Sónia Pereira Henrique
Dinâmia'CET-Iscte

Filipa Lopes
Dinâmia'CET-Iscte; IEM-NOVA FCSH

Tracing Public Works and Labour in Historical Archives: From the *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino* to the National Archives of Cabo Verde

Abstract

This paper outlines archival research conducted within the framework of the ERC ArchLabour project and examines the methodological potential of cross-referencing metropolitan archives with local archives in former Portuguese colonial territories, with Cabo Verde as a focal point. The paper is organised into three sections. The first addresses the archival processing and study of public works records undertaken over the past fifteen years at the *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino* in Lisbon. The second presents a preliminary survey of fonds and records relating to public works and labour at the National Archives Institute of Cabo Verde. The final section assesses the challenges and possibilities of cross-referencing documentation between the two archives, drawing on a case study developed within the ArchLabour. Archival records are used to reconstruct the technical and administrative dimensions of public works projects, while personnel files and labour documentation from Cabo Verde provide insight into the everyday practices and labour experiences that shaped their execution. Combined, these materials demonstrate the methodological value of reading metropolitan and local archives in parallel to understand how colonial administrative processes were planned, negotiated and carried out.

Keywords
Cabo Verde, colonial history, cross-referencing, historical archives

Sónia Pereira Henrique

Integrated researcher at DINÂMIA'CET (Centre for Socioeconomic and Territorial Studies) of ISCTE, the University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal). Sonia holds a doctoral degree in Historical Archives, awarded in 2020, and a master's degree in Archival Science from the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of NOVA University (Lisbon, Portugal). Currently, she is a member of the ArchLabour research team, where her expertise lies in the field of historical colonial information studies, with a particular focus on the examination of these circuits through the lens of Public Works.

Filipa Lopes

Postdoctoral fellow in the ArchLabour project, based at DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte IUL (Lisbon, Portugal). She holds a PhD in history with a specialisation in historical archivistics, awarded under a joint supervision agreement (cotutelle) between NOVA FCSH (Lisbon, Portugal) and the École nationale des chartes (Paris, France). Her research focuses on archival practices in premodern institutions and colonial contexts. She has worked as an archivist at the Historical Archives of IRSCM (Braga, Portugal) and at the AHS-ICS (University of Lisbon, Portugal) and has taught at NOVA FCSH and at the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo (Portugal).

[Cover] Photographs of berm-side works at the São Nicolau aerodrome, from the BEAPU Report - Cabo Verde Detachment, 1961. PT/AHU/IPAD/MU/DGOPC/DSUH/1886/07501. Courtesy of the PT, AHU.

> *Et, d'abord, nous peinons encore à comprendre qu'il n'existe pas une histoire de l'homme en général. Viendrait-elle à exister, une telle histoire ne serait qu'une longue suite d'abstractions.*[1]
>
> Achille Mbembe

Introduction

This paper examines the methodological potential of cross-referencing metropolitan and local archival records within the framework of the ArchLabour project, using Cabo Verde as a focal point.

The first part revisits a research trajectory that has shaped the institutional and methodological foundations of several studies on colonial architecture and infrastructure led by architect and researcher Ana Vaz Milheiro, and outlines the scope and characteristics of the archival record sets hosted at *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino* (AHU),[2] Lisbon's central repository for records produced by the Portuguese metropolitan colonial administration. The research initiatives led by Milheiro have explored a technical perspective on architectural and infrastructural projects, generating outputs that contributed to transforming how historians, architectural scholars and the wider public engage with colonial public works records. By combining detailed archival descriptions with interpretive frameworks attentive to architecture and infrastructure, they have rendered previously under-described materials findable, citable and analytically productive. Particular attention is given in this paper to one of those outputs, the finding aid *Obras Públicas*,[3] accessible on the national DigitArq platform, maintained by the *Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas* (DGLAB).[4] It describes an artificial assemblage representing colonial public works documentation for Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique, the Indian possessions, Macau and Timor (mostly 1870–1975), produced in Lisbon by metropolitan authorities responsible for urban development and infrastructure.

The second part turns to preliminary archival research conducted at the National Archives Institute of Cabo Verde (IANCV), whose holdings preserve the local dimension of colonial publicworks governance. Within the framework of Milheiro's ERC Advanced Grant *ArchLabour* (2024–2028),[5] several on-site archival research visits and fieldwork missions are currently being prepared, and this visit focused specifically on the archival component. Examining these records opens methodological possibilities that remain inaccessible when research is confined to metropolitan sources alone.

In the third part, this movement from archival processing in Lisbon to on-site research in Cabo Verde underscores the interpretive potential of linking these two archival worlds to reconstruct infrastructural processes and identify the labour practices embedded in colonial architecture and public works. The paper situates this analysis within the broader temporal scope of ArchLabour's inquiry into colonial public works and labour during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

1. Reconstructing colonial public works through the archive: archival description and study of records at the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino in Lisbon

Building on the overview provided in the introduction, this section examines the institutional and descriptive context in which the *Obras Públicas* finding aid was developed at the AHU.

The AHU is a historical archive that provides a public service under DGLAB and is the custodian of about 16–17 km of textual and visual records relating to Portuguese activities overseas from the late sixteenth century to the mid–1970s.[6] Its mission encompasses preservation, access, and the production of finding aids to support research. Integration into the broader

1. Achile Mbembe, *Brutalisme* (Éditions de La Découverte, 2020), chap. 1, Kindle.
2. In English: The Overseas Historical Archive.
3. In English: Public Works. It has the reference code: PT/AHU/ID-OP: "Obras Públicas," DGLAB, AHU, last modified December 29, 2024 05:41 (UTC).
4. "Portal Digitarq," DGLAB, 2026.
5. ERC No. 101096606.
6. Over the years, several authors have written extensively about this heritage institution, and many of these contributions are surveyed in Sónia Pereira Henrique, "Informar, administrar, preservar prova: circuitos e significados da correspondência nos arquivos coloniais (Direção Geral do Ultramar, 1835–1910)" (PhD diss., NOVA FCSH, 2020), 166–78. Reference should also be made to the ECHOES Project – European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities, under which Ana Guardião, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, and Paulo Peixoto published Ecos Coloniais: História, Patrimónios e Memórias. In this noteworthy volume of text and imagery, the opening article in the "Essays" section focuses on the Overseas Historical Archive: Ricardo Roque and José Miguel Ferreira, "Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino," in *Ecos Coloniais: História, Patrimónios e Memórias*, ed. Ana Guardião, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, and Paulo Peixoto (Tinta da China, 2022), 13–21. More recently, Gautier Garnier has also written about the AHU: Gautier Garnier, "Arquivos da memória colonial portuguesa: o Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, 1931-1974", *Ler história*, no. 85 (2024): 143–64.

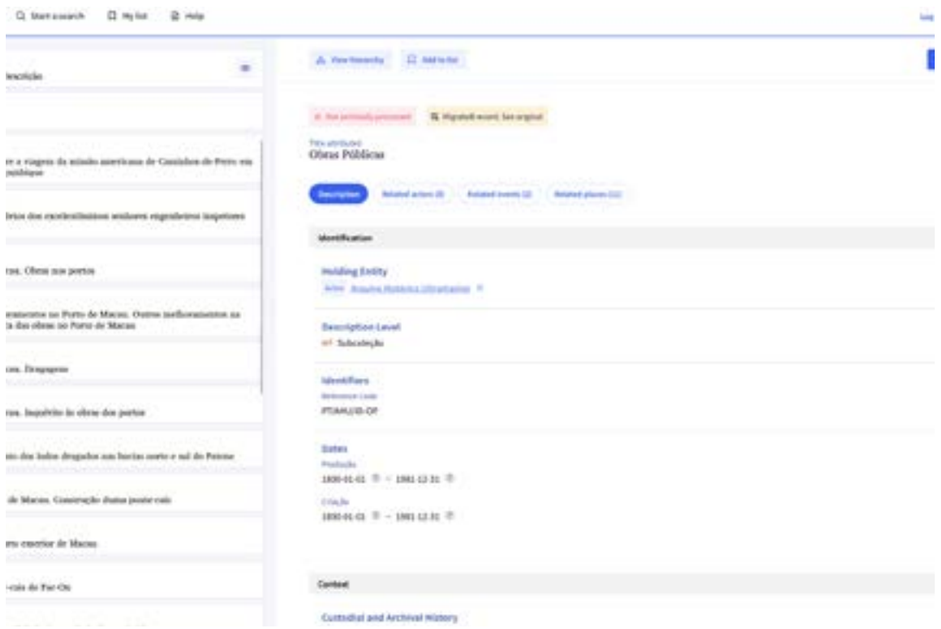


Figure 1. Presentation of the *Obras Públicas* finding aid on DigitArq.

DGLAB DigitArq system has, over time, made millions of descriptive records and tens of millions of images searchable online; however, for several series, especially nineteenth and twentieth-century overseas administration, substantial content has required new descriptive work before online discoverability could be achieved. This has been the case for the records described within the above-mentioned *Obras Públicas* finding aid.

Within the AHU, this finding aid stands out for the heterogeneity of the records it brings together. This diversity results from the integration of ministerial and directorate correspondence, project files, registers, technical drawings, maps, and photographs. These documents were generated from both centralised sources in Lisbon and across the overseas territories, reflecting the breadth and complexity of the material described.

1.1. Bringing Public Works into view: mapping and describing colonial archival records

Following the production of the above-mentioned *Obras Públicas* finding aid, the process reached a key turning point with the online release, on 17 October 2019, of the first dataset of archival descriptions for colonial public works (PT/AHU/ID-OP) on the DGLAB DigitArq platform, which made its descriptive foundations publicly accessible. This dataset aggregates documentation produced by central Portuguese colonial bodies with administrative and executive public works functions for the main African territories and Asian outposts, dated chiefly 1870-1975. The release explicitly acknowledged three funded research projects as having enabled the descriptive work: (1) *Os Gabinetes Coloniais de Urbanização: Cultura e Prática Arquitectónica*;[7] (2) *Coast to Coast – Late Portuguese Infrastructural Development in Angola and Mozambique*;[8] and, to a lesser extent, (3) *EWV – Crossed Visions of the Worlds*, a project on modern architecture in Lusophone Africa through Brazilian connections since the 1930s. At the time of the release, there were 19000 records

7. Ana Vaz Milheiro and Eduardo Costa Dias, "Architecture in Bissau and the Colonial Urbanization Departments (1944–1974)," *arq.urb - Revista eletrônica de Arquitetura e Urbanismo*, no. 2 (2009): 80-114; Ana Vaz Milheiro, "Africanidade e Arquitectura Colonial: A casa projectada pelo Gabinete de Urbanização Colonial (1944-1974)," *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, no. 25 (2013); Ana Vaz Milheiro and Filipa Fiúza, "A Arquitectura dos Gabinetes de Urbanização Colonial em Moçambique (1944–1974)," in *Atas do Congresso Internacional Saber Tropical em Moçambique: História, Memória e Ciência*, ed. by A. C. Roque and E. Rodrigues (IICT, 2012).
8. Ana Vaz Milheiro, "Colonial landscapes in former Portuguese Southern Africa a brief historiographical analysis based on the colonial transport networks," *African Geographical Review* 40, no. 3 (2021): 214–230.

mapped and described.[9]

The PT/AHU/ID-OP set is not a recovery of a single archival fonds but an instrument that integrates and points to multiple producers and information systems active during the administrative period of the Secretary of State for the Navy and Overseas Territories (1833–1911)[10] and of the Ministry of Overseas Territories (1911–1978).[11] Because colonial Public Works documentation was never centralised under a single institution, searches must systematically target a wide range of producer bodies. These include ministerial divisions such as the *Direção-Geral de Obras Públicas* (DGOPC)[12] and the *Direção-Geral do Fomento Colonial* (DGFC);[13] ministerial departments; and cabinets such as the *Gabinetes de Urbanização Colonial*, responsible for architectural and urban-planning documentation linked to housing, education, and health programmes. Commissions and technical councils specialising in development planning, such as the *Conselho Técnico de Fomento Colonial*[14] also form part of this landscape, deriving directly from the organic structure of these superior administrative bodies. In addition to these central authorities, those records also reflect the activity of numerous auxiliary structures devoted primarily to infrastructure development and exploitation, as well as individual producers (architects, engineers, ministers, governors, secretaries, and others).[15]

At the technical level, the descriptive work carried out for this collection makes it possible to identify records by both administrative provenance and material typology. This reflects the descriptive standard pursued by the A+I team. Mapping the graphic components of studies and projects (drawings, plans, and photographs) was particularly relevant for the group, as it provides a clearer sense of the visual materials contained in the Public Works *corpus*.

This descriptive layer improves access, although it does not eliminate all obstacles. Research on colonial infrastructures often stalls not because documents are missing, but because finding aids remain incomplete or opaque. By aligning scholarly questions with archival processing – a collaboration repeatedly emphasised by AHU –, archivists and researchers were able to move from heuristic searching to more systematic sampling of files, registers, and technical series. This work supported the creation of broad thematic categories (such as ports, railways, public buildings) that help structure the *corpus* and highlight the technical dimensions of public works.[16]

1.2. From description to interpretation: exhibitions and public scholarship

The scholarly and archival work undertaken by the A+I team has, over the years, intersected with curatorial and public-facing initiatives. In January 2019, the AHU hosted the exhibition *Colonizando África: Relatórios das Obras Públicas em Angola e Moçambique (1875–1975)*, coordinated by Milheiro.

The exhibition, while aimed at a broader public, also functioned as a platform for presenting AHU's ongoing archival and research activities. It foregrounded reports, maps and photographs and drew attention to labour as a central component of public works. Its opening coincided with the *I International Congress on Colonial and Post-Colonial Landscapes* in Lisbon,

9. Ana Canas Delgado Martins, Maria Manuela Portugal, and Sónia Pereira Henrique, "Portuguese Colonial Architectural Archives at the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Mid19th Century–1975 [Poster]," in *Proceedings of the International Congress on Architectural Archives: Professional Experiences in a Cultural Diversity*, ed. by Y. C. Ocejo, R. García-Raez Romero, R. Domenichini, G. Parra Garzón, C. O'Riordan, A. C. Simon, and A. A. F. S. Sousa (Section on Architectural Records of the International Council on Archives, 2020), 277–278.
10. "Secretaria de Estado da Marinha e Ultramar archival fonds," reference code PT/AHU/SEMU.
11. "Ministério do Ultramar archival fonds," reference code PT/AHU/MU.
12. In English, Directorate-General for Colonial Public Works. In 2011, Pedro Godinho carried out an organic-functional study of this body, as well as the archival description of its records. Pedro Godinho, "Tratamento arquivístico da documentação da Direção-Geral de Obras Públicas e Comunicações do extinto Ministério do Ultramar" (Master's diss., NOVA FCSH, 2011).
13. In English, Directorate-General for Colonial Development.
14. References to producers include the 3.ª Repartição da Direção Geral do Ultramar da Secretaria de Estado da Marinha e Ultramar later renamed 3.ª Repartição da Direção Geral das Colónias do Ministério das Colónias, among others.
15. Sónia Pereira Henrique, "Os arquivos das obras públicas portuguesas custodiados pelo Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (1875–1910): Valor e relevância para os estudos africanos," in *11º Congresso Ibérico de Estudos Africanos – Trânsitos africanos no mundo global: História e memórias, heranças e inovações*, ed. C. Almeida (Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa, 2022), 82.
16. Sónia Pereira Henrique, "Disseminating and Accessing Colonial Records: Exploring the Portuguese Public Works Database," in *II International Congress on Colonial and PostColonial Landscapes: Architecture, Colonialism and War – Papers' Booklet*, ed. A. V. Milheiro and B. Serrazina (Dinâmia'CET-Iscte, 2025), 11–34.

Figure 2. Exhibition poster advertising the guided tours and talks held on Saturdays. Coast to Coast Research Project, led by Milheiro (FCT ref. PTDC/ATP-AQI/0742/2014).

situating questions of infrastructure and city-making within wider reassessments of colonial legacies. In this context, the PT/AHU/ID-OP finding aid supported not only scholarly access but also curatorial narratives capable of engaging diverse audiences, from historians of technology and architectural historians to urban scholars and the public. This curatorial work forms part of a broader research trajectory led by Milheiro's teams, whose long-standing engagement with colonial and post-colonial built environments has shaped how PT/AHU/ID-OP materials are mobilised. Over the past decade, Milheiro's sustained work – spanning colonial architectures, the Colonial Planning Offices (*Gabinetes de Urbanização Colonial*) and middle-class mass housing, and involving the coordination of multiple funded projects – has positioned Portugal as a leading pioneer in the archival description and study of colonial public works. More recently, the ArchLabour project extends this line of inquiry by examining the role of mass labour in the design and construction of public works in former African territories under Portuguese rule.[17] Earlier projects, particularly *Os Gabinetes Coloniais de Urbanização* (from 2009 onwards), also coordinated by Milheiro, had already established a methodological approach that combined the historiography of architectural institutions with archival inventory, cataloguing and a structured analysis of these records (urban plans, public facilities, infrastructures and housing).

17. "ERC-ArchLabour – Architecture, Colonialism and Labour. The role and legacy of mass labour in the design, planning and construction of Public Works in former African territories under Portuguese colonial rule," ISCTE – CiênciaIUL, https://ciencia.iscte-iul.pt/projects/architecture-colonialism-and-labour-the-role-and-legacy-of-mass-labour-in-the-design-planning-and/2050.

1.3. The archive as a method: the archival database to colonial public works

The PT/AHU/ID-OP finding aid effectively orients the researcher across a web of producers and document types. Covering material from the 1830s to the late twentieth century, it captures the day-to-day administrative exchanges that concern projects, contracts, budgets, materials and labour arrangements. As a register, it operates as an index to the actions and decisions of the bodies involved, offering a first step toward reconstructing institutional workflows between Lisbon and the overseas territories.

Beyond the Public Works finding aid itself, AHU's wider holdings contain adjacent documentation essential for labour-centred analyses. Records on indigenous labour in the Ministry of the Overseas archival fonds (*Ministério do Ultramar*, MU), for instance, allow labour regimes to be triangulated against the physical execution of public works. Additional material is preserved in the sub-fonds of the Superior Inspection of Overseas Administration (1930–1980),[18] which includes correspondence on forced labour allegations, recruitment and oversight, evidence directly relevant to the labour-centred questions now pursued by ArchLabour. Particularly significant are the reports produced by the Curators of Indigenous Affairs in the 'overseas provinces', which incorporate assessments and opinions from the Superior Inspection of Colonial Development and the Superior Inspection of Indigenous Affairs. These records constitute key sources for analysing labour conditions within public works programmes.[19]

Historical research depends on access to historical sources. In this sense, the trajectory outlined above suggests that one of the broader contributions of the A+I collective research programme – and of the integration of the Public Works finding aid into AHU's descriptive ecosystem – has been to highlight the extent to which metropolitan archives shape what can be known about colonial governance. While post-independence national archives hold substantial local documentation, the AHU retains the Lisbon-centred administrative record that captures policy intent and resource allocation at the scale of the empire. The AHU role has been further supported through partnerships with former Portuguese colonies, most recently with Cape Verde, where digital images

18. "Inspeção Superior de Administração Ultramarina (ISAU) archival sub-fonds," reference code PT/AHU/MU-ISAU.
19. "ISAU Curator's reports archival series," reference code PT/AHU/MU-ISAU/022.

of records from the Overseas Council (1602–1834)[20] were made available, highlighting the contemporary relevance of these holdings for governance, heritage, and technical decision-making.

Despite these advances, challenges persist. First, heterogeneity: public works documentation is scattered across ministerial entities (SEMU/MU), directorates, and specialised councils, often with incomplete series or mixed records. Second, digitisation remains selective; description precedes imaging, meaning that researchers must still rely on reading-room consultation for many items, albeit now with more precise guidance. Third, contextual metadata varies in depth. While PT/AHU/ID-OP improved access, further series-level and unit-level enrichment (such as indexing contractors and materials or geocoding of worksites) would substantially enhance computational analysis and cross-archive interoperability.

Sustained investment in finding aids and selective digitisation is therefore essential, particularly given the archive's transnational constituency. Further progress will depend on continued cooperation across institutions. The ArchLabour project will likely operationalise PT/AHU/ID-OP as a primary evidence base while extending inquiry to site histories, workforce biographies and material flows. There is scope for integrating this instrument with GIS and network analysis, aligning archival references (e.g., OP codes) with geographies of construction and transport onsite.

The consolidation of descriptive and interpretive tools at AHU thus forms the metropolitan anchor of this research programme. The next section shifts focus to Cabo Verde, where local archival materials enable a multi-scalar analysis of colonial public works.

2. Locating colonial public works and labour: fonds and records at the Cabo Verde National Archives

While the AHU preserves, in general, the metropolitan scale of colonial administration,[21] the IANCV holds significant documentary strata that allow us to observe how colonial governance was enacted, negotiated, or contested in its local and practical implementation, including traces of local agency within administrative[22] and urban processes.[23] Created in 1988 and now responsible for preserving both the colonial and national administrative and broader historical memories of the archipelago,[24] the IANCV safeguards a heterogeneous body of record sets that reflect relations with metropolitan bodies, the day-to-day functioning of local government, and its material execution, notably the implementation of public works and documentation relating to their technicians and workers across the islands.[25] Although many of these records lack systematic classification and cataloguing, or are still undergoing archival organisation, they provide indispensable insight into the material, social, and institutional realities of colonial administration in Cabo Verde.

2.1. A fragmented but indispensable archival landscape

The IANCV's holdings reflect decades of uneven preservation, institutional discontinuities, and losses through damage and destruction.[26] The archival

20. "Cabo Verde" archival Series from the Conselho Ultramarino, reference code PT/AHU/CU/024.
21. Gautier Garnier, "Arquivos," 143–64.
22. Odair Barros-Varela, "A emergência do Estado colonial/moderno em Cabo Verde: notas sobre a administração da justiça local (1460–1974)," in *Estudos em Comemoração do X Aniversário do ISCJS – Dinâmicas Sociológicas, Estado e Direito* (ISCJS, 2017): 74–100.
23. Fernando de Jesus Monteiro dos Reis Pires, "Há vila além da costa. Urbanidade(s) em Cabo Verde no século XIX" (PhD diss., University of Coimbra, 2017).
24. Under the designation Arquivo Histórico Nacional, which changed over time (ANCV, "Arquivo Nacional de Cabo Verde: 30 anos a preservar e a disseminar os acervos coloniais e nacionais," *Encontro dos Arquivos Históricos e Bibliotecas Nacionais da CPLP*, May 4, 2018, https://esct.cplp.org/media/5wkdype4/arquivo-nacional-cabo-verde.pdf; Euclides Jorge Varela da Silva, "O património arquivístico cabo--verdiano: estado actual da questão" (BA diss., University of Cabo Verde, 2009), 22).
25. The creation of the IANCV must be situated within a longer history marked by the failed 1958 project to establish an *Arquivo Geral da Província*. Although the law envisaged a central repository to gather dispersed public and private documentation across the islands, the project was never implemented, largely due to the lack of qualified personnel and the limited financial resources of the province. In the absence of such an institution, a significant portion of the documentation produced in Cabo Verde should be sent to Portugal in accordance with legislation issued by the MU, which required that closed processes of more than twenty years and of historical interest be transferred to the AHU. Despite this mandate, substantial documentation remained in Cabo Verde, and after 1975 some of it was destroyed (Silva, "O património," 19–20).
26. Silva, "O património," 20.

ecology of Cabo Verde[27] remains distinct from that of Lisbon:[28] less centralised, more fragmented, shaped by often precarious local documentary-conservation practices, and in most cases more directly tied to the lived experience of colonial governance. This fragmentation requires a multi-fonds approach, drawing together dispersed administrative strata to reconstruct the implementation of public works and labour across the islands.

Preliminary research conducted at the IANCV shows that documentation relating to public works and labour is dispersed across several major fonds,[29] most notably the *Ministério de Infraestruturas e Transportes* (MIT)[30] and the *Instituto do Trabalho, Providência e Ação Social* (ITPAS).[31] The *Secretaria Geral do Governo* (SGG),[32] the *Repartição Provincial dos Serviços de Administração Civil* (RPSAC),[33] the municipal councils and administrations fonds, and the customs services, together, also contribute to the core archival strata through which the material implementation of public works and labour across the islands can be reconstructed.

Across these fonds, alongside architectural project files (including plans, drawings, and descriptive reports) and general instructions, the most significant records for analysing the execution of public works include worksite diaries (*diários de obra*), payrolls (*folhas de pagamento*, often referred to as *jornais*), and invoices for materials. These documents make it possible to connect technical execution with its human and logistical dimensions, providing tangible data on workforce composition and the provenance of supplies. Complementing these are minutes of municipal council meetings (*atas de vereação camarária*) and extensive correspondence tracing the circulation of orders, the negotiation of resources, and, in some cases, social and housing surveys carried out in the field, which document living conditions, settlement patterns, and the pressures shaping urban expansion.[34] Individual files and contracts further document recruitment conditions and technical specialisations of workers. Taken together, these records illuminate the micro-scale of construction processes: the allocation of materials, the recruitment and daily organisation of workers, the management of local budgets, and the everyday frictions between metropolitan directives and local realities, including occasional labour disputes.

2.2. Understanding major fonds and collections for studying public works and labour

The MIT fonds is central for the study of public works in the archipelago. It remains without a systematic archival classification. Access to information relies entirely on thousands of handwritten catalogue sheets, stored in thematically assembled boxes such as *Edifícios Públicos* (Public Buildings) or *Portos* (Ports). Research is hindered by the repetition of subjects, the presence of "Miscellaneous" boxes,[35] and the frequent displacement of sheets between units due to decades of user handling. These conditions underscore both the richness of the fonds and the urgent need for a comprehensive archival classification to stabilise its internal structure, as well as the informatisation of its catalogue to make its research potential fully accessible.

The documentation incorporated into the MIT fonds originates from a wide range of colonial and post-independence technical bodies responsible for public works. These include the *Brigada Técnica de Estudos e Trabalhos de Hidráulica* (active between 1948 and 1960) and the brigades that succeeded it;[36] the *Brigada de Estudos e Construção de Estradas*;[37] the *Repartição Provincial dos Serviços de Obras Públicas, Agrimensura e Cadastro* (RPSOPAC); the *Repartição Provincial dos Serviços de Obras Públicas e Transportes* (RPSOPT), among others. This fonds also preserves documentation relating to major infrastructures such as the Gil Eanes and Adriano Moreira lyceums, Sal Airport or water supply systems.

27. On the archive as a relational or dynamic system, see, among others: Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, and Graeme Reid, "Introduction," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh (Springer Science+Business Media, 2002), 7–17.
28. Some documentation was sent from the colonies to Lisbon, although this transfer involved selective curation, the removal of local administrative routines, and a reorientation towards political and administrative control (Garnier, "Arquivos"; Silva, "O património," 20).
29. The findings presented here draw on an archival survey mission at the IANCV carried out by Filipa Lopes in October 2025.
30. In English, Ministry of Infrastructures and Transports.
31. In English, Institute of Labour, Welfare and Social Action.
32. In English, General Secretariat of the Government.
33. In English, Provincial Office of Civil Administration Services.
34. Some of these surveys derive from the methodological innovations introduced by Maria Emília Caria, who, as shown by Milheiro, Tormenta Pinto and Vieira de Almeida, combined sample-based habitability enquiries with aerial photography to diagnose settlement patterns and informal growth in Praia and Mindelo (Ana Vaz Milheiro, "Maria Emília Caria, uma urbanista colonial no território da sede e da fome (1962–1975)," in A*tas do 5.º CIHEL – Congresso Internacional da Habitação no Espaço Lusófono* (Lisboa, 2024); Paulo Tormenta Pinto and Rogério Vieira de Almeida, "Territorial development in the Cape Verde archipelago under the Estado Novo dictatorship (1953–1974)," *Planning Perspectives* 30, no. 4 (2015): 597–623.
35. Catalogue sheets found in boxes labelled Diversos (Miscellaneous) have likewise been shown to contain essential information on public works, underscoring the centrality of this fonds.
36. Portugal, MU, Portaria n.º 18000, 13 October 1960, *Diário do Governo*, I Série, no. 238.
37. Originally created in 1959, it was integrated in 1964 into the RPSOPAC (Portugal, Ministério do Ultramar, Portaria n.º 20377, 18 February 1964, *Diário do Governo*, I Série, no. 41).
38. Silva, "O património," 29. Silva designates the fonds as Ministério das Obras Públicas, the colonial-period administrative structure that preceded the post-independence Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport (MIT).

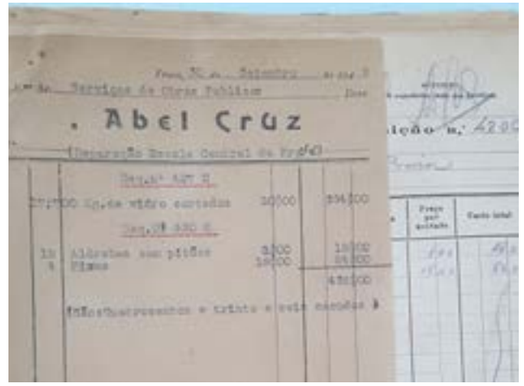


Figure 3. Invoices for the purchase of materials for the public works project to repair the Central School of Praia, 1948. IANCV, MIT, cx. 1316. Courtesy of the IANCV.

The heterogeneity of these materials reflects the successive reorganisations of the province's technical colonial-period documentation in the MIT fonds is the administrative continuity that may have characterised the transition after 1975. Rather than having been retrospectively "collected", these materials may have been retained by the post-1975 technical services that appear to have inherited the functions, personnel, and ongoing projects of their colonial predecessors. This would probably have helped account for the preservation of existing technical files (plans, measurements, project dossiers and infrastructure records), which remained operationally useful for maintaining or completing works already underway. These materials were incorporated into the National Archives at a later stage, and their documentation extends into the 1990s.[38]

services responsible for the planning and execution of major infrastructure works in Cabo Verde. Unfortunately, the institutional history, administrative succession and archival production of the bodies represented in the MIT fonds still lack systematic study.[39]

If the MIT fonds illuminates the technical and infrastructural dimensions of public works, the ITPAS fonds provides the corresponding labour and social strata. Covering the period 1924–1986,[40] the ITPAS fonds originates in the long institutional evolution of labour oversight in the archipelago and is closely tied to the *Curadoria Geral dos Serviçais e Colonos*,[41] created in 1878. These materials that were inherited by the ITPAS upon its formal establishment in 1962.[42] As with the MIT fonds, the presence of colonial-period documentation is explained by administrative continuity after 1975: national services retained the functions, personnel, and operational files of their predecessors, maintaining individual dossiers, contract

39. Although the MIT fonds, where much of this documentation is now preserved, have not yet been the object of systematic archival or institutional study, aspects of the activity of the colonial technical services that produced these records have been examined in relation to specific missions, brigades, and planning instruments. Notable examples include the work of Tormenta Pinto and Vieira de Almeida on territorial development and technical missions in Cabo Verde, the curatorial research of Hugo Lopes, which highlights the activities and chronology of these brigades and repartições, and the study by Luís Pereira-Farinha on the organisation and evolution of road planning and engineering services in the archipelago (Pinto and Almeida, "Territorial"; Arquitetura Prometida: uma aproximação aos arquivos das Obras Públicas em Cabo Verde, curated by Hugo Lopes, itinerant exhibition, DARQ/University of Coimbra, Coimbra, 13–25 February 2025; Luís Miguel Pereira Farinha, "O Plano Rodoviário de Cabo Verde de 1962. Génese e Evolução," *Revista Portuguesa de História*, no. 46 (2015): 327–46).
40. This fonds is supported by a numerical repertory: Instituto do Arquivo Histórico Nacional (IAHN), ed., *Repertório Numérico Simples do Fundo Arquivístico Instituto do Trabalho, Previdência e Acção Social* (1924–1986) (IAHN, 2004). The classification up to the series and sub-series levels has been transferred to IANCV's AtoM.
41. In English, General Curatorship of Servants and Settlers.
42. Cláudia Correia, "Parte I: Historial," in R*epertório Numérico Simples do Fundo Arquivístico Instituto do Trabalho, Previdência e Acção Social* (1924–1986) (IAHN, 2004), 5–38.

registers, payroll sheets, and other records essential for managing pensions, labour rights, and social protection during the transition to sovereign administration.

The heterogeneity of the ITPAS fonds, whose sections range from trade unionism and public assistance to technical construction and maritime labour, reflects successive reorganisations of labour governance and the accumulation of documentation from multiple administrative bodies. Beyond its institutional value, the fonds is central for reconstructing the human and social dimensions of work in Cabo Verde. It preserves evidence of workers' agency and resistance through complaints, disciplinary cases, and labour disputes, which illuminate tensions between labourers and employers. It also documents processes of professionalisation, including classification juries for skilled trades and detailed salary tables,[43] as well as the role of the state in regulating migration, child labour, workplace accidents, and conditions of employment.

Taken together, these materials provide an indispensable counterpart to the technical records of public works, offering a comprehensive view of how labour was recruited, controlled, remunerated, and protected across the colonial period and the early decades of independence.

In addition to the MIT and the ITPAS fonds, the SGG fonds constitutes another major archival resource and is the largest and oldest collection preserved at the IANCV.[44] It serves as an indispensable nucleus for the study of public works in Cabo Verde, as it concentrated the administrative correspondence that linked the local, provincial, and metropolitan levels of the colonial administration. As the central office of registration, information and dispatch for the colonial administration, the SGG functioned as the obligatory conduit for all matters requiring the Governor-General's attention. This administrative position explains the organic integration of municipal and public works documentation into the SGG. By hierarchical mandate, municipal councils and council administrations (*Administrações de Concelho*) sent

43. For example, the appointment of juries for the classification of workers (carpenters, masons and painters) in IANCV, ITPAS, cx. 67, no. 19.
44. This fond has two archival finding aids: IAHN, ed., *Repertório Numérico Simples do Fundo Arquivístico da Secretaria-Geral do Governo* (Documentos avulsos), 1803–1927 (Praia: IAHN, 1994); IAHN, ed., *Repertório Numérico Simples do Fundo da Secretaria-Geral do Governo* (Livros de Registo, 1674–1954) (IAHN, 1997). The classification of this fond's handwritten documentation, up to the series level and in some cases down to the item level (some of which have been digitised), is available in IANCV's AtoM.

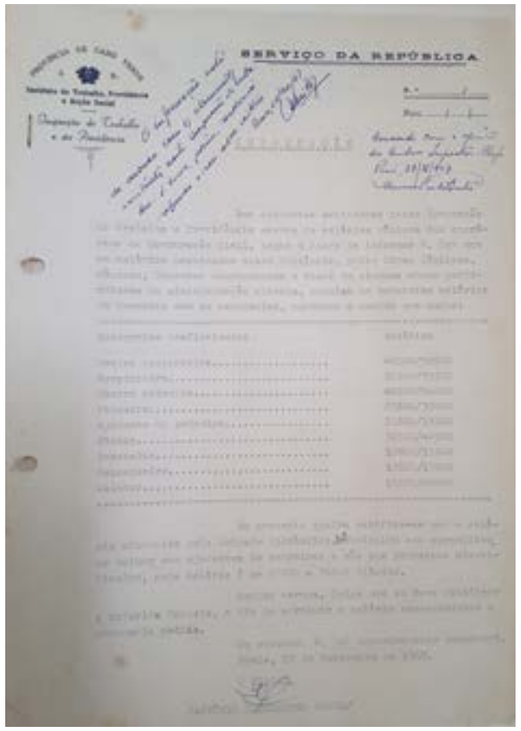


Figure 4. Information sent by ITPAS on the wages paid to classified masons in answer to the request for masons submitted by BECOH for work in Ribeira do Pico de Antónia, 1967. IANCV, ITPAS, cx. 185, no. 14. Courtesy of the IANCV.

to the SGG minutes of municipal council meetings, reports, budgets and requests for authorisation concerning street alignments, expropriations or minor urban interventions, while the Public Works Directorate submitted plans, measurements and technical opinions that required the Governor-General's approval. This systematic circulation produced a heterogeneous archival sedimentation in which Sub-section A3 preserves local-government records from across the archipelago, while Section J contains technical files of the Public Works Directorate between 1858 and 1926, including unpublished project drawings, descriptive reports and strategic correspondence.[45]

The significance of these materials lies in their ability to reveal the "internal face" of colonial administration, as Fernando Pires argues,[46] because they contain details of practical execution and local agency that

45. Arquivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), ed., *Repertório Numérico Simples do Fundo Arquivístico da Secretaria-Geral do Governo* (Documentos avulsos), 1803–1927 (AHN, 1994), 91–92, 96.
46. Pires, "Há vila além da costa," 34.

metropolitan archives in Lisbon often omit.[47] Drawing on minutes of municipal council meetings preserved at the IANCV, Pires demonstrates how this internal dimension becomes particularly visible in Brava, where local authorities shaped key urban interventions, from the 1877 alignment conflict in Rua de Santana to the ambitious 1920 restructuring plan conceived by the Municipal Commission (*Comissão Municipal*).[48] These records show how the emergence of an urban condition was negotiated locally through disputes over street alignments, the imposition of sanitary norms, and resistance to abandoning rural spatial habits, revealing a project generated "from within", debated and financed locally, and carried out collectively over successive municipal legislatures.[49] As Joana Brites has shown for Mozambique, such local agency also manifested in bureaucratic strategies that fragmented large public works budgets into smaller parcels to avoid metropolitan scrutiny and retain decision-making at the provincial level.[50]

Whereas central planning tended to remain abstract, some SGG documents capture the frictions of implementation on the ground and are indispensable for reconstructing the micro-scale of construction processes and understanding how Cabo Verde's built environment was materially produced, negotiated and contested from within, integrating the voices of residents and local institutions into architectural historiography. Historically, the SGG also concentrated labour-related documentation because bodies such as the *Curadoria Geral dos Serviçais e Colonos* (whose archival legacy, as noted above, later fed into the ITPAS) initially operated within its structure. All registration, information and contract services, including those concerning compelled labour and colonisation, were centralised under the Governor's jurisdiction, leading the SGG to accumulate records of services that only later gained autonomy or were absorbed into specialised ministries after independence.

The institutional trajectory of the SGG continued after 1926 with the creation of the RPSAC, which replaced the SGG and preserved traces of routine governance and civil-service operations until 1975[51]. As the successor body responsible for registration, information and dispatch, the RPSAC maintained the same documentary functions, making its fonds fundamental for reconstructing administrative networks, personnel structures and the circulation of decisions across the archipelago during the late colonial period.[52]

Beyond these central-government fonds, the IANCV also incorporates records from several municipal councils and former council administrations

47. Yet, as Milheiro has shown through the work of Maria Emília Caria, certain metropolitan technicians acted as intermediaries who documented this internal face through detailed housing surveys and photographic campaigns, as we have already referred to, bringing local realities back into central planning (Milheiro, "Maria Emília Caria"; Ana Vaz Milheiro, "Shaping the colonial islands: A woman architect in Cape Verde during the liberation wars (1961-1974)," unpublished manuscript submitted to journal review, kindly provided by the author, to whom we are grateful).
48. Pires, "Há vila além da costa," 221–314, 382.
49. Pires, "Há vila além da costa," 375–384.
50. Joana Brites, "Colonialismo, modernismo e agência: burocracia e obras públicas no colonialismo tardio português," *Ler História*, no. 85 (2024): 119–142.
51. IAHN, ed., *Repertório Numérico Simples do Fundo Arquivístico da Repartição Provincial dos Serviços de Administração Civil (1907–1979)* (IANCV, 2004).
52. Cláudia Correia, "Parte I - Historial," in *Repertório Numérico Simples do Fundo Arquivístico da Repartição Provincial dos Serviços de Administração Civil (1907–1979)* (IANCV, 2004), 5–54.

Figure 5. Part of a salary sheet issued to destitute individuals employed on public works projects during the preparation of a main road on the island of Santiago, 1927. IANCV, ACP, cx. 75. Courtesy of the IANCV.

(*administrações de concelho*),[53] which were originally preserved locally before being transferred to the national archives.[54] Together with the municipal materials found in the SGG and the RPSAC, these records are essential for understanding how public works were implemented on the ground, how labour was mobilised, and where forms of local agency emerged. The fonds of the *Administração do Concelho da Praia* (ACP)[55] are particularly revealing. It has a section devoted to public works, but other sections may contain information related to public work labour. For example, in a section devoted to "Work and personnel" are included salary sheets for individuals classified as "*indigentes*" (destitutes) and employed on road works between 1927 and 1932.[56] These records document how road works functioned as mechanisms of survival during periods of famine and scarcity. Such materials expose the social dimension of public works, showing how infrastructure building sometimes intersected with poverty relief, coerced labour and municipal welfare strategies.

Other fonds complement these themes. The customs services maintain correspondence and other records that shed light on port infrastructures, customs buildings and the importation of construction materials, providing insight into the logistical and fiscal frameworks that supported public works programs.[57] The Museum of Special Documentary Collections holds photographs and postcards that offer iconographic evidence of buildings and infrastructures. Although less extensive than the textual fonds, these visual materials can significantly aid in the examination of the material and spatial landscapes of Cabo Verde's built environment. Additional fonds held at the IANCV, including those of the regional courts, notarial offices and the civil-registration services, have not yet been surveyed.[58] Although they contain valuable documentation for social, legal and family history, their relevance to the study of labour mobilisation and public works administration is more limited. They may nonetheless provide sporadic insights, particularly regarding expropriations, private contracts, or litigation associated with construction activities.

2.3. Methodological Implications

The heterogeneity and uneven organisation of fonds such as the MIT, combined with the dispersion of relevant material across multiple fonds and the lack of detailed, item-level or fully digitised descriptions, create a structurally fragmented access to documentation relating to public works. In parallel, the lack of comprehensive, systematic studies on the institutional history, internal organisation and administrative succession of the technical services in charge of public works during the colonial period – and on the archival custody of the records they produced – is particularly acute in the MIT fonds, which lacks the repertories available for other major archival holdings. This gap limits our ability to understand how these services were structured, how they changed and how their documentation was produced, circulated and preserved. This situation reinforces the methodological significance of archival surveys and provenance reconstruction, to which initiatives like ArchLabour could contribute by cross-referencing metropolitan and local archives to trace the circulation of decisions, the implementation of infrastructures, and the organisation and mobilisation of labour across the archipelago through specific case studies.

At the same time, this situation underscores both the methodological challenges and the interpretive potential inherent in connecting these two archival worlds. Some of the records present in the above-mentioned fonds provide access to what Pires terms the "inner face"[59] of public works:

53. Many are still undergoing archival treatment or have yet to be treated, but their research potential is considerable, especially if they have preserved material comparable to that found in the Administração do Concelho da Praia (ACP) fonds. Some of these fonds have only provisional classifications and lack the corresponding handwritten catalogue sheets, while others do include such sheets, and several remain in indeterminate or incomplete stages of processing. By contrast, the documentation of the ACP, covering the period 1868–1975, is classified and described in a printed numerical index and in the IANCV's AtoM platform down to the series and sub-series levels.
54. Silva, "O património," 30, 32–33.
55. In English, Administration of the Municipality of Praia.
56. AHN, ed., *Repertório Numérico Simples do Fundo Arquivístico da Administração do Concelho da Praia B1 (1868-1975)* (AHN, 1998), 149.
57. Maria José da Conceição Almeida, coord., *Repertório Numérico Simples do Fundo Arquivístico da Repartição Provincial dos Serviços Aduaneiros (1820–1983)* (Arquivo Nacional de Cabo Verde, 2019), which includes a historical overview by José Silva Évora, "História administrativa," 10–16.
58. Some of these are described in the IANCV's AtoM platform: https://atom.arquivonacional.cv/. For a full list of fonds available for consultation, see the IANCV guide *Fundos arquivísticos disponíveis para consulta* (consulted on site, 2025). See also Silva, "O património," 28–30. The holdings of sectoral state companies such as *EMEC – Empresa Estatal de Construção* should also be examined in future research to determine whether they inherited any colonial-period documentation relating to public works.
59. Pires, "Há vila além da costa," 34.

site-level decisions, labour arrangements, technical improvisations and the everyday functioning of provincial services. When read alongside the PT/AHU/ID-OP finding aid and other records present at AHU, these materials enable a multi-scalar reconstruction of administrative networks and labour that would be difficult to reconstruct from either archive on its own. Taken together, these methodological considerations inform the preliminary, exploratory approach adopted in the following section, where examples drawn from both archives illustrate the potential of cross-referenced readings.

3. Cross-referencing metropolitan and local archives: methodological approaches, challenges and interpretive potential

As proposed in this paper, cross-referencing operates not simply as a technical procedure but as an analytical instrument for reconstructing processes across different scales. A critical reading of these archival strata requires acknowledging that archives are historically produced and shaped by administrative priorities, classificatory regimes and asymmetries of power. As scholars in archival and historical studies have long argued, the gaps, silences and fragmentations that characterise any archival holdings result from selective preservation, bureaucratic reorganisation, uneven valuations and the descriptive choices made by archivists and institutions (what is described, how it is described and what is left undescribed).[60] Acknowledging this non-neutrality also helps explain the structural asymmetries between the AHU and the IANCV, which are shaped not only by past administrative regimes but also by uneven resources and contemporary archival practices.

3.1. Challenges of working across asymmetrical archival worlds

At the AHU, the PT/AHU/ID-OP, as discussed in the first section, is not an organic fonds but a finding aid created through the thematic, virtual aggregation of public works records originally dispersed across different departments. The limited study of these services, combined with the incomplete nature of the surviving documentation, makes it difficult to reconstruct the organic structures that originally produced these records. As Ana Canas notes, the institutional succession and custodial history of colonial technical services remain insufficiently studied, leaving gaps in how documentation was handled and reorganised on arrival in Lisbon. These rearrangements, together with a metropolitan practice of ordering records by process number and subject rather than by territory, produced a descriptive system defined by successive layers of administrative mediation rather than stable institutional structures.[61]

Beyond the documents catalogued in the *Obras Públicas* finding aid, relevant documentation is scattered across other AHU fonds, including the MU materials described on the Holos platform[62] (originating from the former IPAD),[63] which has not yet been integrated into DigitArq and remains only partially processed. This fragmentation, resulting from autonomous cataloguing initiatives and uneven integration, requires researchers to navigate different platforms and partially described fonds, combining thematic keywords with names of ministries, brigades, contractors, technicians and localities.

At the IANCV, the asymmetry is even starker: only a few fonds are described in AtoM, and mostly at the series or subseries level. Research therefore depends on printed repertories (when they exist, which also allow searches in the general indexes by theme, names and places) and thousands of handwritten catalogue sheets, making

60. See, among others: Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Terry Cook, "What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (1997): 17–63; Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (2002): 1–19; Jeannette A. Bastian, *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost Its Archives and Found Its History* (Libraries Unlimited, 2003); Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Duke University Press, 2005); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Society of American Archivists, 2007); Joseph Morsel, "Histoire, archives et documents. Anciens problèmes, nouvelles perspectives," in *Herencia cultural y archivos de familia en los archipiélagos de la Macaronesia*, ed. Juan Ramón Núñez Pestano, Maria de Lurdes Rosa, and Judit Gutiérrez de Armas (Instituto de Estudios Canarios, Instituto de Estudos Medievais, 2020), 109–131.
61. Ana Canas D. Martins, "Colonial Public Works archives: sources of questioning and creativity," in *Colonial and Post-Colonial Landscapes I: Architectures, Cities, Infrastructures in Africa. Coast to Coast researchers' book*, coord. Ana Vaz Milheiro (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte, 2025), 133–141.
62. Project for the inventory of the archives of the former MU, funded by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, coordinated by José Mattoso. http://arquivos.ministerioultramar.holos.pt/.
63. *Instituto Português de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento*. In English, Portuguese Institute of Development Support.

systematic digital searching largely unfeasible and requiring time-consuming manual verification.

These structural differences mean that cross-referencing AHU and IANCV materials is not a matter of establishing direct correspondences between two parallel systems. It is an analytical reconstruction that must account for divergent modes of accumulation, description and preservation. A systematic research protocol is therefore essential. Researchers must define search terms (covering institutions, technical bodies, professions, infrastructures and geographic units) to navigate both the PT/AHU/ID-OP in the DigitArq platform and the other descriptions that lie outside it. Because documents relating to public works and labour circulate across ministries, municipalities, brigades, contractors and technical services, it becomes necessary to construct a research dataset capable of tracking them to refine searches and locate relevant documents.

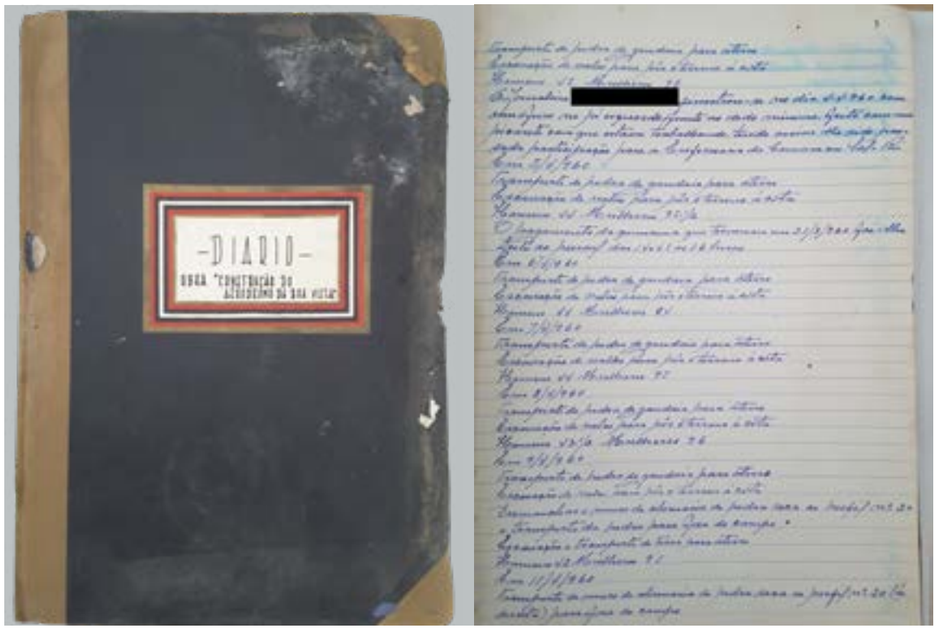
3.2. ArchLabour case study: airports and aerodromes

Airports, aerodromes and landing fields constructed in Cabo Verde between 1935 and 1975 constitute one of ArchLabour's selected case studies for exploring the methodological potential of cross-referencing metropolitan and local archives. The example is presented here in a preliminary, exploratory way to demonstrate how such triangulation can open new analytical paths. Conceived within highly centralised administrative circuits, these infrastructures were planned, budgeted and specified in Lisbon by bodies such as the *Direção-Geral de Obras Públicas e Comunicações* (DGOPC)[64] and, later, the *Direção-Geral de Aviação Civil* (DGAC),[65] with most of the surviving records now preserved at the AHU. Their implementation, however, depended on profoundly local dynamics: terrain adaptation, labour mobilisation, material shortages, municipal negotiations and the everyday problem-solving of provincial services. These dimensions survive only in the fragmented but indispensable documentation held at the IANCV, notably in the MIT and ITPAS fonds and in municipal records across different record sets. Although additional materials are likely to be dispersed across other repositories (including corporate, military and even private collections, as in the case of Sal airport)[66] such dispersion does not invalidate the exercise proposed here. On the contrary, it reinforces the argument for a multi-scalar reading.[67]

Methodologically, the research combined targeted work at AHU with manual inspection at IANCV. Initial keyword searches at AHU for "airport" and "aerodrome" returned few results; expanding them to other related terms (such as airfield or landing strip) and to actor-based terms (DGOPC, DGAC, brigade names, contractors, engineers) increased yields, although AHU material for Cabo Verde airports and landing strips remains modest, at least as far as what is currently described in the DigitArq and Holos platforms.

The documentation identified at AHU falls into three main categories: technical execution reports, long-term planning dossiers and administrative processes or DGAC synopses that coordinated metropolitan oversight. Among these materials, the 1961 report of the Cabo Verde Detachment of the *Brigada de Estudos de Aeródromos das Províncias Ultramarinas* (BEAPU)[68] deserves particular attention. It provides progress maps, technical assessments and a photographic record of works and of the men and women employed on the construction of the aerodromes or landing strips at São Nicolau, Maio, Boa Vista, Praia, and São Vicente.[69] Long-term planning is represented by the 1972 *Plano Director* for Sal airport, a comprehensive dossier produced by the DGAC that includes a descriptive memory and technical drawings.[70] An additional group of plans for Sal is associated with the 1945 *Missão Técnica*.[71] Complementing these materials are several DGAC synopsis files, which function as indexes of

64. In English, Directorate-General for Public Works and Communications.
65. In English, Directorate-General for Civil Aviation.
66. Elisa Pegorin, "The War for the air. Ilha do Sal airport, between Fascism and Estado Novo," *Histories of Postwar Architecture* 6, no. 13 (2023): 45; Jorge Vieira, *Aviação em Cabo Verde* (ASA – Aeroportos e Segurança Aérea, 2010), 13–15, 131–151.
67. See Elisiário Miranda's work on aviation infrastructures and modernist public works in Mozambique, which similarly highlights the entanglement of centralised planning, local constraints and dispersed documentary traces in late-colonial contexts. His analyses of Mozambican airports and modern infrastructural programmes (1951–1964) offer a useful comparative frame for understanding how transport infrastructures materialised state presence while generating fragmented archival footprints (Elisiário Miranda, "Mozambican Airports in the Colonial Era: A Critical and Historical Analysis," in *Colonial and Post-Colonial Landscapes I*, coord. Ana Vaz Milheiro (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte, 2025), 171–193).
68. In English, Brigade for the Study of Aerodromes in the Overseas Provinces.
69. *Relatório do destacamento de Cabo Verde da Brigada de Estudos de Aeródromos das Províncias Ultramarinas*, 1961 (PT/AHU/IPAD/MU/DGOPC/DSUH/1886/07501).
70. PT/AHU/IPAD/MU/DGOPC/DSUH/1886/07629.
71. PT/AHU/ID-OP/OP03127.



Figures 6 and 7. Cover and page from the work diary for the construction of the Boa Vista Island aerodrome, 1960. IANCV, MIT, cx. 2295 (relocated within the 'Airports and Aerodromes' boxes). Courtesy of the IANCV.

official correspondence and cover issues such as the operation of Achada Grande aerodrome, foreign airline use of Sal, radio-navigation equipment, fuel logistics and auxiliary infrastructures,[72] including the 1960 solar distillation project.[73] Additional files from the MU document housing allocations for technical staff[74] and procurement procedures for radio-electrical and signalling equipment,[75] among others. Despite their partial nature, these materials reveal how Lisbon articulated standards, budgets and infrastructural ambitions, and how it sought to coordinate provincial works through periodic summaries rather than continuous reporting.

At IANCV the work was entirely manual, requiring the systematic inspection of boxes and bundles across several fonds. The survey focused on MIT catalogue sheets, the indexes of numerical repertories, and data-collection sheets that summarised items from some municipal fonds. Relevant information was recorded in an Excel file to track references. In the MIT fonds, some boxes containing records on airports and aerodromes bring together most of the relevant material, but additional documentation on the same subject is dispersed across other MIT boxes. The documentation consulted within this fond related to airports and aerodromes can be grouped into four main sets that reveal operational dimensions absent from AHU.

The first comprises technical planning and site-implementation files, including expropriation processes, project drawings and descriptive reports for aerodromes on Santiago, Boa Vista and Santo Antão, which show how metropolitan designs were adapted to local terrain, materials and constraints. For example, one process includes documentation from 1935 to 1946 detailing the public-utility expropriation of land at Achada Grande for the installation of Praia airport.[76]

A second group contains regulatory material (circulars on the classification of aerodromes and the application of Provisional International Civil Aviation Organization standards) linking international norms, colonial directives and insular realities. For instance, brigade reports classified Sal as a Class A International Airport due to its strategic position and terrain, while Achada Grande on Santiago was designated a Regional Airport, despite initially lacking levelling and equipment.[77] This illustrates the administrative effort to reconcile international technical categories with the precarious state of local infrastructure.

72. PT/AHU/ID-OP/OP13565.
73. PT/AHU/ID-OP/OP07536.
74. PT/AHU/ID-OP/OP08712.
75. PT/AHU/ID-OP/OP13585.
76. IANCV, MIT, cx. 458 (relocated within the 'Airports and Aerodromes' boxes).
77. IANCV, MIT, cx. 169 (relocated within the 'Airports and Aerodromes' boxes).

A third, and particularly revealing, set consists of work diaries, daily registers and monthly reports documenting manual labour, logistical difficulties and the organisation of work brigades, highlighting the reliance on local labour and the improvisation required to sustain progress. For example, the 1960 work diaries from Boa Vista describe tasks such as gathering stone and clearing the construction site, and they also record incidents such as workers injured by pickaxes.[78] Monthly reports from the same site note cases in which construction had to be temporarily suspended so that labourers could be diverted to combat locust infestations.[79]

Finally, administrative and financial records (payrolls, supplier invoices and travel authorisations) allow the reconstruction of workforce composition, labour mobility and the material economy of construction, alongside cost estimates and later tender processes. For example, the payrolls for the works at Mosteiros' landing strip on Fogo (1958–59) list a large number of workers, identifying each by name and occupational category (such as foremen, masons, blacksmiths, carpenters and drivers).[80] The same occurs in the construction of the aerodrome at Campo da Preguiça, on São Nicolau Island (1962), where workers are likewise identified by name and occupational category and, in a statistical summary, clearly distinguished between men, women and "boys" within the labour force.[81]

78. IANCV, MIT, cx. 2295 (relocated within the 'Airports and Aerodromes' boxes).
79. IANCV, MIT, cx. 2291 (relocated within the 'Airports and Aerodromes' boxes).

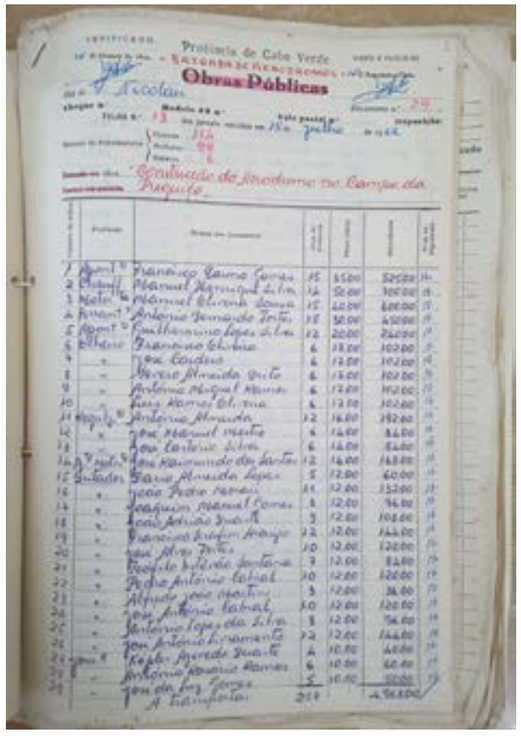


Figure 8. Payroll sheet from the construction of an aerodrome at Campo da Preguiça, on São Nicolau Island, 1962. IANCV, MIT, cx. 759 (relocated within the 'Airports and Aerodromes' boxes). Courtesy of the IANCV.

Additional material from the ITPAS fonds further illustrates the operational and labour-related dimensions of airport construction. These include individual complaints and administrative claims, such as the 1964 grievance filed by a driver employed by *Construtora Tâmega, Lda*. during the runway-extension works at Sal airport.[82]

These records reveal the everyday, labour-intensive and logistically fragile nature of airport construction in Cabo Verde, an operational layer largely absent from metropolitan files. At a micro-scale, they capture details that metropolitan summaries systematically efface: the presence of women and boys in work brigades, shortages of basic tools, damage to materials during maritime transport and reliance on local suppliers. The 1961 report stands as a hinge between these two archival landscapes, translating local practice into a format legible to Lisbon through operational tables, workforce totals and photographic evidence. While AHU foregrounds metropolitan rationalities – centralised budgeting, ICAO-oriented standards and administrative oversight – the IANCV holdings expose the contingent, adaptive and materially constrained processes through which the archipelago's aerial infrastructure was built.[83]

3.3. Synthesis: potential and limits

For the purposes of this working paper, the most productive approach is methodological and demonstrative: to outline the search protocol and a set of related search terms, to present a small set of illustrative materials from AHU and IANCV, and to indicate the analytical possibilities opened by this dual documentation, while leaving fuller interpretive readings for subsequent case studies. Further work in the fonds identified above will likely expand the corpus and sharpen the local dimensions of airport construction.

Although additional records on airports, aerodromes and landing strips are likely dispersed across corporate, military and private archives, such dispersion does not undermine the analytical focus adopted here. Instead, it underscores the structural fragmentation of colonial public works documentation and reinforces the value of cross-referencing metropolitan holdings with the operational strata preserved at the IANCV (and, where relevant, with municipal or sectoral archives). The aim of this section is to demonstrate, through selected examples, the interpretive potential of connecting these archival layers and the methodological insights that emerge from this preliminary, still-developing cross-referencing exercise.

80. IANCV, MIT, cx. 2060 (relocated within the 'Airports and Aerodromes' boxes).
81. IANCV, MIT, cx. 759 (relocated within the 'Airports and Aerodromes' boxes).
82. IANCV, ITPAS, cx. 67.
83. Vieira, *Aviação*.

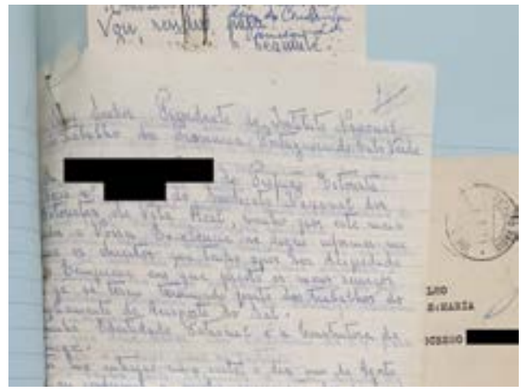


Figure 9. Complaint records filed by a driver of *Construtora Tâmega, Lda.*, who took part in the expansion works of Sal airport, 1964. IANCV, ITPAS, cx. 67. Courtesy of the IANCV.

Conclusion

The PT/AHU/ID-OP finding aid has significantly improved access to metropolitan records relating to colonial public works, making visible a dispersed body of technical, administrative and labour documentation. By consolidating descriptions across multiple producers, it offers a structured entry point into the metropolitan dimension of public works administration and the rationalities that shaped planning, budgeting and oversight. Despite challenges such as heterogeneous provenance, uneven description and selective digitisation, it provides a methodological foundation for reconstructing institutional workflows and for connecting these materials with local archival strata. This work has been strengthened by the sustained research efforts coordinated by Milheiro, which have contributed decisively to the visibility, organisation and scholarly use of these records.

The analysis developed in this paper shows that only a parallel reading of metropolitan and local archives makes it possible to apprehend the multi-scalar dynamics of colonial public works. The documentation preserved at the IANCV (fragmented, heterogeneous and shaped by colonial and post-independence arrangements) records the everyday textures of execution: labour mobilisation, improvisation, negotiation and the small adjustments through which projects advanced or stalled. The AHU, by contrast, retains the administrative rationalities that framed these works from a distance: planning cycles, budgetary decisions, technical prescriptions and the bureaucratic language through which the empire imagined its infrastructures. Cross-referencing these partial and asymmetrical archival worlds does not eliminate their gaps, but it enables a more grounded reconstruction of infrastructural processes and labour experiences than either archive, taken alone, can sustain.

What has been outlined here is a preliminary methodological contribution to the ArchLabour project, demonstrating how metropolitan and local archives can be read together to reconstruct the administrative, technical and labour dimensions embedded in colonial public works processes. Rather than offering a comprehensive labour history, it identifies the archival foundations that make such histories possible. As descriptive work progresses and local holdings are further surveyed and systematised, new opportunities will emerge for writing multi-scalar accounts of infrastructures and the forms of labour that sustained them. The approach sketched in this paper thus opens a line of inquiry that links archival reconstruction with the material and labour histories of colonial public works administration, and with broader efforts to understand how these infrastructures were conceived, negotiated and enacted across different archival scales.

Acknowledgements

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Director of Research and Documentary Communication at the IANCV, Dr. Maria da Luz Pires, and to the Director of the Museum of Special Documents, Dr. Ana Mafalda Gomes Pereira Moreira, as well as to the entire technical staff and the reading-room team of the Archive, for the generous support provided during Filipa Lopes's research stay at the IANCV. We are also grateful to the President of the IANCV, Dr. José Maria Borges Tavares, and to the AHU, in the person of its Director, Professor Ana Canas, for granting permission to reproduce the images included in this working paper. A special word of thanks goes to Fernando Pires, who kindly devoted part of his time to discussing with us the central argument of this paper.