

## **Advocacy: An International Perspective**

An old saying goes: be careful what you wish for. But many audiovisual archivists would retort: if only! All we ask is the possibility to do our job of safeguarding audiovisual documents under optimal conditions, or as the late Sam Kula put it: *Give me the money and get the hell out of the way!*'

As telemarketers proclaim: Folks, I am here to say that you can ask, and expect your audiovisual archive wishes to be granted! Although probably not as you may be imagining it - the reason why you should be careful what you ask for. It can be achieved through advocacy at the international level which will be described below.

In 1980, the UNESCO General Conference adopted *the Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images*. This was a hugely significant event as it was the first official recognition that audiovisual heritage was equal to other forms of heritage. It was by no means an earthshattering moment, but more a slowly moving ball gathering momentum. Although even at time of adoption, there were some areas not covered, the Recommendation has led to many changes in the world, at national and international levels.

Perhaps the most foremost of these was the establishment of UNESCO's own programme for the preservation of audiovisual heritage, which has promoted numerous initiatives across the globe. Initially implemented in close collaboration with the three specialist non-governmental organizations of FIAF, FIAT/IFTA, and IASA, as well as the audiovisual section of ICA and IFLA, this was later expanded to others such as SEAPAVAA, AMIA or ARSC. In association with these professional bodies, the Programme has provided the framework for the preservation of the world's audiovisual memory and assists in convincing decision-makers and those holding the purse strings, that it is far more viable, both economically and culturally, to preserve audiovisual production than having to reproduce it due to neglect or its destruction.

Another outcome of the Recommendation was the codification of the theory of audiovisual archiving with the publication of the 1998 *Philosophy of audiovisual archiving*. This was updated in 2004 and published as *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles*. Translated into several languages (German, Farsi, Portuguese, Japanese and even two Spanish language versions, among others), it is the foundation to understanding the theoretical and practical elements that have come to define audiovisual archiving. A third version planned to address issues that have come to the forefront in the intervening 10 years is scheduled for publication and release next year at the 2016 JTS in Singapore. These loosely triennial symposia provide opportunities for indepth exploration of technical issues, alongside those technical studies and recommendations on standards that have been elaborated and published over the years.

Let me summarize a few of the changes and improvements to the audiovisual world since 1980 and which are attributable to the Recommendation:

- a draft model law. The text was prepared and published by UNESCO and the model was used by the Czech Republic in drafting its own audiovisual legislation.

- training programmes. When Recommendation was adopted, there were no formal audiovisual curricula. Today, training courses and programmes have been set up in places like Australia, France, UK and USA, to name but these few.

- formalized collaboration. The Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations of which AMIA is a member, was established in 1999 replacing the informal Roundtable that previously existed. CCAAA. This body encourages cooperation among professionals; sharing of resources, etc.

Lastly, I will mention the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage which has become the annual event celebrated around the world under the auspices of CCAAA and UNESCO. Its objectives are to raise global awareness of the importance of audiovisual heritage and to promote measures for its long-term protection. A different theme is identified each year that highlights the importance of audiovisual archives and the role of professionals working in the area.

The second initiative I wish to touch upon is UNESCO's Memory of the World programme (<http://www.unesco.org/webworld/en/mow>). Since its 1992 launch, it has become the global platform to protect and preserve documentary heritage in any form and held in any type of memory institution, but especially archives, libraries and museums: whether these are private or public; textual or audiovisual. This programme continues to evolve to match the transformation of documentary heritage itself.

Initially its impact was limited to groups of dedicated professionals who saw it as a mechanism supporting their daily work. But in order to support and highlight the invaluable work which these professionals undertake, a world register of significant items or holdings was created. Through this tool, people from different walks of life have become increasingly aware not only of the treasures which are safeguarded in heritage institutions, but are also able to contextualize different historical events.

In addition to preserving precious documents, one major objective is to ensure quasi universal access to them no matter where they may be located, irrespective of their creator, as the content may be invaluable in providing insight in support of development, defence of rights or simply in better understanding the past. As such, content needs to remain accessible but while invaluable cultural property should rightly be preserved by, and on hand to, those who created it or those

most closely associated with it, many factors can prevent this from happening. The Memory of the World has built bridges between countries so that shared heritage or dispersed items can be reunited in a mutually acceptable form for the benefit of all human beings.

It thus contributes to the long-term availability of information while preventing additional losses of information on the scale that has already occurred and that has resulted in collective amnesia. This is one area where very positive cooperation among institutions for the better protection of the global heritage has occurred.

The Memory of the World has known success through international conferences on different themes including the most recent 2012 conference in Vancouver, Canada on preservation and access to digital heritage. Its recommendations are gradually being implemented. Among them is the Dutch spearheading of PERSIST, the Platform to Enhance the Sustainability of the Information Society Transglobally. PERSIST is intended to ‘find sustainable economic solutions to safeguard the digital output of public and private sectors’. It considers that long-term preservation can be derived through close collaboration between governments, the relevant industry sector, memory institutions and other stakeholders.

PERSIST is mentioned as a new venture that can have potential impact on the way heritage professionals interact with each other and with different non-traditional stakeholders.

But the Memory of the World Programme is much more than another heritage project. It is increasingly being viewed by governments as means to achieving particular goals that are outside preservation imperatives. As such, the Programme is in danger of becoming a victim of its growing visibility. Recent controversies illustrate the dangers of politicization of documents for a specific agenda. Historical revisionism is neither new, nor to be condemned, as it can enable a legitimate reexamination of knowledge about events in the service of objectivity or bring to light a previously overlooked perspective. But it can also be used for distortion or perversion of the past. It is certainly not for the Memory of the World Programme, and by extension UNESCO, to interpret history or to pass historical judgments. However, its recognition of the significance of certain documents may well be publicized or misconstrued as an endorsement of the content.

Therefore, attempts to control what some governments may consider harmful to their image could result in a radical transformation of the Memory of the World and prevent legitimate scholarly research.

In this context, it was reassuring that the UNESCO General Conference a few days ago adopted the latest legal instrument relating to documentary heritage: *Safeguarding the Memory of the World - UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage including in Digital Form*.

This new legal instrument is intended to facilitate the establishment of principles for determining those documents that constitute documentary heritage, as well as their long-term management. It also seeks to encourage the development of awareness raising measures and policies as well as networking and links with professional associations.

The Recommendation provides an opportunity for professional bodies and institutions to lay the foundation for the introduction or reinforcement as appropriate, of policies or laws as well as other areas that can effect lasting change in the documentary heritage framework. There may be obstacles due to ignorance, lack of political will, endemic bureaucracy and even internal rivalries. To overcome these is no easy task, but then again, audiovisual archiving has surmounted many difficulties to attain its current recognition as national heritage.

While the Recommendation itself is not legally binding, it can facilitate the enactment of national legislation for the security of data and documents of all types. It can also lead to better financing if States realize that their documentary heritage is an asset, equal to any other, be it wood, mineral deposits or other, that has to be protected and wisely exploited for national development. Protection of documentary heritage should not be regarded as an expense, but rather as an investment with long-term benefits to the nation as a whole.

Policy change is usually slow to be implemented and quite often is the direct outcome of broader changes in the political environment, which in its turn is influenced by effective advocacy. For advocacy to have an impact, both long-term and short-term approaches are essential. There must also be the ability to compromise where appropriate, the forging of alliances and partnerships, as well as the readiness to seize opportunities as they present themselves.

As with most telemarketers, I have not given an instant cure but I hope I have provided a broad outline of an area where there are opportunities for increased engagement and professional collaboration on the issues that affect the work of all audiovisual professionals. Realistically, important goals can be achieved by knocking at the right doors, through hard work and collaboration. In this way, audiovisual archivists will be granted their wish for enhanced protection of documentary heritage.

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