

19. From analogue collection to multifunctional access

Digitizing audiovisual heritage in Poland

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Polish audiovisual heritage is a very important part of the cultural legacy of the country. Unfortunately the use of and access to Polish audiovisual archives is still in its initial phases. The Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage has made great strides towards solving the problems of access and limitations of use. In 2009 the ministry established the National Audiovisual Institute (NInA), which prompted several digitization projects including collaborations between Polish Public TV, National Archives, museums and private collections. This paper highlights some of the creative uses of Poland's audiovisual heritage and demonstrates how NInA has become an innovator and a leader in the audiovisual field in Poland and Eastern Europe.

In 2005, Polish Audiovisual Publishers was founded and began to be involved in the publishing and promotion of audiovisual heritage. For four years it produced CD and DVD publications issued in collaboration with groups such as the Polish School of Documentary and the Anthology of Polish Animation, including videos of concerts and performances of outstanding representatives of Polish music and theatre. In 2009 the Minister of Culture and National Heritage transformed the Polish Audiovisual Publishers into the National Audiovisual Institute (NInA), widening the scope of

the organization's activities to archiving, digitization and promoting access to Polish audiovisual heritage. NInA also carries out activities in the field of media and audiovisual education by co-producing film and television programmes and working with the Competence Centre for digitization of audio and video materials. During the Polish presidency of the European Council, the institute organized a series of cultural events (concerts, workshops, conferences, performances), recordings of which are now in the NInA archives.

NInA's digital and analogue archive has modern and professional equipment ready and able to manage a large collection of audiovisual content. We concentrate on creating different channels and ways of giving access to our audiovisual materials. In NInA's new building we have a digital cinema, multimedia library and workshop rooms that give our users many possibilities to work, educate and play using audio and video content. In the institute's short history, it has managed to find creative uses for Poland's audiovisual material. Through collaborations with the public's personal records, outreach and workshops aimed at the youth in the community, and the practice of modern digitization techniques, NInA demonstrates the numerous possibilities and uses of a successful audiovisual archive.

Challenges and strategies

One major issue for Polish audiovisual archives is the immense dispersion of audiovisual content. Stored at the National Film Archive, the National Library, the National Archives, state-owned film studios, museums and non-governmental organizations, as well as in public media, the quantity of this audiovisual heritage is unknown, but the number of items is certainly in the millions. Digitization activities in the field of audiovisual documentation began in 2007, but they were not centrally coordinated or accompanied by cross-institutional cooperation in the field of digitization, metadata description or recommended methods for long-term storage of digital materials.

In order to solve the problems of use, access and storage of digital archives, in 2010 the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage launched Kultura+. This multiyear

programme supported both public and non-governmental organizations in the digitization of archival, library, museum and audiovisual collections. NInA was entrusted with the role of coordinator of this program. Our tasks were to conduct a formal and essential evaluation of candidates' applications, offer financial support, provide back-up storage for digital audiovisual collections, limit forms of access and promote audiovisual heritage. Kultura+ ended in 2015, but before that it conducted 187 projects worth EUR 30 million, including 35 projects related to audiovisual collections. Thousands of hours of audiovisual content have been digitized and are now accessible online.

Every beneficiary organization was obliged to deliver one copy of digitized audiovisual content and metadata to our repository. Then our archivists imported the files and metadata to our media asset management (MAM) system, and if the copyrights were valid, the content was exported to our online collection or to an offline collection in NInA's new building.¹ The workflow between the Archive and Internet Projects departments is still in a phase of testing and development. The main challenges are whether the MAM system should be operated only by the Archive department or also by other departments (Digitization, Internet Projects) and whether the archive should preserve all footage (including small previews and working materials).

Online presentation is still our most important activity in the area of access to audiovisual content. NInA's strategy is to create audiovisual thematic collections enriched with context materials. So far we have presented collections on famous Polish contemporary composers, on Polish theatre and on the 'Round Table' political and social reforms of 1989. NInA also takes part in European projects on access to audiovisual heritage. We support EU screen and Europeana with our content and have delivered more than 8 000 audiovisual content items to these projects.

The materials can also be used in different ways in our recently opened building that includes a digital cinema with 4K and Dolby Atmos parameters, a multimedia library and workshop rooms. We offer audiences the chance to vote on footage that will be shown at our cinema's weekly screening. They can choose from five different materials: documentary, animation, feature, spectacle and music. Our multimedia library can accept 16 users. They can explore the digital archive, especially those materials that cannot be shown online. We give access to almost 14 000 audiovisual items, and the room also contains press articles and books about film, theatre, television and music (Fig. 1).²



FIGURE 1. Multimedia library at the National Audiovisual Institute (NInA) in Warsaw. Photo by Marcin Soto

Every year NInA organizes a festival of audiovisual culture called NInA Beta version. This is an opportunity to meet environmental artists, fans, users and researchers from the audiovisual industry. The meeting theme, workshops and conferences are based on audio and video resources of the institute. Attendance at the festival continues to grow and shows the increasing interest in the use of creative and diverse audiovisual content.

Another idea for the creative use of archival content is a footage workshop. Our experts teach people how to manage home collections and how to take care of analogue carriers. Children and adults learn the basic skills of music composing, sound recording and video making. NInA's role in education also supports academic institutions in educating future archivists in audiovisual matters. Since 2015 we have run workshops and study visits for students from different universities.

At NInA we pay particular attention to the education of children and youth. We give them rich workshop offerings in which we try to introduce them to the world of audio, video, music and theatre. Young participants make their first video and sound recordings and archive their work on a variety of analogue and digital media. During cinema screenings we present cartoons, animated films and feature films, especially those of historical and archival value.

Our workshop rooms and conference facilities are also available for people or institutions to use for free for various activities. With an idea for a workshop, conference, meeting or presentation of audiovisual content, one can use NInA's space and infrastructure (Fig. 2).

Since 2015 NInA has been able to digitize audiovisual collections on its own. We launched a professional digitization line for film materials in 8 mm, 16 mm and 35 mm formats, magnetic tapes of all types and digital reconstruction of sound and video (Fig. 3). In this area, we have cooperated with many public institutions that preserve

¹ The online collections are accessible at www.ninateka.pl.

² The database can also be searched online at www.archiwum.nina.gov.pl.



FIGURE 2. NInA's main workshop room. Photo by Bartek Syta



FIGURE 3. NInA's sound studio. Photo by Marcin Soto

audiovisual content. We have managed digitization projects for Polish TV, the National Archives, museums and private owners. Digitized objects are preserved in NInA's repository and shown online.

An important digitization project using the social capital and commitment of our users is called Home Archives. The aim of the project is to digitize and make available private and amateur collections. Anyone can bring recordings to NInA, most often VHS, Video 8 and 16 mm film (Fig. 4). In exchange for agreeing to share the content in situ or online, the user receives a free copy of the digitized recordings. NInA's archives received materials from the period 1960–2000 containing family celebrations, vacations, education and everyday life. Some recordings are truly historical and documentary in character. Another social aspect of the project is that we entrust volunteers with the work of description and archiving so that the entire project is based on resources and the work of our users and friends.



FIGURE 4. Participant at the Home Archives project. Photo by Marcin Soto

NInA's experience in the field of digitization of audiovisual heritage has helped it become one of the leaders in developing cultural activity in Poland and Eastern Europe. Our mission is to work with audiovisual materials, from their analogue form to multifunctional access. We are proud and happy that we are able to face this challenge.

Conclusions

Analysis of the number of users and their reviews of the new NInA headquarters shows that both the access to online digital audiovisual materials and the organization of cultural and educational events are being met with great public interest.³ The road which brought the institute from its origins as a small publishing house to a rapidly developing multimedia cultural institution leads us to believe that our vision for the transfer of audiovisual heritage from analogue to digital and its eventual sharing meets the huge demand of users, and probably will be a determinant for further programme activities.

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³ The total number of visitors to NInA's headquarters for 2015 was 2 144.