



World Library and Information Congress: 70th IFLA General Conference and Council

22-27 August 2004
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Programme: <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla70/prog04.htm>

Code Number: 133-E
Meeting: 107. Preservation and Conservation with Audiovisual and
Multimedia
Simultaneous Interpretation: Yes

The Audiovisual Archives of Chile

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Abstract

The stocks, quantities and states of presentation of sound archives in Chile are known only partially. Together with the archives belonging to official institutions, private archives have been created. This situation and the need to establish common policies and directions have motivated a private group to form MINGACO, Corporación del Patrimonio Audiovisual y Cinematográfico with the aim of uniting efforts so as to constitute a net of sound archives for its preservation, development, organization and promotion. One of the organization's main tasks is the realization of a survey of the sound archives of the country and the identification of its materials, state and requirements so as to guide future training in this area and the establishment of common practices in order to protect their heritage.

Introduction

Thomas Edison did not imagine the influence of the phonograph. His invention was intended to register only voices; he never talked about applying it to the recording of music.

From wax cylinders to radios, tapes, and the large digital expansion, the universe of sounds registered in diverse formats has grown exponentially.

The sound is registered, archives are created—are we preserving the materials? Do their contents still exist?

The Departamento de Extensión Cultural del Ministerio de Educación possesses a collection of 16mm films and transparencies whose purpose is to be loaned for teaching purposes, Chilean films, works done by the department's personnel and the products of grant funds.

Two film libraries are known to conserve the Chilean films and what is left of the collections of Chile Films, an official institution producing films (news, movies, documentaries) created in 1942 by the Corporación de Formento de la Producción: one in the Universidad de Chile and the other one in the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso.

The foundation "Imagen en Movimiento," created in the last decade, preserves films and documentaries in climate-controlled vaults and also has a museum of filming equipment.

There are also private television archives, which do not have conservation policies, and some theatre collections like the one at the Municipal de Santiago. These theatre collections include works presented in opera recordings, concerts and ballets, complemented in recent times with videos from the Teatro Municipal, and national musical concerts from the Teatro Baquedano de la Universidad de Chile. In addition, all of these archives keep printed materials, such as record covers, posters, etc.

Among the private archives is the Archivo Audiovisual y Sonoro del Museo Precolombino, created in 1994, with field compilations in videos and cassettes of ethnographic themes like ceremonies, rituals, religious feasts, dances, and indigenous music from Chile, the Americas, and other places in the world. Nowadays, this material has been transferred to a database and CDs for public use.

In 1995 the Archivo de Chiloé was inaugurated with the intent of recovering the intangible heritage that relates to oral traditions. Registering the popular cultural expressions that are about to disappear like dances, songs, ceremonies, has become the most urgent task.

Preservation of the collections

Due to the shortage of funds in official institutions this task has been developed slowly. What is worrisome is the lack of consciousness about the fugitive nature of this type of media and the urgency of preserving it. In 2002 a presentation took place at the International Congress of Archives about the pressing need for the conservation of sound and digital media.

These collections are a compilation of acetate discs, vinyl records, CDs, digital formats (DAT), cassettes, videos, and magnetic tapes that correspond in large part to field recordings. This valuable heritage is registered in materials that are not safe for long-term.

In 2001, the digitalization of the sound archives and the music section of the National Library began, with the objective of conserving the library's fragile collection, through the transfer to digital systems by the agreement of the DIBAM with the Fundación de Chile. Transferring the Archivo de la Palabra (writer's recorded voices) and cassettes of recorded musical events to CDs was done at the Biblioteca Nacional and other institutions of the area. El Archivo de Literatura Oral has digitalized a minimal part of its musical collections through the work of interns.

In recent years, the Universidad de Chile has been transferring recordings to a digital medium (DAT) and copying into cassettes the collection of the Chilean music for other libraries in the country. Its plan is to convert all sound and graphic collections to digital format, and also to develop a system that can store and relate recordings, scores, texts and images, making them available for direct consultation.

Legal Deposit and the increment of heritage collections

The policies for increasing the Heritage Collections are still not clear. Even though it has existed since 1865, it is only since 2001 that the National Library has begun demanding policies in a systematic way for audiovisual materials. The National Library receives two copies of all CDs produced by the national record companies, films in VHS and DVD, and CDs of events. Up until now, there have been no agreements to receive radio and television material.

Cultural Policies

In the year 1993 a law was approved to settle a foundation for a new cultural policy. We hope that in the future we can count on policies that will protect audiovisual and sound materials. The creation of a museum of film and photography has been discussed. Considering this situation, MINGACO was created to bring attention to the institutions in charge of making the political decisions related to radio recordings, television, and the creation of record collections for public use.

The Private Solutions

In 1999, after a reunion took place in Valparaiso under the sponsorship of the Universidad Católica, a communitarian work group called Mingaco was formed with the purpose of uniting efforts and creating a network of sound archives to preserve and disseminate the recorded heritage.

Subsequently, in November of 1999 the first conservation seminar of the audiovisual material took place with the intention of defining procedures, methodologies, conservation techniques, and the uses of audiovisual materials. This was done to meet common criteria and knowledge that will allow interaction among different centers in an efficient and systematic manner. Other important issues that were discussed were the legal and ethical aspects of managing archives.

Finally in 2002 MINGACO became legally constituted as the Corporación del Patrimonio Audiovisual y Cinematográfico with the aim of developing, organizing, and promoting audiovisual archives. Its areas of action are management, conservation, restoration, dissemination, and technical assistance.

MINGACO's main goals are to promote networking specialists who obtain and circulate specialized documentation, to support the specialization of its members and to create an official register of the audiovisual archives of the country with the purpose of planning future actions and training. It is important to know the existence and location of playback equipment (record players, gramophones, tape recorders), which is increasingly difficult to find, to unify efforts and

avoid duplication. This is a necessary task, but it is difficult without the indispensable means. For now, a network of contact people has been created.

There are still a lot of tasks to be accomplished, but the work will be better defined after a complete count of the existent holdings in the archives of the country. Then, more will be known about the technological infrastructure, which will allow a strategic alliance among the different institutions. Having clear policies at a state level will be of great importance because it will allow access to funds for the increase and conservation of archives.