

Sunrise or sunset? The future of audiovisual archives

Ray Edmondson, Archive Associates, Canberra, Australia

"All national archives will be "under one roof" one day ... but I won't live to see it" (Lord Puttnam, 2006) Archives, libraries and museums are awakening to the idea of 'convergence' - helped along by the shared experience of digitization, but also by economic and political reality in a time where they are falling ever further in the priorities of governments and funders. Some see the idea as implicit in UNESCO's 'Memory of the World' program, for instance. But what do we mean by convergence? Do we mean greater cooperation and resource sharing between institutions and associations? Do we mean joint advocacy? Do we mean the organic merging of many institutions into larger units, and even into some ultimate mega-institution? Or the merger of associations like IASA with similar bodies? Do we mean rational processes, passing fashion or political convenience? Audiovisual archives have always had a varied organisational typology. The present landscape is the current result of mergers, separations and organic growth. Is there a newly discernible trend? Do audiovisual archives, in their various guises, have such distinctive professional cultures and attributes that their character needs to be maintained? Or are our very institutions, in fact, becoming redundant in an age where people can increasingly find anything they want on the internet? These questions will be discussed and illustrated with case studies.