

The role of National Audiovisual Archives: The case of Israel

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Because of its history and because of its collections and treasures, the National Library of Israel (NLIS) is one of the greatest intellectual institutions of the Jewish people since returning to their homeland. And as it moves into its next phase, it will also serve Israel and the Jewish People as a preeminent cultural and educational force. The National Library's sound archive collects the tonal expression of Judaism and of Jewish life. The oral memory of the Jewish people, as preserved in recordings, since the beginning of the 20th century, is a true vocal expression of Judaism. These recordings tell the story of the origins of Jewish life in the Near East, the exile to East and West, the return to Israel, while revealing the dynamic of change in the Jewish oral tradition. In addition, sound recordings from the 1920's of the Palestinians living in the area and other minorities are also part of the collection. There are no editions of these recordings and most of the recordings are unique tonal frames that cannot be repeated. Until the age of digitization, several technologies were used in attempting to save these unique recordings however, none offered a satisfactory solution for long-term preservation. Most of the recordings of the Sound Archives were stored and played back from the original formats and original play back machines on site. The age of digitization has opened up new possibilities for the long-term preservation of audio and audiovisual material, integration of data bases and audio into data systems, and even enables on-line accessibility throughout the world. The SA (Sound Archive) therefore has begun to create a digitized audiovisual archive, firstly in order to save these endangered treasures from extinction and secondly to ensure their availability both to the Jewish people in Israel and the Diaspora and to scholars of worldwide. Digitization and cataloguing will enable web accessibility and adaptability to future technologies, and thus preserve the recorded sound heritage for future generations. The project will include 30,000 hours of recordings created from the 1930's to 2007. These recordings should be digitized and accessible by 2012. At the same time, the SA continues to acquire from legal deposit, donations and its own productions, recordings that will have to be added to the digital library once established. The process of digitizing and cataloguing the collection will lead to many issues of services provided and the role of the National Library in creating new audiences, new performances and educational programs. These themes will be the center of my presentation: How to present and whom to address with such a unique National and yet Universal audio-visual collection?