSI - Association of Historic Italian Houses - in the "SOS Heritage" project, co-financed by Europe under the Creative Europe programme and led by Mazzini Lab Srl in partnership with the University of Donau Krems, the Transylvania Trust Foundation, the National Museum of Kruševac, and, indeed, ADSI.

The SOS Heritage project was conceived to develop and integrate innovative tools to strengthen the cultural heritage sector's ability to assess, manage, and prevent risks to their heritage that may be caused by natural disasters and climate change, as well as to collect and experiment with best practices to promote tangible cultural heritage and engage the public through digital technologies. ADSI is primarily involved within the framework of the pilot project "Hidden Archives", aimed at quantitatively and qualitatively investigating private archives, analysing their state of preservation, level of digitalisation, and accessibility.

In order to offer a complete and coherent analysis of private historical archives in Italy, and to place the analysis into context, it is appropriate to delve into and examine some data within the framework of the regulatory and fiscal regime of historical archives. The following section will therefore focus - in the first part - on the analysis of the

¹ Spadolini, Giovanni, reprised by Sciuillo G., Archives as constituent elements of cultural heritage: mission and legal organization. Aedon, 2020. <http://www.aedon.mulino.it/archivio/2020/1/sciuillo.htm>

current legislation on private historical archives, while the second part will focus on the tax regime applicable to historical archives.

As regards private historical archives, just like public archives, the legal framework is based on the Cultural Heritage and Landscape Code of 2004² (hereinafter simply referred to as “The Code”). Specifically, the Code, consisting of 184 articles, recognises the obligation to preserve Italian cultural heritage and identifies as cultural assets all movable and immovable properties of artistic, historical, archaeological, or ethno-anthropological interest; it also includes architectural assets, libraries, archives, intangible and natural resources.

The law derived from the Code makes a double distinction in relation to the archives: the first one distinguishes the safeguarding provided to public and public archives, the second one, the protection granted to bound private archives and unbound private archives. As for the first distinction, the current legislation is applied *ope legis* to public archives or those of the state domain, meaning it comes into force without the need to apply a constraint on the asset itself; instead, in the case of archives belonging to private individuals, the law will be applied only after the recognition of a legal constraint, that is only in the presence of a historical interest recognised by the law. Thus, the recognition of historical interest is necessary to ensure the proper safeguarding of private archives. Such requirement is confirmed by the data gathered from the survey presented in this Report. In particular, out of 850 participants, 26% have an archive, but only 34% of these declare having a listed archive, which is an archive having a recognised historical interest – and 5% only partially.

However, the Code does not entirely exclude unlisted private archives from its jurisdiction. Indeed, it provides, in paragraph 2 of Article 28, for the possibility for the *Soprintendenza* to order that interventions are stopped or suspended in the case of archives not yet listed, in order to protect them from actions that may cause harm. According to the doctrine, such power to stop or suspend interventions responds to a precautionary need to protect the asset, even if its cultural interest has not yet been declared or verified; however, if such verification is not performed within a period of 30 days, this power expires, as the rationale for the precautionary need of the power itself provided for in Article 28, paragraph 2, expires. Moreover, although the protection of archival assets, according to the constitutional provision of Article 118, is a power of the State, Article 30 of the Code, in paragraph 3, states that “private owners, possessors or holders of cultural assets are required to ensure their conservation,” meaning that private owners of assets not recognised under Article 13 of the Code are nevertheless required to ensure the conservation of the asset. In the case of a listed

² Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape, March 31, 2016,: <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2016-05-20/italy-new-code-of-cultural-heritage-and-landscape/>

archive, private owners are not only required to ensure its conservation but must also make sure that inventories are performed.

Thus, the intervention made by Articles 28 and 30 is particularly significant, as it extends to unlisted archival assets some of the forms of protection provided for by the Code. Such protection granted to unlisted archives represents an innovation brought about by the Cultural Heritage Code compared to previous legislation, which protected only archival assets whose historical interest was recognised by the law, without any exception. In fact, as Navarrini remarked, the State, through the new code, has a greater power to perform actions of substitution in matters of conservation interventions³. This innovation further emphasises the need to recognize a legal constraint where there is a historical interest to be safeguarded, to ensure that the owner implements the measures adopted for the protection of the archival asset and, at the same time, has access to the tax benefits provided for by the law, which will be explored in the next section. When the archive is listed, the private owners are required to comply with obligations in terms of conservation, ordering, inventory, open consultation; they are also required to notify the *Sovrintendenza* of any changes or variations to the listed asset. These obligations are necessary to ensure the safeguarding, namely the protection and enhancement, of archival assets whose historical interest is particularly significant.

As regards the enhancement of private historical archives, as already mentioned, this depends on the will of the owner, who can also be assisted by the State. The obligations arising from the Code require the owner to ensure said enhancement, which, in the case of historic homes, can be challenging, given the private nature of the asset, entailing multiple difficulties for the owner in relation to the management, maintenance, and opening of their property to the public. In particular, in the case of private listed archives, the Code obliges the private owner, through Article 127, to allow the consultation of materials to those who make a motivated request through the competent *Soprintendenza*.

Article 127, indeed, provides for - according to the prevailing literature - a comprehensive set of rules concerning the consultation of private archives. The interpretation of this provision, according to the doctrine, cannot be separated from the other norms of the same Chapter of the Code, leading to a substantial equality of regime between private and public archives. As regards this article, the main subject of doctrinal discussions has been paragraph 3 of Article 127, which extends to private archives used for historical purposes, but not yet declared of particularly relevant historical interest, both the provisions contained in Article 123 of the Code, concerning the possibility to consult reserved documents, and those contained in Article 126,

³ Navarrini R., *Gli archivi privati*, Civita Editoriale, Lucca, 2005.

which, in order to protect individual privacy, lays down the obligation to comply with the provisions of the Code of Ethics and Good Conduct for the processing of personal data for historical purposes. This means that in the case of private archives, any early consultation of confidential documents is allowed only by virtue of an authorisation to be issued by the Minister of the Interior, following the opinion expressed by the archival superintendent.

Even in the case of private archives, the data subjects can avail themselves of the rights recognised by privacy legislation and can demand the blocking of data in cases where they are not of significant public interest or if their dissemination could harm dignity. The doctrine has pondered the meaning of the blockage and remarked, in principle, that the interpretation more favourable to the principle of free consultation of archives should be preferred, in a general manner, otherwise history research work may get stuck. The consultation of private archives involves the potential conflict of numerous interests and in terms of jurisprudence, it may be accepted that the private individual could only oppose a legitimate interest to the obligation to allow the consultation of the archive, which poses a limit to the right of property.

Finally, in order to offer a complete legal analysis, some significant legal acts issued by the European Union should be mentioned, since they are particularly relevant for the safeguarding of historical archives. In particular, the European Union in this regard has adopted a series of recommendations concerning the protection and enhancement of archives, including the listed ones. Such as the European Commission Recommendation of October 27, 2011, concerning the European Digital Agenda⁴ and emphasising the challenge for a wider access and use of cultural materials, including archival assets. The Commission therefore recommends Member States to develop planning and monitoring of European cultural assets and foster national strategies for the long-term preservation of digitised content.

On November 10, 2021, the Commission issued a Recommendation, also based on the assessment of the European Commission Recommendation (2011/711/EU) on the digitisation and accessibility of cultural materials, in which it highlighted that many challenges in the cultural heritage sector persist. Therefore, it is essential to provide policy responses that meet the new needs and expectations of the cultural sector and society in general. The 2021 Recommendation also highlights that in order to pursue

⁴ Commission Recommendation of 27 October 2011 on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32011H0711> [This Recommendation, part of the European strategy for the digitization and preservation of cultural materials, is based on the work carried out in recent years through the initiative relating to digital libraries and is addressed to all organizations, public or private, that wish or need to preserve digital materials](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32011H0711)

an effective digital transformation and promote collaboration based on trust, Member States should actively involve all relevant stakeholders in formulating the strategies to be used and should also provide resources/support for the implementation of such strategies. These strategies should have a clear mandate in order to facilitate collaboration between national or regional aggregators and cultural heritage institutions, with the aim of making digitised assets accessible through Europeana and the data space, and encouraging the proactive contribution to the data space.

As for the tax regime dedicated to historical archives, the current reference legislation is the Consolidated Income Tax Act (Tuir) of 1986. The Tuir grants fiscal benefits to private owners of listed archives or libraries for the maintenance, protection, and restoration of the asset⁵.

Since its adoption in 1986, this benefit has undergone significant percentage variations, moving from 27% (Decree-Law of May 31, 1994) to 22% (Decree-Law of February 23, 1995, n. 41)⁶. In 2009, the Revenue Agency issued a resolution setting the tax credit provided for by the Tuir at 19% and recognised its validity for any expenses incurred for ordering and inventorying the historical archive⁷. Subsequently, with Law December 27, 2013, n. 147, it was established that such tax credit “is reduced to 18 percent for the tax period ongoing on December 31, 2013, and to 17 percent from the tax period ongoing on December 31, 2014”⁸.

Finally, since this last rule was repealed, with Circular n. 7 of April 4, 2017⁹, and then in subsequent ones (see lastly Circular 14/E of 2023), the *Agenzia delle Entrate* (The Italian Internal Revenue Agency) fixed the amount of the tax credit at 19% for maintenance, protection, and restoration expenses. The expenses incurred for ordering and inventorying private historical archives of interest are eligible for tax credit if they refer to extraordinary interventions to be carried out immediately after the listing or to interventions aimed at updating the inventory, in the case of extraordinary causes verified by the competent public authority. Costs incurred for the purchase, maintenance, protection, or restoration of historical archives are also eligible for tax credit, if they are public entities or institutions, foundations, or legally recognised associations that do not pursue profit-making purposes or promote activities of study, research, and documentation of significant cultural and artistic value. From the fiscal

⁵ Consolidated Income Tax Act, Article 15 paragraph 1(g).

⁶ Federal Register Volume 60, Number 41, March 2, 1995: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1995-03-02/html/95-4997.htm>

⁷ Agenzia delle Entrate, Resolution 02.04.2009 No. 93/E.

⁸ Law 27 December 2013, No. 147: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/12/27/13G00191/sq>

⁹ Agenzia delle Entrate, Circular n.7/E of 04/04/2017: <https://www.ancebenevento.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Circolare-n.7-E-del-4-aprile-2017-.pdf>

year 2020, expenses incurred for the maintenance, protection, and restoration of listed assets will be eligible for deduction just in the case of a specific bank transfer (usually by *Bonifico parlante*). In addition, the Tuir stipulates that expenses incurred by those responsible for the maintenance, protection, or restoration of properties subject to cultural constraints can be deducted, provided that they are justified and documented. The need for such expenses, if not required by law, must be certified by the competent *Soprintendenza* of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, after evaluating their correctness together with the office of the Agency of the territory. The tax credit does not apply if the goods are used differently without prior authorisation from the Administration for Cultural Heritage, or if the legal obligations relating to the Government's right of pre-emption on such goods are not respected, or if an unauthorised exportation attempt is made. The Administration for Cultural Heritage immediately informs the *Agenzia delle Entrate* in case of violations and calls for the non-deductibility of the expenses.

Lastly, before the advent of the Consolidated Income Tax Act, of particular significance in the context of tax legislation was Law n. 512 of August 2, 1982¹⁰, which established that properties used for cultural purposes - including private historical archives – did not contribute to the formation of income “when the owner derives no income from the use of the property”. The same law also stipulated in Article 3 that expenses incurred by the owners of the listed asset were deductible from taxable income. Article 3 also considered the costs incurred for organising exhibitions and shows as eligible for tax credit. The same legislation also introduced the possibility of transferring assets to the state in order to pay taxes.

1. Exploring the widespread and hidden archives

This analysis is based on the survey made by Fondazione Bruno Visentini between April and June 2023. The key results of the Survey are included in the fourth 2023 Report of Bruno Visentini Foundation's Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage offering a multidimensional analysis of Italy's archival heritage.

Based on data taken from their annual survey, out of the 850 respondents, 229 stated that they own a family's archive, accounting for 27% of the total. Archives perform the function of storing and preserving data for future generations and, in many cases, operate as cultural institutions that give access to valuable records and items they protect. They have two different and potentially contrasting missions, a long-term one – to preserve the documentation– and a short-term one – to provide services on

¹⁰ Law 2 August 1982, No.512, Art.1: <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:1982;512>

demand for various purposes (research, education and entertainment) – which, however, may cause the deterioration of the archive itself¹¹.

As regards the territorial spread of domestic archives, most of them are located in the Northern macro-area: Piedmont with 30 respondents, closely followed by Veneto (27) and Lombardy (26). Tuscany is the leading region in the Centre with 25 respondents, followed by Lazio region with 17, while in the South, the region with the highest number of respondents is Campania with 12, followed by Apulia with 10 respondents (Chart 1).

Chart 1. Regional Distribution of Respondents to the Section on Historical Archives



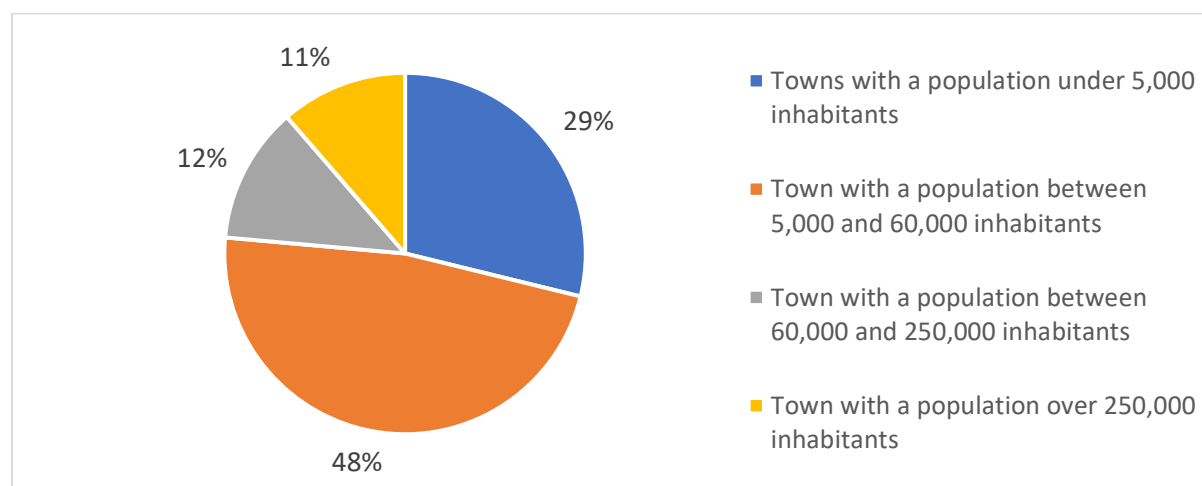
Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, Gangemi Editore, Rome, 2023

¹¹ Guccio, Calogero; Martorana, Marco; Mazza, Isidoro; Pignataro, Giacomo and Rizzo, Ilde: An assessment of the performance of Italian public historical archives: Preservation vs utilisation. Socio-Economic Planning Sciences, Volume 72, 2020. Taken from Science Direct: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0038012119305488>

The results of the questionnaire show that almost one third of archives (29%) are located in villages with less than 5,000 inhabitants, and just under a third are situated in municipalities with populations between 5,000 and 20,000. As for larger municipalities, 17% of the archives are located in towns with 20,000 to 60,000 inhabitants, 6% in municipalities with 60,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, another 6% in towns with 100,000 to 250,000 inhabitants, and finally, 11% in cities with more than 250,000 inhabitants (see summary in Chart 2). Moreover, the survey reveals that, overall, 43% of the archives are situated within a historical village.

Historical villages reflect the conditions of the historical heritage and social development and are the key promoters of traditional culture. They are highly valued because their aesthetic, functional, and environmental characteristics can make them hubs for socioeconomic development through efficient preservation and management.¹²

Chart 2. Summary of the Percentage Distribution of Archives by the Size of the Municipality in Which They Are Located



¹² Mu, Qui and Aimar Fabrizio. How Are Historical Villages Changed? A Systematic Literature Review on European and Chinese Cultural Heritage Preservation Practices in Rural Areas. Land, 11, 2022. Taken from Research Gate: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361588143_How_Are_Historical_Villages_Changed_A_Systematic_Literature_Review_on_European_and_Chinese_Cultural_Heritage_Preservation_Practices_in_Rural_Areas

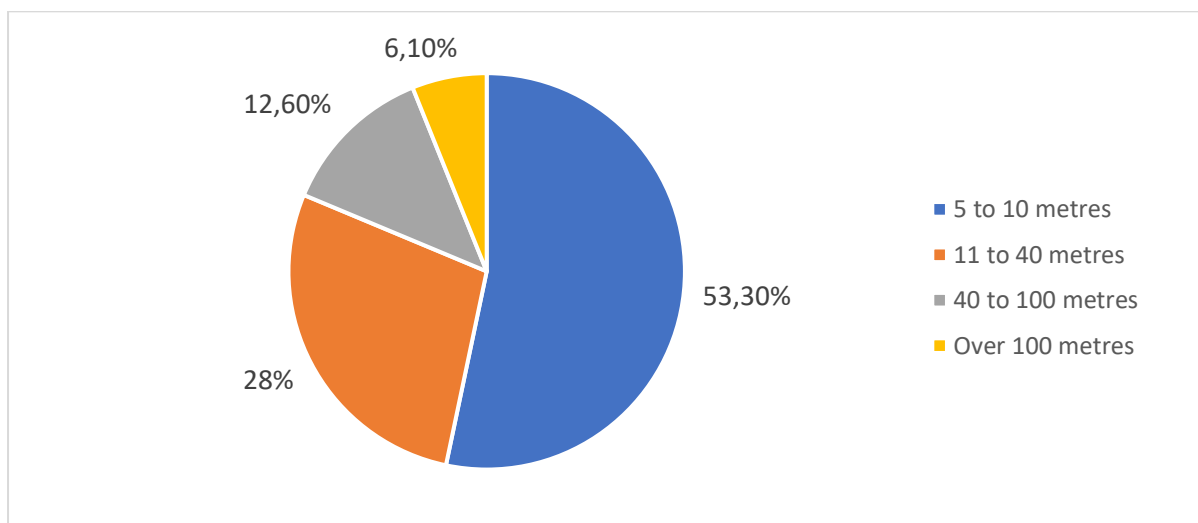
Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

As regards the data on the location of archives by type of dwelling, the data reveal that they are mainly located in four types of listed historical houses: 11.88% are palaces, 8.24% are villas, 3.65% are castles, and 1.41% are manors..

2. The Condition of Private Archives

This chapter provides some key information on the general structure of family archives. Firstly, given its unique characteristics, in order to understand the size of the archive and, consequently, its importance also in terms of management and conservation, owners were asked to indicate the dimension of the archive in linear meters.

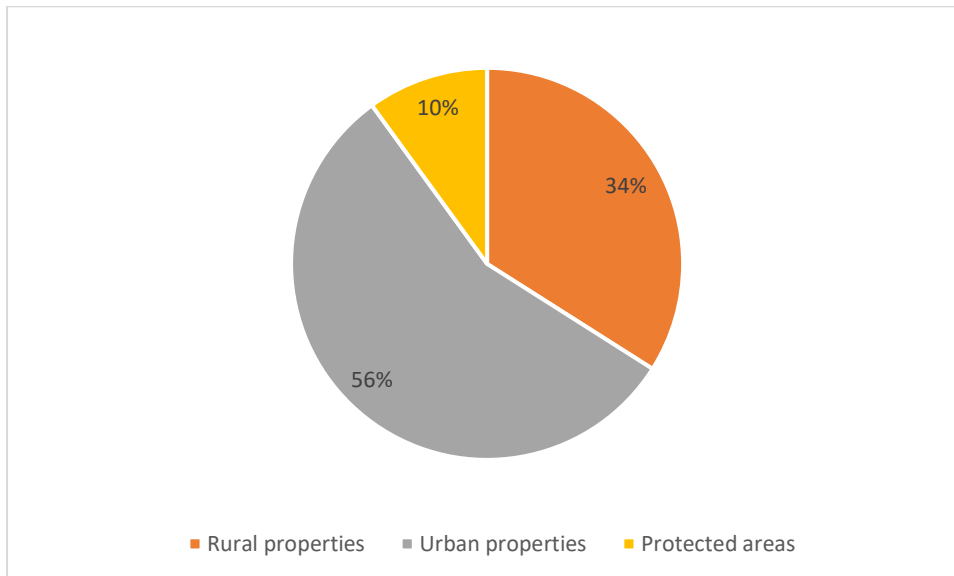
Based on the distribution of answers, it can be stated that the majority of archives are small in size, as 53,3% of them range from 5 to 10 linear metres. A further 28% have a size varying from 11 to 40 metres, while medium/large-sized archives make up 18,7%, and of these, only 6% exceed 100 linear metres.

Chart 3. The dimension of the Archive (in linear metres)


Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

Historical archives can be situated in very different environments. They may be located in urban or rural areas and their geographical characteristics require different management methods¹³. 85% of respondents to the survey stated that the archive is located within the historic dwelling, while the remaining 15% of archives are located in public archives, a private institution, or other premises. Considering only the archives located in the dwellings, in 56% of cases the archive is located in an urban abode, in 34% in a rural property, and in 10% of cases, it is located in a specially equipped and protected room (Chart 4).

¹³ Thickett, David; Rhee, Soek-Joo and Lambarth, Sarah. "Libraries and archives in historic buildings", Museum Microclimates, The National Museum of Denmark, 2007: https://natmus.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/Editor/natmus/bevaringsafdelingen/billeder/M_M/Museum_Microclimate/Proceedings/musmic150.pdf

Chart 4. Type of Historic Dwelling in Which Archives are Stored.


Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

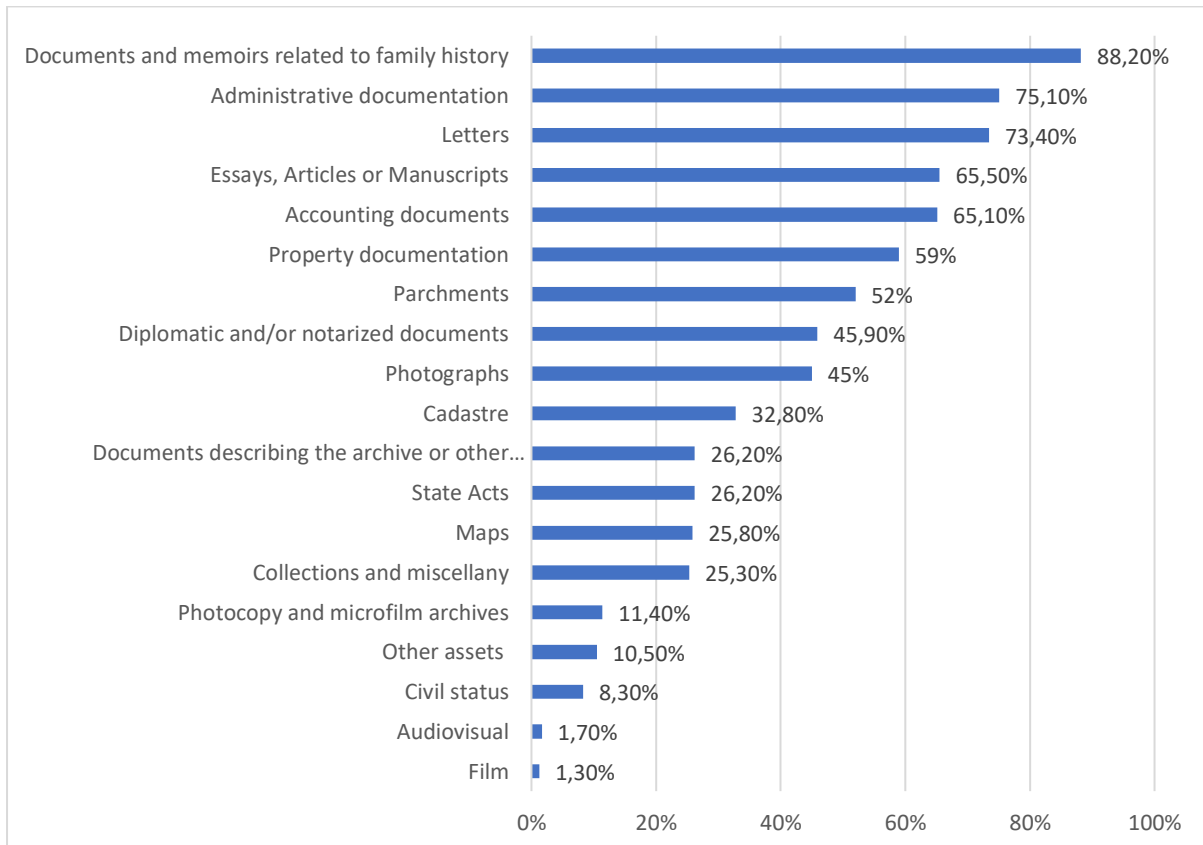
56.3% of the archives have their own inventory and/or list of assets. Of these, the majority (56.6%) are in paper form, but there is a significant portion of owners who have created both a paper and a digital inventory for their archives (39.5%), while a small percentage of archives have only a digital inventory (3.9%).

Archives were created and exist with the aim of acquiring, preserving and making accessible artifacts and evidence of the world's social, intellectual, artistic, and even spiritual achievements¹⁴. In Italy, as seen in Chart 5, it is clear that the most common types of material stored in the archives are documents and memoirs related to the history of the family (as is the case for 88.2% of the archives surveyed by the questionnaire), administrative documentation (75.1%), correspondence (73.4%), writings (65.5%), and accounting documentation (65.1%). However, high percentages are also recorded for property documentation (59%), parchments (52%), diplomatic

¹⁴ Dupont, Christian. Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Twenty-First Century: Intersecting Missions, Converging Futures. *Journal of Rare Books Manuscripts and Cultural Heritage*, 2007: <https://rbm.acrl.org/index.php/rbm/article/view/271>

and/or notarial documents (45.9%), and photographs (45%). All other types are present in fewer than one in three archives.

Chart 5. Distribution (%) of type of asset in the archive



Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

3. The Process of Digitisation and Conservation

Digitalisation is one of the innovative processes that, if properly implemented, can help manage the cultural heritage and prevent risks caused, for example, by atmospheric phenomena and climate change. It can also enhance the tangible historical heritage by engaging more proactively the modern public, immersed in a constantly evolving

technological world. As outlined by Stefano Pigliapoco, "in addressing the digitization of archives within private historic homes, it's crucial to consider the broader digital preservation landscape in Italy"¹⁵. This is because strategic coordination and compliance with established digital preservation standards can ensure the longevity and accessibility of Italy's rich historical documentation.

Implementation is arguably the greatest unresolved issue of digital preservation and the most difficult to tackle, because it requires significant resources, compliant organisations, steadfast management and appropriately skilled staff. Archivists have sometimes felt that they are expected to provide answers and solutions to problems that outstretch their capabilities¹⁶. In this context, respondents were asked to indicate whether the archive was digitised or undergoing a process of digitisation, but only 18.3% of archive owners declare that at least a part of the archive is digitised.

Considering only the percentage of those who answered yes, 43% admit that they have digitised less than 25% of the archive, 26% state that they have digitised between 25 and 50% of the archive, and the remaining 31% declare that they have digitised more than half of the archive.

Within the context of digitisation, and more specifically, the digital transition process, archive owners were also asked whether they had applied for the Digital Transition Facilities for Cultural and Creative Bodies (TOCC) provided by the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), with a deadline set for February 2023¹⁷. Only 3.5% of the respondents states having submitted the application.

¹⁵ Pigliapoco, Stefano. La conservazione digitale in Italia. Riflessioni su modelli, criteri e soluzioni, AGAS Department, University of Florence, published by EUM, Edizioni Università di Macerata (Italy), 2019: <https://u-pad.unimc.it/handle/11393/247554>

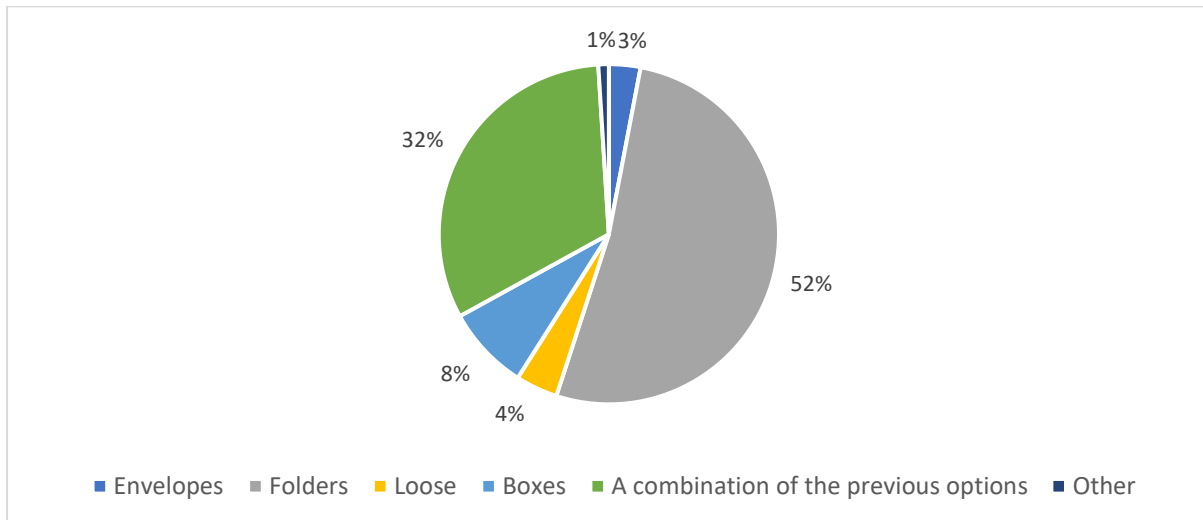
¹⁶ Digital Preservation in Archives: Overview of Current Research and Practices. National Archives of Sweden, 2005: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=760081af5cf291c8a606d989647648db7ec94379>

¹⁷ The "Digital Transition Cultural and Creative Bodies" (TOCC) incentive, which expired on Feb. 1, 2023, encourages the innovation and digitisation of micro and small businesses, third sector entities, and for-profit and non-profit organisations. The measure is promoted by the Ministry of Culture and managed by Invitalia. More in detail, TOCC falls under Mission 1 - Digitisation, Innovation, Competitiveness and Culture, Component 3 - Culture 4.0 (M1C3), Investment 3.3, Sub-Investment 3.3.2. The facilities are aimed at micro and small enterprises, in corporate or partnership form, including cooperatives, unrecognised associations, foundations, organisations with a non-profit legal personality, as well as Third Sector Entities, registered or in the process of registering with the "RUNTS", which were established as of December 31, 2020 and operate in the cultural and creative sectors and in the

Subsequently, the focus shifted to the practices and specific conservation tools in the sector. Firstly, respondents were asked about the type of shelves on which the archival assets were stored. The distribution of answers is quite broad. 38.9% of respondents state that they store archival assets on wooden shelves, followed by cabinets (24%), a combination of different types (21.4%), and metal shelves (13.1%).

Regarding the type of document collectors (Chart 6), more than half of the respondents indicate that they store their assets in folders (51.5%), while 32% rely on a combination of different collectors (envelopes, boxes, folders). Only 4% of the owners store their assets loose.

following areas of intervention: Music; Audiovisual and radio; Fashion; Architecture and design; Visual arts; Live performance and festivals; Tangible and intangible cultural heritage; Artistic handicrafts; Publishing, books and literature; Interdisciplinary area (for those operating in more than one area of intervention among those listed). A total of 1,860 micro and small enterprises, third sector entities, and for-profit and non-profit organisations are accessing grants from the NRP for "Supporting the cultural and creative sectors for innovation and digital transition" (M1C3 - Sub-Investment 3.3.2). Nearly 108 million euros was the total amount allocated, accounting for 97.6 percent of the amount put out to tender. Here follows the division by sphere of activity: 128 for music; 214 for audiovisual and radio; 38 for fashion; 46 for architecture and design; 56 for visual arts; 202 for performing arts and festivals; 628 for tangible and intangible cultural heritage; 40 for artistic crafts; 151 for publishing, books and literature; and 357 for interdisciplinary area. MIC website: <https://www.beniculturali.it/comunicato/pnrr-assegnati-fondi-a-supporto-della-transizione-digitale-1860-gli-organismi-culturali-e-creativi-ad-accedere-al-finanziamento>

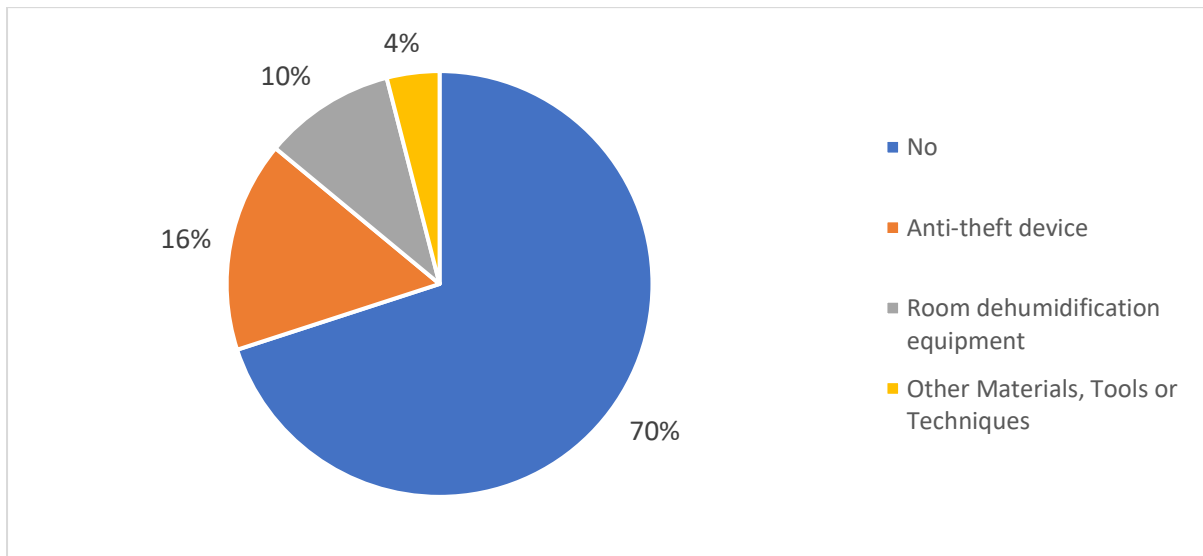
Chart 6. Type of Collectors for Archival Documents


Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

The successful preservation of archives relies on knowing how the materials and objects in the collection behave and how the environmental influences acting on them can be controlled, in order to maximise their robustness and chances of survival. Some aspects affecting conservation are evident: fires, floods, pollution and earthquakes can damage or destroy most collections. It is obvious that such threats must be controlled, eliminated or minimised as far as possible ¹⁸. Archive owners were asked to indicate whether they had implemented specific preservation techniques for their archives (Chart 7). 70% of respondents currently declare not having introduced measures in this regard, while in the remaining 30% of cases, the majority of actions taken concern the installation of anti-theft devices (16%) and equipment for dehumidifying the environment (10%).

¹⁸ Erhardt, David; Tumosa, Charles and Mecklenburg, Marion. Applying science to the question of Museum Climate, Museum Microclimates. The National Museum of Denmark, 2007> https://natmus.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/Editor/natmus/bevaringsafdelingen/billeder/M_M/Museum_Microclimate/Proceedings/musmic150.pdf

Chart 7. Are Specific Materials, Tools, or Techniques Implemented for Preservation?



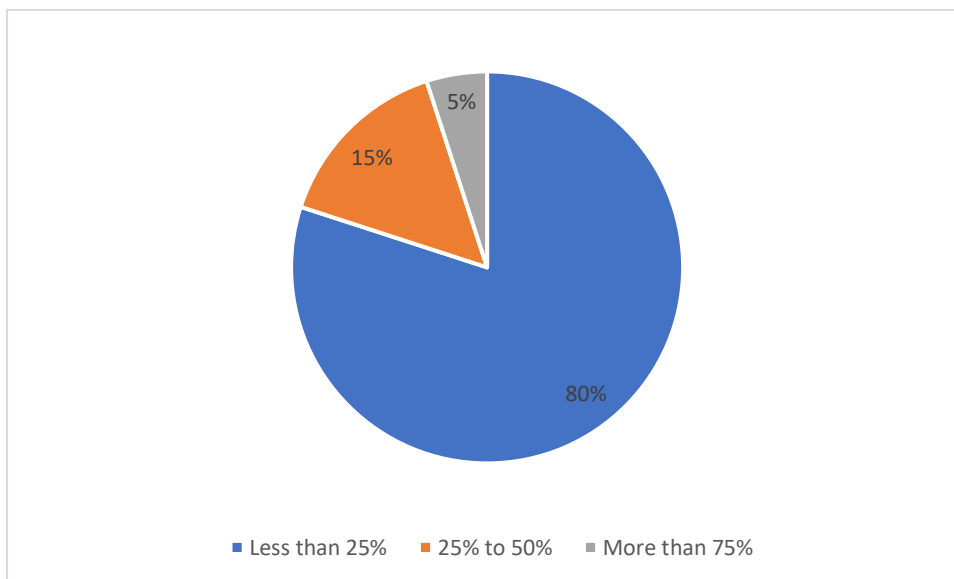
Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

Generally, the management of the archive is taken care of by a member of the family (77.4%). Sometimes, a specialist is hired (12.6%) or, very rarely, a non-specialised employee is hired (3.5%), who also performs other duties within the historic dwelling. The remaining 6.5% of owners state having more than one type of personnel employed (among those mentioned above) who take care of the historical archive. Respondents also indicate that the maintenance of the archive, including staff management, has had in almost all cases (93.8%) an impact lower than 10% of the total annual management expenses for the upkeep of the property. Similarly, a low percentage of owners (17%) state that they have planned investments in the last five years for the restoration or conservation of some works within the archive.

Finally, Chart 8 highlights that within this small group, the vast majority (80%) declare that they have initiated conservation or restoration activities in the last 5 years on less than 25% of the total assets, 15% state that they have planned investments on a portion of assets ranging between 25% and 50%, while only the remaining 5% have

allocated funds for the maintenance and/or restoration of over three-quarters of the assets contained in the historical archive. Taking into account the total number of owners of a property that includes an archive, it can be stated that only 3.5% of such owners have so far adequately invested in the conservation or restoration of their own archive.

Chart 8. Percentage of assets contained in the archive for which investment in maintenance and/or restoration has been planned.



Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

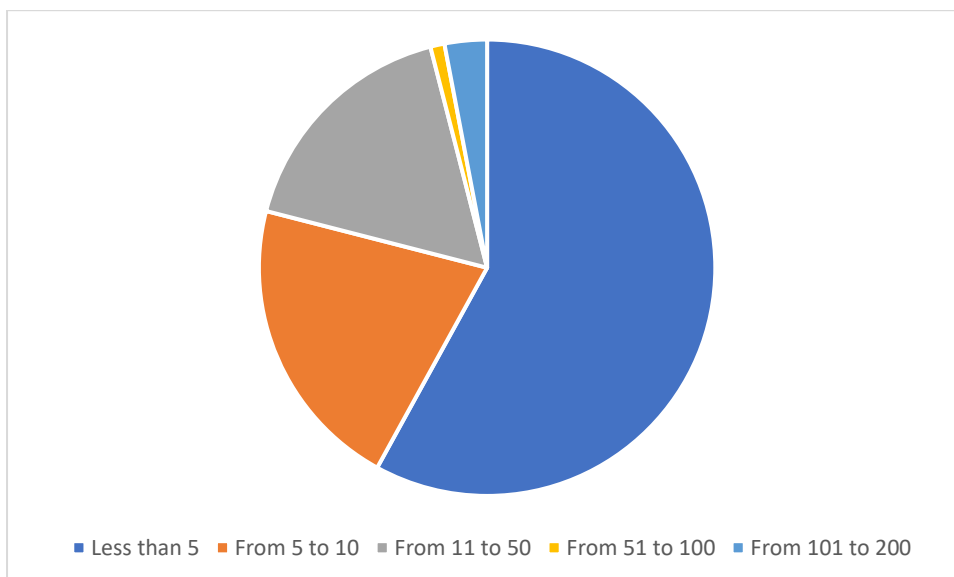
One way to enhance the heritage of Italian historic homes is certainly that of making the consultation and visitation of the archives accessible to guests/visitors, as these constitute a fundamental resource from a historical and artistic point of view.

Firstly, owners of historic homes with archives were asked to indicate whether their archive had been reported to the competent territorial *Sovrintendenza* or not. As can be seen from the chart below, just under a third of respondents declare having reported their archive.

In light of this, a more detailed analysis was conducted, revealing a positive correlation between the possession of a notified archive and the request for its consultation. The

majority of respondents (58%) state that they receive less than 5 requests per year, 21% receive between 5 and 10 requests, and a further 17% receive between 11 and 50 requests. Only 4% of respondents claim to be contacted for archive consultation by more than 50 people each year. This category of respondents also allowed to identify the channels employed to convey such requests: the more commonly used is the *Soprintendenza*¹⁹, followed by private Internet users, universities, and local cultural associations.

Chart 9. How Many People Per Year Typically Request to Consult the Archive (Reported Archive)?



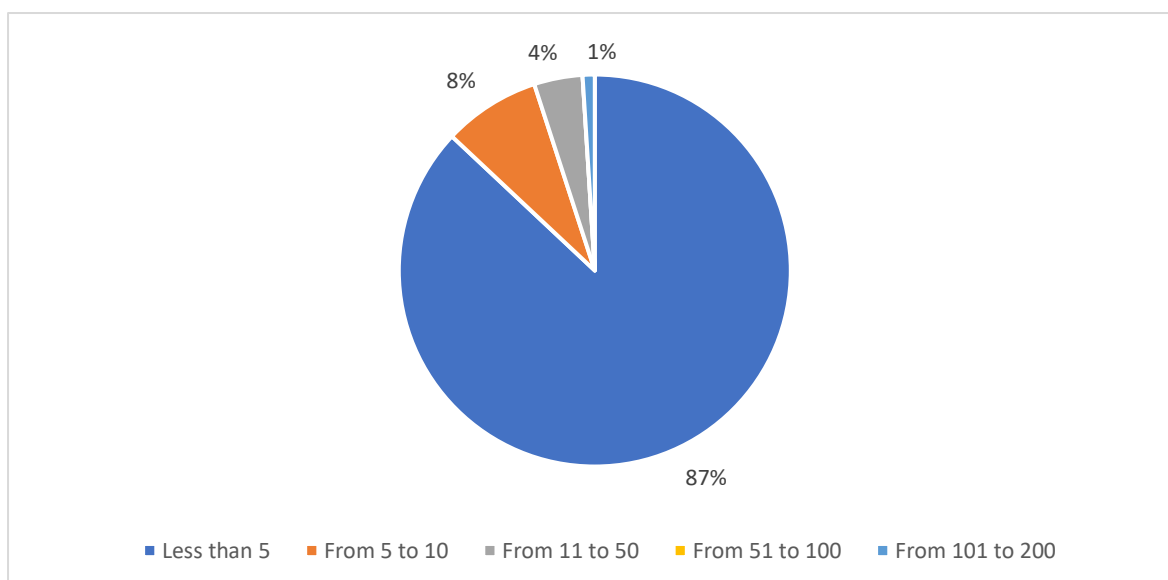
Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

Proportionally, as can be seen in the chart below, consultation requests for archives that were not reported are significantly fewer. Indeed, 87% of the owners of non-reported archives stated that they received fewer than 5 consultation requests per year (compared to 58% for reported archives), 8% between 5 and 10 (compared to 21% for reported archives), and 4% between 11 and 50 (for reported archives, whose

¹⁹ *Soprintendenza* is the Italian state authority responsible for the supervision and protection of cultural and environmental heritage, including the oversight of historical buildings, archaeological sites, and landscapes with the aim to ensure their preservation and protection under national laws.

percentage is 17%). One can guess that, in order to increase consultation requests and to promote greater accessibility to this extraordinary cultural heritage, it is important to increase the percentage of archives reported by the *Soprintendenza*.

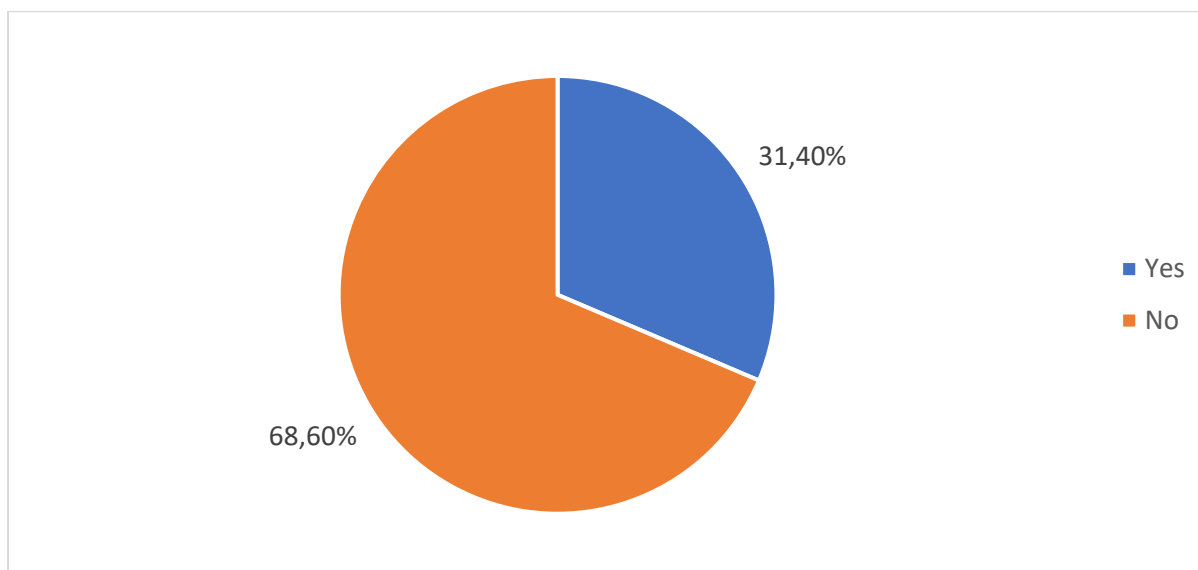
Chart 10. How Many People Per Year Typically Request to Consult the Archive (Non-Reported Archive)?



Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

Subsequently, the survey focused on accessibility, more specifically on the matter of visits to the archive. In relation to this, owners of historic homes with archives were asked whether visits to the premises where the archive is stored were allowed. Based on the survey conducted (Chart 14), only 31.4% of these are regularly open to the public. Furthermore, the study reveals that historic homes open to the public and having an accessible archive represent 6% of the homes belonging to the total of owners interviewed. While homes that do not allow visits to the entire property but only to the premises where the archive is stored constitute about 1%.

Chart 11. Are Visits to the Premises Where the Archive is Stored Allowed?



Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

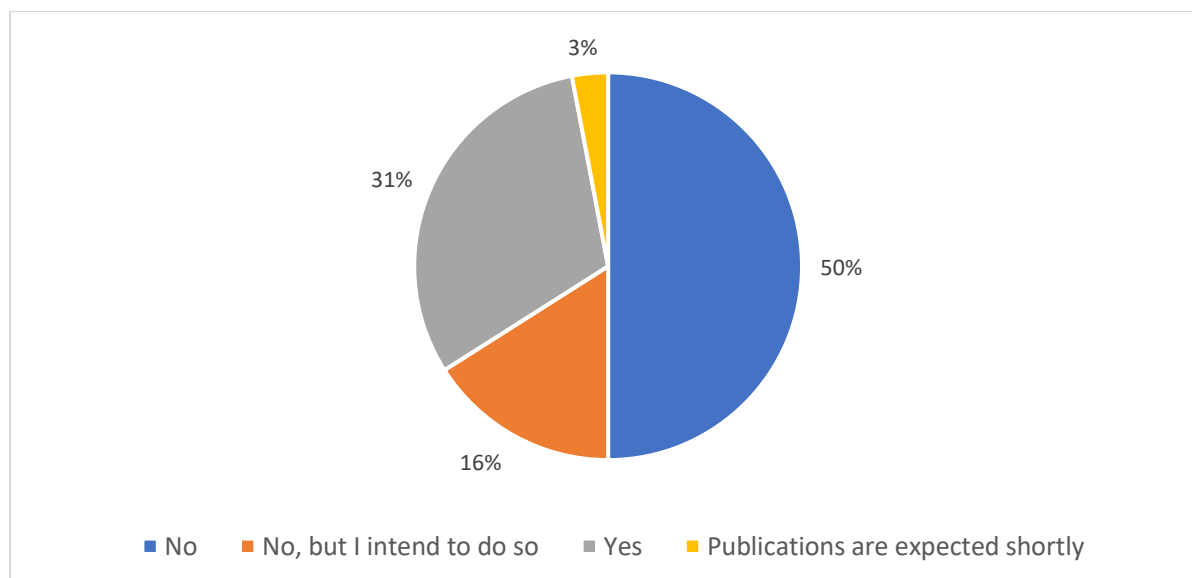
For an even more detailed analysis, it is worth noting that within this minority category of owners who allow visits to their archive, 47% have decided to include the archive's visit as part of the tour of the dwelling itself, while in the remaining 53% of cases, the visit is allowed only upon specific request.

Also in relation to the visits, the survey reveals that 74% of the visits to the archive were supported by a Guide.

Lastly, with the aim of assessing the visibility of the archives, owners were asked to indicate whether, in the last five years, there had been any publications, whether scientific or informative, of material taken from the archive. As shown in Chart 15, half of the respondents have not planned any initiatives in this regard, while 16% intend to do so in the future. On the other hand, 31% of archive owners state that they have published archival material in the last 5 years, and a further 3% say that publication is planned or in progress.

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Chart 12. In the Last 5 Years, Have There Been Publications (Scientific or Informative) of Resources Contained In the Archive?



Source: Bruno Visentini Foundation, Observatory for Private Cultural Heritage, IV Report, 2023

4 Conclusion

This survey was aimed at analysing the structure, state of preservation, levels of digitisation, accessibility and regulatory and fiscal characteristics of historical family archives in private historical residences in Italy.

For these reasons, this study represents a fundamental step for the assessment of the role played and the status of historical archives housed in private historical residences in Italy, allowing to draw some interesting conclusions:

1. It is understood that a significant proportion of historic houses include archives.
2. Small and rural communities play a crucial role in preserving historical documents;
3. The types of documents stored within the archives range from family histories and administrative records to correspondence and financial documents;
4. A significant portion of these archives is yet to be digitised - This gap presents both a challenge and an opportunity in the field, in which the integration of modern technological approaches with traditional preservation methods is crucial;
5. It becomes clear that the legal and fiscal frameworks governing these archives provide a comprehensive structure for their management and preservation: the National and European laws underscore the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage and offer incentives for the maintenance, protection, and restoration activities related to historical archives.

In this regard, the crucial role played by private historic houses in Italy as guardians of invaluable cultural heritage should be emphasised - offering insights into the preservation needs, digitisation efforts and the broader socio-economic and legal context that affect the preservation of these archives. All of this points to the urgent need for harnessing technological advancements to bridge the digitisation gap, thereby ensuring the longevity and accessibility of these cultural treasures for the future generations.

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