

The AVMS legal deposit survey: issues, challenges, directions

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1. Introduction

At the AVMS meetings held at IFLA Göteborg on August 10 and 13, 2010, discussions of the progress of the section's legal deposit survey project were held. This report is an attempt to sort out the issues, identify the problems, and suggest possible approaches that would help advance the work of the project.

Goals of the project

The project aims to identify which countries have some sort of legal deposit for audiovisual materials, and to gather information about the content of the legislation, if there is any. Some of the points identified as useful for information-gathering are:

- what legislation governs the legal deposit of audiovisual materials
- which national institution is responsible for collecting material deposited
- what kinds of materials are included
- the extent of the collections
- whether funding is available for managing the legal deposit collections
- the state of preservation of the collections
- provide a lobbying tool for countries without legal deposit for audiovisual materials

History of the project

AVMS identified the survey as a project of the section, and work began in 2007. Howard Besser and James Turner agreed to coordinate the work. A group of students from Université de Montréal did some background research and worked out a first draft of the questionnaire.

At the AVMS open session at IFLA Québec in 2008, the questionnaire was presented, and a discussion ensued to refine the questions and finalise the questionnaire.

From then, research assistants at New York University built an online version of the questionnaire, installed it on the web, and later organised the data for analysis and conducted data analysis. AVMS members took responsibility for recruiting respondents in every area of the world.

At IFLA the open session at IFLA Göteborg, Howard Besser presented the results to date. Issues

surrounding the questionnaire and the project were discussed at both AVMS meetings at the conference, and this report is a result of the discussions

2. Background

Information on audiovisual collections worldwide is rather sketchy, dating to a Unesco report in 1990. In 2008, Klijn and de Lusenet published a survey of collections in Europe. These reports give some knowledge of the volume of collections and the state of preservation. Although both are far from complete, they constitute the body of knowledge available about collections in general.

Legal deposit for audiovisual materials came much later than legal deposit for books. This comes as no surprise, especially in view of the fact that audiovisual materials scarcely existed before the twentieth century. However, because of a number of threats to the conservation of cultural heritage materials as well as important preservation challenges, it is important that legal deposit for audiovisual materials be established everywhere. As we mentioned, one of the goals of the legal deposit survey is to provide a tool that countries without legal deposit for audiovisual materials can use to build arguments for lobbying their governments to enact legislation.

3. Problems identified

From the beginning, the survey was fraught with problems, and these only increased as the data was collected and analysed. Since great care to ensure high quality work was taken from the start, and since this continues to be a preoccupation of those involved, it is fair to say that the problems are not due to methodological flaws or sloppy work. Rather, they reflect the extreme complexity of the issues, the problems in comparing differing categories of information available, and confusion and outright lack of knowledge about national legislation in many countries.

In this section, we try to identify the principal problems to date, with a view to addressing them in ways that will ultimately permit us to gather information that will be useful in constructing an accurate portrait of the state of legal deposit for audiovisual materials.

Primary problems

- the survey was put online only in English
- despite endless discussion and attention to simple, clear wording, some questions still seem unclear
- Half the respondents gave only contact information. Why?
- Some countries had several respondents, who represented regional and not national interests
- Information from different sources in the same country was sometimes contradictory
- Many respondents skipped a number of questions

- There were few responses from Asia, all of which were from east Asia
- There were no responses from South America
- The United States did not respond

4. Approaches

Although we said earlier that we think the problems are not due to methodological flaws, we wonder whether sending out a questionnaire is the correct approach to gathering the information we need. What is the essence of what we hope to find out?

Strategies:

- another round to get more responses
- advertise with World Heritage
- telephone interviews
- Skype interviews
- look for help from other IFLA sections, for example statistics, national libraries
- translate the questionnaire, at least into IFLA languages
- proactively contact people in each country, and interview them by administering the questionnaire orally, recording the conversation, and giving respondents the opportunity to ask questions about the questions
- find a graduate student, especially a doctoral student, to contact respondents and interview them

George Abbott offered to work with James on finding a doctoral student and arranging an overview of the project.

5. Discussion, recommendations, conclusions

Despite the disappointing results of this work to date, it is important to emphasise that a great deal of effort by competent people has been invested in this project. Thus it seems that the results reflect the extremely complex nature of the problem, and the very great variety of arrangements for legal deposit protection from one country to another. Arrangements are anchored in various combinations of factors, and are sometimes voluntary rather than compulsory. Thus comparison is extremely difficult, ultimately, yet that is what we wish to do.

The goal of the project is to find out which countries have some kind of legal deposit for audiovisual materials, and to try and describe the arrangements. While this may seem simple, it is far from simple, and this is at the heart of the difficulties we have had in gathering information. The problem is exacerbated by the multiplicity of languages and cultures involved. Furthermore, as we noted, the questionnaire was made available in English, hoping this language choice would elicit the most responses.

It now seems that a questionnaire will not be sufficient for gathering the information we need to make a usable report on the state of the art in national legal deposit legislation. Human contact in an interactive interview now seems what is required to obtain the information we need. Respondents need

to have the opportunity to ask for clarification of any questions they do not understand, to ask for examples of how to respond, to explain particularities of their own situation. While this will not be easy to organise, the data obtained will be more uniform and of good quality.

6. Resources

Anne Louise Anglim has provided names of IFLA members from the Statistics section who might be able to provide assistance: Micheal Heaney, michael.heaney@bodleian.ox.ac.uk, and Jesus Lau-cuv, who will forward to the National Library for information from South America.

James might try to get some research money. Howard might also try. Trond or other AVMS apply for project money from FAIFE? Any other sources?

References

- Unesco report 1990.
- Klijn, Edwin et Yola de Lusenet. 2008. Tracking the reel world: a survey of audiovisual collections in Europe. European Commission on Preservation and Access.