

Hot off the press following an inspirational and seamless 40th anniversary conference in Athens in September, this journal offers 10 papers delivered at the event. Most of them have been reworked for publication so even for those lucky enough to have been there, this issue will be of value.

The theme the conference was grappling with was “Towards a new kind of archive? The digital philosophy in audiovisual archives”. In many ways it was an invitation for us to do some blue-sky thinking about where we see our profession, our institutions, and our disciplines in years to come. But of course futures depend on where we are at the present, and it’s clear that different types of archives experience different ‘presents’ and thus focus on a variety of visions as they head into their futures.

Ray Edmondson’s digital philosophy concentrates on convergence - he envisages a future of public “mega-institutions”, not driven by profit-making, and presenting words, images and sounds together digitally. Referring to our profession, he suggests that “it needs... to learn the lesson of convergence within its own internal politics, so its advocacy and cohesion as a field can grow and be more effective”.

Indeed, if there was a single buzzword of the 40th anniversary conference, it was probably “convergence”. And we can see this as we read through many of these papers, despite the fact that they are penned by people working within different types of archives and within different fields of research. We see Aaron Bittel from a research archive perspective believing that “hybridity is our strength”, hybridity not only of collections but also of functions (including teaching, librarianship, archiving, preservation, subject specialisation). We see Ruth Abankwah putting forward her ideas for the convergence of audiovisual collections within a country into a single national collection. In some senses this suggests the opposite of convergence in that these audiovisual collections would be drawn out from library collections that are more hybrid. However, she suggests that where resources and expertise are scarce it makes sense to allow them to develop in a single specialised environment rather than spreading them thinly across several non-specialised institutions. It is interesting to dwell on the potential for Jamaica’s solution to the problems of lack of resources, presented in this issue by Maureen Webster-Prince. “The Audiovisual Information Network (AVIN) of Jamaica provides a community for rallying the cause to develop comprehensive collections of AV productions”. Is this network of organisations - including representatives from a range of other networks as well as media practitioners, researchers, cultural historians, librarians, archivists, entertainment lawyers and promoters - delivering the “advocacy and cohesion” that Ray suggests we need as we head into the digital future?

Bert Lyons, Nathan Salsburg and Anna Lomax Wood’s paper presents a case study that also speaks to Ray’s model of convergence. In the case of the Alan Lomax Archive, the original items have been passed to the Library of Congress, which now takes responsibility for their stewardship, thus freeing the Alan Lomax Archive - a digital archive - to deal with research requests, and to develop cultural and social outreach programmes that ultimately will promote the value of archives overall.

Edwin Van Huis, founder and director of XPEX Experience Experts in Amsterdam and previously General Director of the National Institute for Sound and Vision in Hilversum in The Netherlands, brings his years of experience to the very good and simple question: ‘What makes a good archive?’ His answer: one that listens to its users. His inspirational keynote speech, presented here with some of the memorable images in full colour, argues that users want a multi-media experience, suggesting, perhaps, that collections of all formats within and between institutions must converge.

Two other papers in this issue explore the relationships between archives and users. Gisa Jähnichen asks what the ethnomusicology archivist/curator is to do as users within this subject make use of ever broadening and diverse resources. Highlighting the importance of format and subject specialists, Gisa suggests that audiovisual archivists are needed to guide users to high quality and subject appropriate resources for their study. Budhaditya

Chattopadhyay's contribution, while talking specifically about a number of "soundscape" projects in India, simultaneously presents research on the importance of user-generated content and the archivists' role in raising awareness within communities of the need for recording and archiving their environment.

I have also included a detailed paper on DAT migration by Tim Bathgate at the Radio New Zealand Sound Archives / Nga Taonga Korero. There are many aspects of this paper that should be of interest to IASA members. However, in considering our question of the future of archives it struck me that broadcast archives are arguably in the best position to research methodologies and technologies for such processes, for their own purposes of course, but also for the benefit of smaller institutions where collections may be more varied.

Grace Koch's paper does not present the future of archives, but rather the past – of IASA through the eyes of its editors. This was a paper Grace entertainingly presented at the 40th anniversary party in Athens and which offers great insight into some of the main themes tackled by our Association

And finally, also looking into the past, Gila Flam's tribute to the late Israel Adler reminds us of IASA's own heritage and inspires us to emulate what he achieved during his productive and influential life and career.