

Typology of audiovisual archives

Audiovisual archives embrace a plurality of institutional models, types and interests.

- non-profit or for-profit
- level of autonomy
- status
- clientele
- media range and capability
- character and emphasis

Non-profit or for-profit

Audiovisual archiving began as a culturally-motivated movement, preserving material because of its intrinsic worth, regardless of commercial potential – sometimes working, in fact, against a prevailing commercial ethos which drove the destruction of ‘outdated’ and apparently worthless films and recordings.

Increasingly, non-profit archives are being complemented by another model: the self-sufficient archive, which is able to sustain itself by generating revenue from its collection, through licensing, segmenting, repurposing and other ways of exercising its own, or its principals’, copyright control. Such archives are typically subsets of larger production bodies such as record producers, film studios or television broadcasters. The proliferation of outlets for retrospective programme materials has made some once-neglected assets valuable again.

A government-run national archive is the classic example of the non-profit model: an in-house radio or television archive of the for-profit. The former is serving altruistic objectives, which are seen as publicly meritorious, irrespective of financial return. The latter is engaged in asset management with a view to income generation or its in-kind equivalent. These differing perspectives and values bear on everything from selection policy and access services to preservation standards and methods.

Since both types of archive are engaged in a shared task – ensuring the survival of the audiovisual heritage – there are commonalities and cooperation. Individual archivists may move between both types in the course of a long career, **and the issues and tensions created by the two sets of values are an important area of professional discussion.**

Archives vary enormously not only in their areas of focus and expertise but also in their facilities and capabilities.

There are large archives with state of the art collection storage repositories, audio, video and film processing laboratories, specialized theatres and auditoriums, digital mass storage systems, public research facilities and more.

On the other hand, there are small archives that have few or even none of these things, even though they may aspire to them, and so are reliant on contracting out their collection storage, duplicating or other work, whether to specialized commercial facilities or to other archives or institutions. In the latter case, there is a need to develop quality control regimes to ensure their own standards are applied.

Character and emphasis

At the risk of applying over-simplistic labels, the following is a method of grouping archives by their differing characters and emphases. Some archives belong to two or more of these groups

- **Broadcasting archives**
- **Audiovisual museums**
- **National audiovisual archives**

- **University and academic archives**
- **Thematic and specialized archives**
- **Studio archives**
- **Regional, city and local archives.**
- **Archives, libraries and museums generally:**
Perhaps the largest category of all. Many institutions have significant accumulations of audiovisual materials intended for permanent retention. Sometimes these may be acquired as an integral part of a formed collection or *fonds*. However, there may be no audiovisual department or even any specialist staff or facilities to care for them at all, so in the longer term the preservation and accessibility of the material presents a dilemma.

Distinction between archives, libraries, museums and audiovisual archives

	Archives	Libraries	Museums	AV Archives
What do they keep	Unique and unpublished	Published materials	Objects, artefacts, associated documents	Image and sound carriers, associated documents and artefacts
What is their objective	Protection of archives , and their evidential and informational values	Preservation and/or accessibility of materials and information	Preservation and accessibility of artefacts and information	Preservation and accessibility of audiovisual heritage

Audiovisual archives

It is evident that the totality of audiovisual archives, of necessity, embrace aspects of all three concepts. For example, the material they deal with may be published or unpublished, though the distinction is not always obvious or important; the concept of an 'original' (a film negative or a master recording) is also meaningful. The skills of cataloguing and inventory control are as essential in audiovisual archives as in libraries, museums and archives. Because they deal with a technological medium, it is conceptually impossible to separate the technology from its product, so the disciplines of museology are relevant. The mechanics and avenues of access, whether to individuals or groups of various sizes, are manifold. In addition, there are distinctive that arise from the nature of the media

The same television programme might legitimately find a place in all four types of institution.

- **Within a library**, it may represent information, historical record or an intellectual or artistic creation.
- **Within an archive**, it may comprise part of the records of a particular organization, the outcome of process.
- **Within a museum**, it may be a displayable work of art or an artefact.

Each concept is legitimate and appropriate within its respective context, the same work being viewed from different perspectives - from the worldview of the profession involved - and treated accordingly.

Source: Ray Edmondson: Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles, Paris (UNESCO) 2004 (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001364/136477e.pdf>)