

UNESCO INSTRUMENT FOR THE SAFEGUARDING AND PRESERVATION OF THE AUDIOVISUAL HERITAGE: CCAAA ISSUES PAPER

The Coordinating Council of Audiovisual Archive Associations (CCAAA) proposes the establishment of new UNESCO instrument as a framework to encourage the preservation of audiovisual heritage.

Audiovisual media in all its formats – films, radio and television programs, audio and video recordings, ‘new media’ – are the documents most characteristic of the 20th and 21st centuries. Their cultural influence and informational content is immense, and rapidly increasing. Transcending language and cultural boundaries, appealing immediately to the eye and the ear, to the literate and illiterate alike, they have transformed society by becoming a permanent complement to the traditional written record. Their content cannot be reduced to written form, and its integrity is closely tied to the format of its carrier – be it film, magnetic or optical media.

Most audiovisual media are inherently fragile. Since they are not human-readable, both their survival and accessibility are also vulnerable to rapid technological change. Preservation needs to be guided by specialised skills and structures, supported by appropriate national legislation.

Much of the world’s audiovisual heritage has been irrevocably lost through neglect, destruction, decay and the lack of resources, skills, and structures, impoverishing the memory of mankind. Much more will be lost if stronger and concerted international action is lacking.

The context

The *Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images* was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 27 October 1980. A breakthrough at the time, it was developed largely in conjunction with FIAF (International Federation of Film Archives). The *Recommendation* was the first instrument to recognise the cultural necessity of preserving moving images, then primarily embodied in film and analogue videotape. It had wide effect as a reference point and statement of principles.

In the quarter century since, however, there has been vast technological and structural change in the audiovisual archiving field, including the emergence of digital media, and a broad recognition that the sound as well as the image heritage needs protection. These needs now go well beyond the provisions of the 1980 *Recommendation*.

Established in 2000, the CCAAA is the peak forum of the audiovisual archiving profession and represents the following associations, each of whom has formal relations with UNESCO:

- AMIA (Association of Moving Image Archivists)
- IASA (International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives)
- ICA (International Council on Archives)
- FIAF (International Federation of Film Archives)
- IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions)
- FIAT/ IFTA (International Federation of Television Archives)
- SEAPAVAA (South East Asia – Pacific Audiovisual Archive Association)

On behalf of its members, the CCAAA presents the following issues as a starting point for the drafting of a new instrument.

The issues

1 General assumptions and scope

In 1980, the *Recommendation* perceived moving images as a new and increasingly important form of expression and record. 25 years later, however, both moving images and sound recordings are no longer “new”, and that there is general public acceptance of the need for their preservation on equal terms with the older media. A new document should take that acceptance as a given.

The inherent fragility of the audiovisual media, its vulnerability to technological change, and hence the need for preservation to be guided by appropriately specialised skills and structures, needs to be specifically recognised.

The scope of the 1980 *Recommendation* is limited to moving images (with or without accompanying sounds). While an appropriate basis at the time, both UNESCO and the profession now recognise a much wider audiovisual heritage which includes the entire spectrum of moving images and recorded sounds in all their forms. A new instrument will reflect the fact that consciousness, as well as UNESCO terminology, has moved on considerably.

2 Definitions and terminology

The list of definitions in the *Recommendation* is brief and now out of date. A new instrument should comprehensively cover the whole audiovisual spectrum, and embrace professional concepts as well as physical formats and technical terminology. The opportunity should be taken to draw on relevant definitions standardised both by UNESCO and the various professional federations, especially those represented in the

CCAAA. Further, definitions and terminology should avoid being format- and time-specific, and inclusive of the widening range of audiovisual carriers and delivery methods, so they will not become dated as formats and methods continue to evolve.

For example, terms like *film*, *magnetic media*, *optical media*, *audiovisual heritage*, *recording*, *archival*, *analogue*, *digital*, *preservation*, *document*, *new media*, *content* and *carrier* will need to be defined. To illustrate, below are two sample definitions:

Archival materials are those intended to be kept so they may be available for future generations, regardless of their age at the time of acquisition (used by *Association of Moving Image Archivists*)

Preservation is the totality of the steps necessary to ensure the permanent accessibility – forever - of an audiovisual document with the maximum integrity (Derived from UNESCO publications *Memory of the World: General Guidelines to safeguard documentary heritage* and *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles*)

3 Technical change and audiovisual heritage

The *Recommendation* emphasises the physical terminology of film (for example in the “Definitions” section) as current in 1980. Since then, the proliferation of video and digital formats and the advent of the internet have had the unintended effect of actually narrowing the application and reducing the force of the *Recommendation*.

So dramatic are these changes that public perception has not kept pace with them. “Audiovisual heritage” and “digital heritage” often seem equivalent terms, because images and sounds are easily accessed by computer. Yet the difference is fundamental. “Digital” is a technology. “Audiovisual” – moving images and recorded sounds - is a language of communication and expression which uses a progression of technologies. Audiovisual documents have a linear character, integrity and intellectual accessibility which makes them inherently different to (for example) the written word or the painting, regardless of format or carrier. Digital technology offers a means of surrogate access to all forms of document, as well as modes of interpersonal communication. While recognising the role played by digital technology in archives, it is essential to explain the difference, which extends, inter alia, to methods of preservation, documentation and access and to curatorial expertise. (Refer definitions in UNESCO’s *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles*.)

Since 1980, too, other areas of heritage which impinge on the audiovisual arena have been recognised by UNESCO. An important example is the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* which aims to ensure the transmission of oral traditions, language, and performing arts. An effective means of preservation and transmission is the moving image and sound recording. Once fixed in this form, this intangible heritage becomes part of the audiovisual heritage. Some of the world’s most

important collections of such recordings are already inscribed on the *Memory of the World* Registers.

4 Concepts of national production and audiovisual heritage

The concept of ‘national production’ is harder to define now in an age of globalisation – of international co-productions, the reach of satellite and cable television, internet delivery of images and sounds, and the pervasive marketing of CDs and DVDs. A wider and perhaps more appropriate concept is that of “national audiovisual heritage” which can be defined to include the generality of moving images and sounds which document and express a nation as a place and people, and which influence its culture and society, regardless of where they originate. There is a need to review these concepts to match current and anticipated future reality.

5 Survival of the heritage

In paras 4 and 5, the *Recommendation* covers the physical and circumstantial needs for the preservation moving images, and the question of physical deterioration. Today the challenge is much wider, as archives face the effects of technological change and the progressive obsolescence of both carriers and hardware across the audiovisual spectrum..

Further, we are more aware now that survival of the heritage is much more than a purely physical or chemical issue. Collections need to be surrounded by stable and continuing organisational structures, by the necessary technical and curatorial skills and knowledge, guided by a professional philosophy and ethos which will maximise the possibility of the heritage being faithfully transmitted from one generation to the next. These realities, too, need to be recognised and factored in.

A crucial, and primary, step in developing preservation strategies is the provision of descriptions, using common standards, to identify holdings, particularly unique titles, so strategic planning and collaborative decision making can occur. Documentation of the preservation/ restoration process, and descriptions of the resulting elements, also help in the discovery of material through on-line, public access catalogues. The encouragement of common standards in cataloguing and metadata is now a strategic need.

6 Copyright and access

In para 6, the *Recommendation* duly recognises protection of the rights of copyright holders. Since 1980, however, the legal landscape has shifted dramatically, significantly extending the duration of copyright control over audiovisual works, which is more often vested in corporations than in individual creators. The change has been driven by the diversification of delivery technologies and the opening up of increased marketing opportunities for archived audiovisual works.

A positive outcome of this change has been a significant investment by corporate rights holders in the restoration and re-release of important films, programs and recordings. On the other hand, it now takes longer for works to pass into the public domain, and this has diminished unfettered access to the public memory.

Likewise, many broadcasters hold vast archives of images and sounds which are used internally but to which public research access is not available. Broadcasters may logically argue that they have no obligation and cannot justify providing an expensive public service for no financial return.

The ability of archives to carry out their obligation to preserve, and hence to generate copies of moving images and sounds, has, in some cases, become inhibited by legal change. This has happened at the very time when technological change and increasing networking among archives is making possible the preservation of ever increasing volumes of material. The difference between the public right to preserve the national memory, and the private right to control commercial exploitation, needs to be made explicit.

At the core of these changes is the tension between two sets of rights – private control and democratic access to the public memory. While there are no easy answers (for example, should broadcasters be obliged to provide public access to their archive in exchange for the privilege of holding a licence for public broadcast?), a new instrument needs to do more than simply acknowledge the obligation to honour copyright control. It needs to articulate the underlying principles and propose both mandatory and voluntary measures which can be taken to balance them.

7 Deposit systems and selection

In para 7 and 9 of the *Recommendation*, considerable attention is given to the concept of the mandatory deposit of moving images in archives – an extension of the long established practice of the legal deposit of printed materials in national libraries. This was an innovative idea in 1980, and it is a measure of the effectiveness of the *Recommendation* over the last quarter century that the idea has since found increasing philosophical support and practical implementation around the world.

But it is now time to urge the concept of statutory deposit of audiovisual materials *as the norm*, using the analogy of printed materials in libraries and recognising that the audiovisual media are an even more pervasive and integral component of contemporary life and culture. As national libraries already do, archives should be free to exercise professional judgement in implementing selection policies, for not everything can or should be preserved.

8 Archives

At several points, the *Recommendation* refers to “officially recognised [film and television] archives” but does not further define what these are. In 1980 it was perhaps unnecessary to do so. The characteristics of a film archive had been well defined by FIAF, and television archiving was still relatively embryonic.

Today the picture is far more complex. Multiple federations comprise the CCAAA and, beyond, the larger profession. There is a profusion of organisational models, whether public, private non-profit, or commercial.

Unlike National Libraries and (traditional) National Archives, which in most countries are autonomous institutions defined by their own legislation or charters, audiovisual archives are often less secure structures operating without the permanency and assured mandate conferred by legislation. Even large, venerable and apparently secure archives have found themselves under threat of dismantlement because of this vulnerability. Public trust, as well as the survival of the audiovisual heritage, is reliant on structures that have guaranteed stability and continuity.

A new instrument needs to set forth a definition of an audiovisual archive that is sufficiently detailed to act as a practical international reference point. This would serve both as a model to countries yet to set up such archives, and to mitigate threats to the stability and continuity of existing archives. Logical elements in the definition would include the importance of defining legislation, permanence and continuity, professional autonomy, skilled and knowledgeable personnel, physical facilities, public accountability and policy base, and ethical base.

Deposit provisions should apply to publicly funded archives with recognised national responsibilities, and should apply to both commercial and non-commercial productions. Such archives should, in turn, have a responsibility to network with other archives in their country in order to maintain an overview, promote principles and offer some protection for unique and valuable material in those collections, be they commercial or non-commercial, “official” or otherwise. If bound together by common standards of preservation and description so that they become one “virtual archive”, their data, and perhaps limited access, can be open to all.

9 Training

The new instrument should make reference to the need for every archive to have, or aspire to, adequately trained personnel. 25 years ago few training opportunities were available to audiovisual archivists. Today, specialised postgraduate courses operate in several countries and the hunger, and need, for training is immense. The field has matured and is gaining recognition as a profession in its own right. As has long been the case in the fields of librarianship, museology and archival science, some form of accreditation is a defining mark of the professional and in many cases is an entry level

requirement for jobs in the field. This transition is now happening for audiovisual archivists.

The inclusion of this issue should act as a stimulus to the growth of training possibilities and aid the global recognition of audiovisual archiving as a profession. It should also encourage schools of librarianship and information science to include more courses covering issues in the management of audiovisual materials.

10 Standards

In para 15 and elsewhere, the *Recommendation* refers to the standards of work carried out in moving image archives. It is important now to recognise not only to technical standards in a generic sense, but to explicitly recognise the essentiality of curatorial and ethical standards. While current documents setting out such standards should not be mentioned specifically (the references will soon get out of date) the range of documents and their potential sources should be mentioned in the new instrument.

Reference should also be made to UNESCO's own standards, if these are of a permanent nature. This would include relevant conventions, guidelines and publications. (Specific mention could be made of UNESCO instruments accessible on the website).

11 International cooperation

The *Recommendation* recognises that archiving resources and expertise are very unevenly spread around the world, and the need for the "haves" to assist the "have nots". There is a growing global awareness among archives of the need for active international cooperation and mutual assistance in all areas of their work, and the beginning of programs to achieve this. A new instrument needs to stimulate this process by emphasising the interdependence of archives and archivists.

For countries that were former colonies, "repatriation" of heritage is a legitimate issue which needs to be recognised in the new instrument.. In the audiovisual context, this does not necessarily mean the return of originals to the country or origin, but rather the provision, over time, of suitable copies. This allows the receiving countries to flesh out their national audiovisual heritage. While the idea of repatriation raises practical issues - such as the process of locating relevant material in the archives of the former coloniser, financial support for making copies, and issues of copyright - the principle needs to be endorsed. Practicalities aside, one archive should not prevent another from retrieving its national heritage.

Recommendations

1 A new instrument for the *Safeguarding and Preservation of the Audiovisual Heritage* should be prepared and adopted. There is now a need for a document with some binding power on signatory states, or which at the very least can promulgate a frae of reference and exert some moral force.

2 It should take the text of the existing *Recommendation* as its starting point for the purposes of drafting. It is important to build on the credibility of the *Recommendation* and see the new instrument as a logical development from it.

3 Cross references should be made to other relevant UNESCO instruments, such as the *Memory of the World: General Guidelines*, the *Convention for the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, and the *Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage*.