

TOWARDS AN OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE SOUND AND AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES: CASE STUDY OF ZIMBABWE

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Sound and audiovisual archives are critical media for the storage and preservation of an institution or a country's intellectual and cultural heritage. As the world moves towards the knowledge economy it becomes imperative for all countries to prioritise the proper management of sound and audiovisual archives as a way to preserve cultural capital for posterity. This paper will examine the strategies that are in place to facilitate easier access to sound and audiovisual archives. The writers will also explore the dynamic nature of users with diverse with regards to basic and digital literacy. It will also highlight the challenges that the country's National Archives is encountering in the management of sound and audiovisual archives. It will highlight the factors that are impeding proper management of sound and audiovisual archives at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. It will examine the aspect of sustainability with regards to providing access to sound and audiovisual archives. The article will explore the prospects for migrating from traditional to online access. It will also explore the aspect of collaboration through Public and Private Sector Partnership to facilitate wider and easier access to sound and audio archives. The treatise will also explore the prospects for migrating towards digital technology. It will also come up with recommendations to improve access to sound and audiovisual archives in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: *knowledge economy; open access; restricted access; universal access; sustainable development.*

Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) are making it possible to widen and deepen access to sound and audiovisual materials irrespective of distance and time. Information management technological convergence has made provision for different types of content (data, audio, voice, video) to be stored in the same format and delivered through a variety of technologies (computers, mobile phones, television, including social media platforms) or to be executed in different e-platforms. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2001) (Section 2:1) defines ICT's as "...powerful enabler of development...." Such technologies are highly rated because of their potential in transforming all aspects of life. During the late twentieth century, the United Nations passed a recommendation in recognition and support for the role of moving images as an expression of the cultural identity of peoples, and their educational, cultural, artistic, scientific and historical value as an integral part of a nation's cultural heritage. The use of sound and audiovisual archives as sources of knowledge has become a key component of business, culture, education and wealth generation. Hill (2012) notes that the recording of sound and audiovisual archives dates back to colonial era and such records have become the accumulated heritage of the collective national memory of nation states, critical to the sustenance of the collective history and conscience. They are also the key pillars of a nation's intellectual and cultural capital in the knowledge driven age.

Background Information

It has, thus, become imperative that as developing countries move into the knowledge economy, emphasis should be placed on strengthening cultural creativity and innovations which are critical factors of cultural identity, wealth creation and economic growth according to Watson (2010). Houghton and Sheehan, (2000) define the knowledge economy as one in which the generation and the exploitation of knowledge plays a prime role in the creation of wealth. Effective exploitation of knowledge is now at the epicenter of economic growth and archives, libraries, galleries and museums as cultural institutions are reinventing and redefining their roles in the complex and dynamic dispensation of ubiquitous computing. Knowledge economies are characterized by openness, knowledge generation, knowledge transfer, sharing and mobilization, and intensive cultures of continuous learning and transformation according to

Carr and MacLachlan (2005). Sound and audiovisual communication has been critical in transmitting and perpetuating culture since time immemorial and this justifies the need to put in place technology driven mechanism to ensure efficient access to such resources, for example, revising and enforcing bibliographic control laws as will be highlighted in the next section.

Legal deposit in Zimbabwe is provided for through the National Archives Act 22/2001 and Broadcasting Services Act (2001) which covers both print and non-print resources. The National Archives Act 22/2001 Section 3 specifies that “*The National Archives established in terms of the repealed Act shall, subject to this Act, continue in existence for the storage and preservation of public archives and public records and shall be known as the National Archives of Zimbabwe.*” The Broadcasting Services Act (2001) Section 41(b) stipulates that every broadcasting licensee is bound by the law to “*...provide a copy of each of its programmes free of charge to the National Archives of referred to in section 3 of the National Archives of Zimbabwe Act...*”. The major challenge is the enforcement of such laws to ensure that there is compliance from publishers, printers, broadcasters, writers and all those involved and concerned with content production and publishing. There is limited training in the handling audio visuals materials in library and information sciences schools, hence the need for a fundamental rethink.

Jules (2003) posits that it is quite a challenge for cultural institutions to rely on goodwill (*uberima fath*) to ensure the comprehensiveness of deposit collections and this justifies the need for adequate mechanisms to facilitate compliance and enforcement. Lariviere (2003) further states that there is need to educate stakeholders on how the legal deposit act operates and benefits that accrue from compliance, for example, increased visibility, wider publicity of publications, effective bibliographic control and long term guarantee of availability of original copies in the event that disaster strikes. As such, memory institutions should proactively educate their key stakeholders about the advantages of compliance to the strengthening of the collective conscience of the nation. Compliance also ensures the longevity of physical and digital cultural memory which serves as a bulwark against cultural haemorrhage.

Matangira (2003:44) states that even though most countries in Southern Africa have made significant strides in the management of paper documents, the same cannot be said with regards to audiovisual archiving which still has a long way to go for it to be properly defined and clearly spelt out for operations to take recognizable shape. The author further states that there has been a growing interest in ensuring proper management of audiovisual archives within the Southern African Region because of the growing interest in multimedia technology and the fact that audiovisual material encapsulates vital information and knowledge critical in socio-economic transformation.

Rooks (2010) notes that in the United Kingdom archival recordings dating back to the 1940s reveal a very clear sense of the historical importance of sound recordings, heightened in war-time, and the deeply held desire to ensure that people in the future would be helped to understand the life and times of their ancestors through sounds and voices. Similarly, Zimbabwe's history is reflected in the Chimurenga files and other sound and audiovisual archives that should be preserved for the future of the nation. It is interesting to note that while nations pride themselves in creating and maintaining a historical record of sound audio archives, there is no matching interest in the preservation of such cultural heritage for posterity. Moyo (2002) noted that there is a strong correlation between access and preservation, since the two cannot be divorced from each other. The author views preservation as the holistic scheme that treats not only the indicators of damage but goes further to correct the fundamental causes. However preservation should also include the strategies to preserve technologies used to preserve sound and audiovisual archives.

Audio and visual materials are by nature fragile. The question then become of preservation. Edmondson (2003) notes that preservation is critical in the management of sound audiovisual archives because it ensures permanent accessibility to sound audiovisual archives. The author views preservation as the sum total of processes, principles, attitudes, facilities, and activities that are critical in ensuring permanent accessibility to audiovisual archives. Leary (et.al) (1988)

posits that preservation is a particularly critical responsibility of audiovisual archivists since audiovisual records are generally more perishable than paper and their preservation costs per unit are so relatively high. The author further notes that effective preventive maintenance involves protecting audiovisual records from improper storage and improper use, and recognizing the signs or deterioration in time to take corrective action. Leary (et.al) also states that audiovisual records unlike print based archives are characterised by multifarious and assorted attributes which poses challenges with regards to handling, storage, and preservation.

Accessibility refers to any form of use of an archives collection, services, and knowledge including playback in real time of sound and moving image holdings and reference to sources of information about sound and moving image holdings and the subject areas they represent. Ngulube (2005:154) states that when national archivists or national librarians select and acquire materials they should ensure that the materials will be available and accessible over time. The author highlights the critical role of environmental control and monitoring as key strategies in the drive to preserve audiovisual archives for permanent accessibility. The author warns archivists and librarians to take precautionary measures to ensure that access to archival material will always be guaranteed.

Pearce-Moses (2004) defines environmental control as “the process of creating and maintaining storage or display conditions appropriate to protect material from adverse effects of temperature, humidity, air quality, light, biological infestation, as well as human risks associated with housekeeping procedures, security, and fire and water damage.” “A record if it is to be useful to science must be continuously extended, it must be stored, and above all it must be consulted. Today we make the record conventionally by writing and photography, followed by printing; but we also record on film, on wax disks, and on magnetic wires. Even if utterly new recording procedures do not appear, these present ones are certainly in the process of modification and extension ...” Vanessa Bush (2001).

Bettington (2008:575) states that preservation should be viewed as an ongoing process whose main objective would be to acquire and capture the best attainable copy or format; retain originals in safe and sustainable conditions; copy items without loss of quality; record and retain bibliographic details, supporting documents, and metadata; and ensure safe access to the collection among others. Zinyengere (2008) states that “audiovisual records are vital elements of our collective memory, determining our achievements over the years, documenting our past, present and determining our future.” Such archives should be preserved because they bear testimony to the successes and achievements of a nation in its endeavour to realise freedom. Preservation and conservation become an important venture, which requires an investment of institutional human capital.

The National Archives of Zimbabwe was founded through an Act of Parliament in 1935 and operates under the National Archives Act of Zimbabwe 1986. It is the official custodian of the country’s cultural heritage and this is made possible through the enacted National Archives Act of 1986 which empowers the Director to acquire and preserve records. Zimbabwe is one of the countries in Sub Saharan Africa whose Archival legislation has its roots in the colonial era. The Act prohibits the removal of public archives or public records from Zimbabwe and it also ensures the protection and preservation of historical records by forbidding the destruction of such records without the consent of the Minister of Home Affairs. Legislation is critical because it provides the National Archives with legal basis to deal with records and archives of public entities such as central government, local government, and parastatles. It also covers the legal aspects of destruction, the role of national archives in relationship to private records and historical manuscripts, as well as legal deposit. Its main mission is to acquire, preserve and provide access to documentation in whatever format reflecting the legal and historical record of Zimbabwe’s past and present.

Matangira (2003:45) states that while the National Archives of Zimbabwe was opened in 1935, its Audiovisual section was opened after independence in 1988. The author states that prior to this audiovisual archives were dumped in the library without proper storage conditions until

when the new Records Centre was opened in 1988 and space was created for an audiovisual archives with proper storage conditions for films.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA 2007) define audiovisual as those artefacts relating to “sight and/or sound” and audio material as “any recorded sound and/or moving and/or still image items.” The same institutions are explicit on the importance of providing unfettered access to information in whatever format “...as information providers should be concerned with the provision of information in the formats most suited to the differing needs of various types of users, each of which must be clearly differentiated...” The author notes that globally much of sound and audiovisual archives are not available commercially, and recommend that such recordings should be preserved for future use by researchers and scholars. The proper storage and handling of sound audio archives including cylinder recordings, discs (shellac and vinyl), magnetic tape and wire, and digital recordings should be given priority and strategies formulated to re-record content onto newer formats to overcome technological obsolescence.

Objectives

- I.** Examine the laws that facilitate legal deposit of sound and audio archives in Zimbabwe;
- II.** Highlight strategies to manage audiovisual archives;
- III.** Explore challenges and opportunities for managing sound and audiovisual archives; and
- IV.** Recommend ways to enhance access to audiovisual archives.

Methodology

The researcher used a qualitative design to study the research topic. The researcher triangulated methods through using observation and interviewing the archivists involved in the management of sound and audiovisual archives. Furthermore the researcher made use of documentary evidence to give the research a scholarly dimension as evidenced by the literature review. This is an empirical inquiry relying on multiple sources of evidence, for example, the documentary sources, observation, and interviews. The research site was the National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare. The target population included records management officers and archivists responsible for sound and audiovisual archives. These are personnel who are involved in the management of sound and audiovisual archives.

Findings and Discussion

Matangira (2003) highlights the challenges of providing access to sound and audiovisual archives, for example, she cites complexities in handling, preservation, and provision as compared to paper. Matangira (2003:44) highlights the challenges of managing audiovisual archives within the Eastern Southern African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA), for example, lack of basic infrastructure and inadequate technical skills to effectively manage audiovisual archives. Abankwa, (2009) states that South Africa, has a vibrant National Archives of sound and audiovisual recordings and plays a key role in the International Association of Sound and Audio Archives (IASA). Matangira (2003) argued that many sub-Saharan African countries were still wrestling with the issue of establishing sound and audiovisual archives. The authors acknowledge the importance of audiovisual material as being useful for educational, historical, and cultural research and teaching purposes. Africa has a rich oral background which can be leveraged through an inclusive and progressive sound and audiovisual archival strategy. The African art of conversation reflects the richness of the oral tradition and the potential for developing sound and audiovisual archives. Zamon (2012:16) states that providing access to archival material is a central part of the function of the archives and archivist: “Providing access to collections means reaching out to researchers and showing them what the archives has and what the archivist can do for the researcher.”

Ugbah, Ogunrombi, and Ameh (2012) also note that sound and audiovisual archives are critical in education and hence the need to develop collection development policies to manage them effectively. The author further notes that while the National Archives of Zimbabwe was established in 1935, the audiovisual section dates back to 1988 when it became imperative to archive such resources which had been previously ignored. The audiovisual collection had

grown significantly thus prompting management to open an audiovisual unit with proper storage conditions for such material. The audiovisual archive collection consists of microform, posters, gramophone records, videos, slides, audiocassettes consisting of music and oral history interviews, reel-to-reel tapes, and CD ROMs, among others. It also consists of Voice of Zimbabwe Programmes which were broadcast from Mozambique by exiled political leaders during the liberation struggle. The collection includes songs, speeches produced during the liberation struggle, and interviews with those involved in the liberation war including key personnel from the civil society and government.

The sound and moving image collection includes reel-to-reel tapes covering the colonial period, the liberation struggle, as well as contemporary times. Some of the issues covered are interviews on chieftainship, liberation struggle, indigenous culture, marriage, and religion. Gramophone records encompass the music of the second half of the twentieth century covering major genres, for example, pop kwela rock and roll and traditional African music. There are a total of 10 000 Gramophone records acquired from the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). This collection which includes videos, slides, and audiocassettes is now part of the sound and audiovisual archives. The moving or visual collection consists of 3 000 titles of films or bioscopes dating back to the colonial era (1940). The film collection was acquired from the Ministry of Information and it includes material from the colonial and post-independence era. This collection can be classified by gauge and material, for example, it includes 16mm and 35mm films of nitrate and polymers. However, the National Archives should be careful of what it acquires by way of donations. Many audio and visual productions are now taking place. There are timeless productions which become part of culture. These must be carefully selected and preserved because they will be used in the future.

Matangira, (2003:44) recommends that audiovisual archives should develop collection development policies to cover collection development and management with reference to acquisition, collection building, preservation and provision of access to such collections. The author views this as a great challenge and is optimistic that such a policy will guide archivists and other stakeholders and that it will serve as a supporting framework through which all collection development decisions can be judged and tested.

Ngulube (2006) states that access to archives should be considered in the context of bibliographical, physical, and intellectual parameters. Access is the *raison d'être* for archives without which there would be no archives. Access is critical for research and education interests of the users. The author posits that physical access is determined by operational factors, for example, hours of service versus hours of closure, example regulations, and legal framework with regards to national security, public order, and public morality; while bibliographic access has to do with the use of finding aids or retrieval tools and the use of bibliographic standards; and intellectual access is determined by language use. Edmondson (2009:31) posits that the pervasive nature of ICT's has led to the convergence of technology through presenting intersected versions of words, images, and sound through a widening range of devices.

Bettington (2008) notes that appraisal of audiovisual archives poses serious challenges because traditionally the source of value has been derived from aesthetic, informational, and cultural content. But with current trends relating to portable recording equipment, audiovisual archives are widely used as evidence gathering tools thus giving prominence to evidential value. Matangira (2003) recommends that archival institutions involved in the management of sound archives should formulate collection development and management policies covering such issues as acquisition, collection development, preservation, appraisal, and provision of access to the collection. Rooks (2010) states that in the modern day world access is steadily becoming more of an online experience than a mere visit to a monolithic brick and mortar edifice. Audiovisual materials have easily become the common choice of the citizenry for accessing information. It is easier for the citizenry to access these materials via different platforms. The National Archives need to tap into the use of technology available to make access easier. The use of the Internet to make available the resources is one of the ways through which the National Archives can make access easier.

Conclusion

Investment in ICT's should enable the National Archives of Zimbabwe to digitise its collection and thus widen and deepen access to support learning, teaching, research, and social-economic development. Sound and audiovisual collections should be prioritised through viable archival management systems that can leverage cultural creativity and expressions for the benefit of Zimbabwe and beyond. Documentation of traditional music and dance as well as animal sounds can serve as useful and progressive initiatives for the perpetuation of culture in a globalised world where identities still matter. Even though we can share sound and audiovisual artefacts with others, it is imperative to dance to ones' own song and hence the need for an open and accessible sound and audiovisual collection deeply rooted in the cultural ambience and struggles of the people for the benefit of humanity. Sound and audiovisual archives should be where living species live, hustle, and carry on their daily living routines to survive.

Recommendations

- I. Legal deposit laws for sound and audiovisual archives should be continuously revisited and aligned to international trends and best practices with regards to enforcement or compliance;
- II. Align sound and audiovisual management to the local cultural ambience and aspirations of the people to preserve their sound and audiovisual heritage;
- III. There is need to move towards e-management of sound and audiovisual archives, for example use of technology to share space and other resources;
- IV. Promote convergence of archives and related institutions in proper management of sound and audiovisual archives; and
- V. ICT's should be viewed as an opportunity to strengthen sound and audiovisual archives.

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