Share That Knowledge!

Finding Strategies for Passing on Knowledge Across Generations of Archivists

**A joint initiative of
the Austrian Film Museum and the Slovenian Cinematheque**

Partner archives

Akademski Filmski Centar - Dom kulture Studentski grad (Serbia), BFI National Archive (UK), Cinémathèque québécoise (Canada), Cineteca Nacional de México (Mexico), Imperial War Museum (UK), J.H. Kwabena Nketia Archives University of Ghana (Ghana), Národní filmový archiv (Czech Republic), National Film and Sound Archive (Australia), National Film Archive of India (India), Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision (The Netherlands) and UCLA library audiovisual preservation studio (USA)

**This project is endorsed and supported by
The International Federation of Film Archives**

Why a research project on knowledge transfer in the field of audiovisual archiving?

The passing on of knowledge across generations of archivists within an institution can be seen as an essential part of the preservation of audiovisual heritage. Sustaining knowledge about a collection belongs to an institution's preservation tasks. Archivists have knowledge about the history of a collection, its organization, the physical makeup, and its subject matter. While some areas of knowledge are easily recognizable, it is the tacit or intangible knowledge an archivist holds which cannot always be clearly expressed or written down. It is therefore much harder to pass on, as archivists often know more than they can tell (in line with Michael Polanyi's explanation of tacit knowing) particularly when it comes to predecessors with a long tenure at an institution.[1]

Within many archives there is a lack of continuity within knowledge transfer across generations, as it is not acknowledged and undertaken in a methodical manner. The main challenge lies in passing on the tacit forms of knowledge; knowledge that is personal in nature, is considered too sensitive to express, or comes so natural to someone that the value of the knowledge is not recognized. Challenges in knowledge transfer might be reinforced by other factors, such as organizational change, technological developments and a changing working culture in the context of audiovisual archiving. Institutions may have found their own individual methods of passing on knowledge, but these methods have not yet been articulated and shared through published research. Up until now, no attempt has been made to bring together professionals in order to engage in this crucial, yet largely unexplored topic.

Project plan

The project **Share That Knowledge!** brings together archive affiliates from thirteen AV archiving institutions (the above mentioned partnering institutions) who will collectively dive into this study. The working group was formed after the presentation of the project during the 2018 FIAF Congress. It consists of a wide variety of people of different generations, from various parts of the world and cultural backgrounds, working for small, large, government run or private collecting institutions. These archive affiliates will over the course of three years, from January 2019 until January 2022, conduct literature and field research to work towards **formulating a set of successful methods and strategies for passing on knowledge within audiovisual archives**. Karen F. Gracy (associate professor at the School of Information of Kent State University) participates as an advising researcher. We are open to and actively looking for collaboration with other FIAF archives during the course of this project.

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[1] Michael Polanyi. *The Tacit Dimension*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 4.

Objectives

1. **Conduct literature research and set up a theoretical framework for a qualitative research study of knowledge transfer**
2. **Explore the methods of knowledge transfer within audiovisual archives**
3. **Identify the challenges in transferring the expert knowledge of audiovisual archivists**
4. **Define the expert knowledge of audiovisual archivists**
5. **Formulate and disseminate successful strategies of knowledge transfer for audiovisual archives**

The final goal of the project is **to publish a methodology which can be used by audiovisual archives to effectively pass on this knowledge**.

Research methodology

The focus of the research will be on real-life examples; actual working practices within the field will be studied using methods of qualitative research, that will be based on an ethnographic approach, combined with grounded theory and action research. The research approach is largely inspired by the method of *'archival ethnography'* as defined by Karen F. Gracy.[2] The outcomes of the qualitative research that will be conducted in the audiovisual archives will form the theoretical foundation for developing concrete strategies to be integrated in the working practice. We will complement the in depth field research with qualitative data collected through surveys within the FIAF community.

Intended results and afterlife

The project aims at contributing to and helping professionals from the wider archival community, including those of different generations, positions in an archive, and most importantly, professionals working in institutions with limited resources and a lower profile. In order to reach a large number of professionals, the final report of the research and methods will be published in print and will be freely accessible via the project website, as well as the websites of institutions and overarching organizations supporting the project such as the Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (CCAAA) and the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF). The handbook will remain available online after the project is finished in 2022. Besides that, we aim at collaborating with training courses and master programmes for audiovisual archiving and the FIAF Training and Outreach Programme to see how the outcomes can be integrated with curricula and how prospective professionals can be reached. We also plan to present the outcomes through a dedicated symposium.

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[2] Karen F. Gracy, 'Documenting Communities of Practice: Making the Case for Archival Ethnography', *Archival Science,* no. 4 (2004), pp. 335–365