

Turning Audiovisual Archives Into Scientific Assets

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ABSTRACT:

University practice requires a high level output of publications and other evidence of scholarly productivity by its researchers and lecturers. Listed categories of efficient evidence show clearly which kind of output is accepted: namely those listed in 'so called' collections of 'citation indexed' journals such as Thompson Reuters' ISI web of knowledge, Scopus and Springer Link. Archived items of audiovisual material including metadata and further supplementary descriptions are not to be found in these sources and it seem they will never be; neither will journals connected to this kind of 'rare disciplines' that use audiovisual materials and metadata. My paper focuses on ways of knowledge communication in this field and on some reasons of their actual status embedded into the competitive thinking of institutionalised higher education. What role can audiovisual archives with their collections play in this context? A vision can emerge from the findings, which should be brought into a discussion that reaches beyond archive and university walls.

Keywords: *Audiovisual archives, Multi-format knowledge distribution, Humanities, Social sciences, Rare disciplines, Local languages*

Introduction

Academic research is probably one of the most rigorously and consistently evaluated sectors in modern society. To many of us working in the field of social sciences and humanities, bibliometric evaluation parameters for knowledge quality in the era of audiovisual collections and documentation can raise contradictory issue. Striving for the application of most advanced technologies in distributing knowledge and in its compaction, the omission of audiovisual documents that include processed knowledge in popular evaluation formats is an anachronism. This would be analogous to an imaginary world government dictating that fax machines have to replace email communication for the sake of fax machine producers. I am often surprised by editors who demand a limitation of audiovisual supplements although they might contain the main information of a scientific study. As in the very beginning of collecting audiovisual documents, pictures and sound are suspicious carriers of knowledge. They are considered to be less reliable owing to their primary characteristic depicting intangible contents that cannot be denoted in verbal expression thus being excluded from verbal discussion. Despite the fact that the linguocentric (Seeger 1977: 47) approach does not prevent manipulation and unreliability, we may ask if verbal

discussion remains the only mean of scientific knowledge distribution? And will it be so forever in the future?

Going through an academic career means going through endless evaluation processes and – in some cases – finally ending up as an evaluator oneself. The whole complex process of knowledge accumulation will then be expressed in some remarks referring to regressively quantified percentage annotations, thus serving as rationale for decisions.

The Situation Of Humanities And Social Sciences In The Era Of Impact Factor And Citation Index

Some years ago, Richard Smith (2006), the editor-in-chief of the mighty British Medical Journal raised the question of flaws of peer review, the amateur quality of editors' work, the very concept of authorship and ethical issues such as corruption through funding and not publishing negative results. There can be added university practices of enforced joint authorship and abuse of power by supervisors and higher administration.

Can the social sciences and humanities be similarly vulnerable to destructive evaluation practices? Seemingly, the small economic impact of research in the social sciences and humanities as compared to that of research in the pharmaceutical or materials sciences could prevent corruption in big style, although we all may know single cases.

Blockmans (2007: 89-94) drafts a few important points that can be applied on the subject of evaluating academic research. Those who think that in the underestimated social sciences and humanities

“...methods valid to evaluate a variety of medical and natural science disciplines can simply be applied to other fields fails to recognize the specific research traditions and goals of other disciplines, particularly the humanities and social sciences. They are being measured according to standards that are unsuitable for their methodology and working practices. The reasons for this have been investigated by the Standing Committee for the Humanities of the European Science Foundation since 2000. The Arts and Humanities Citation Index (AHCI) of the ISI was judged to be unsuitable as an evaluation instrument for these disciplines and therefore should not be used by European policy-makers. Moreover, the AHCI is biased towards English language journals, it includes only a few of the best journals published outside of the U.S.A., and in no way takes into account the humanities' distinctive publication culture which revolves more around books and volumes. “

The ISI is focuses on important articles in the first two years of their publication. In the humanities and social sciences generally, publications in any format remain relevant for decades (Peyraube, 2002: 14). Audiovisual material that is increasingly incorporated becomes even more valuable the longer it is preserved and equipped with updated metadata. It can – under certain circumstances – deliver reliable parameters

for quality of academic research. In practice, I might not be the only one is surprised that some editors insist on reducing ‘visual illustrations’ or rejecting audio supplements for not being relevant, which should be translated as for not being in the scope of citation. Although over the years, archivists as well as media scientists have developed an effective and thoroughly tested system of audiovisual citation rules, the very character of audiovisual information seems to be the key problem in dealing with it in a conservative academic way that is based on linguocentric views.

Ranking by number of native speakers	Language	Number of speakers in Million	Number of journals considered in the AHCI
1	Chinese	1,205	4
2	Spanish	429	24
3	English	428	957
4	Hindi	260 (Kariboli only)	2
5	Arabic	221	0
6	Malay/Indonesian	260	0
7	Portuguese	205	1
8	Bengali	193	0
9	Russian	144	6
10-13	German/ French/ Japanese/ Vietnamese	112	118 94 5 0

Table 1: Out Of 120.000 Journals All Over The World 1225 Are Listed In The Ahci.

If we try to search for journals on ethnology, musicology or ethnomusicology that are ennobled by the inclusion into a citation index such as Thomson Reuters we will find exactly one journal per subject: the *Asian Ethnology*, edited at Nanzan University, Nagoya, Japan; the *Journal of Musicology*, University of California Press, Berkeley, USA; and the journal *Ethnomusicology*, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA. None of them includes audiovisual examples or a rich multi-format display of visual documents. Although these journals are undoubtedly of high quality, they could never be taken as the only representative part of academic discussion among ethnomusicologists, ethnologists or musicologists, who accumulate their knowledge primarily in audiovisual archives, in local languages, proceedings of small scale conferences, monothematic books and volumes that often include audiovisual supplements.

	SCI 2004:	SoSCI 2004:	% of SoSCI items
source journals	5968	1712	22.3%
journal-journal relations	1,038,268	96,207	8.5%
	25,798,965	2,909,219	
	20,909,401	1,453,397	
	(difference of 18%)	(difference of 50%)	
total citations'	2,016,500	137,269	6.8%

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics Of The Jcrs Of The Science Citation Index, The Social Science Citation Index (Leydesdorff, 2006).

The humanities and the social sciences have the duty to break through this procrustean evaluation system of impact and citation indexes, which follows purely quantitative parameters in terms of academic investments such as project funding and manpower related to its outcome presented in ISI recognised journals. This duty arises from the distinct role of these disciplines not only in the academic world but also in human society as a whole. Blockmans explains:

“Issues of consuming societal importance, such as health policy, ethical and legal matters, cultural identity, religious thought, cultural changes related to technologies and social mobility, the distribution of resources and wealth demands a mode of direct communication between the researchers and the various social stakeholders. Every society is entitled to a deep and thorough analysis of the way it functions and has the right to research-based information on this matter; and, in highly developed societies, decisions in all areas are based on academic research” (Blockmans 2007: 89-94).

Novotny et al (2001) called this “socially robust knowledge”.

The Role of Audiovisual Archives

Audiovisual archives can play an important role in changing the situation in the social sciences and the humanities. Confronted with the speedily increasing amount of digitally born audiovisual documents, such archives, as directly communicated and diversely distributed knowledge sources can contribute to answer a few very important questions such as:

How is knowledge processing incorporated into audiovisual documents including metadata delivery authorised and related to research evaluation practice? Since we know that access to audiovisual collections is the main aim of all archiving efforts, we should now go further to enhance its quality in terms of societal development which is in many cases connected to academic research as a basis for decisions. Looking into university realities of publication

and teaching issues, audiovisual documents, to date, are still undifferentiated and summarized as “illustrations” or as “non-scientific output” or as “supplementary works”. What about those who work with non-verbally communicable content such as musicologists, scholars in the field of performance studies, film sciences, theatre sciences and history of arts and oral history? The often lamented loss of languages and their implied structural knowledge is on the way to becoming reality through ignoring their non-written shape. Languages in their oral form, which depend on sound rather than on visual symbols, will have no chance to develop academic significance although they are of utmost importance to the society in which they are used. Between English and those languages is a broad field of academically marginalised languages (see table 1). Not only the academic world that communicates mostly in English but also most reviewers who gain their reputation through English linguocentric approaches reproduce the unequal development of academic languages and the unequal standard in knowledge contribution around the globe. Now is the time to classify audiovisual documents seriously from the perspective of academic research quality. Being aware of technical and logistic matters that can only be controlled and overseen by professionals in various archiving institutions and organisations, the responsibility for this complex of social effectiveness should lead to classified co-operation standards between contents specialists and those professionals (Nisonger 1992: x ; 2003: 5, 23).

mono-format development	multi-format development
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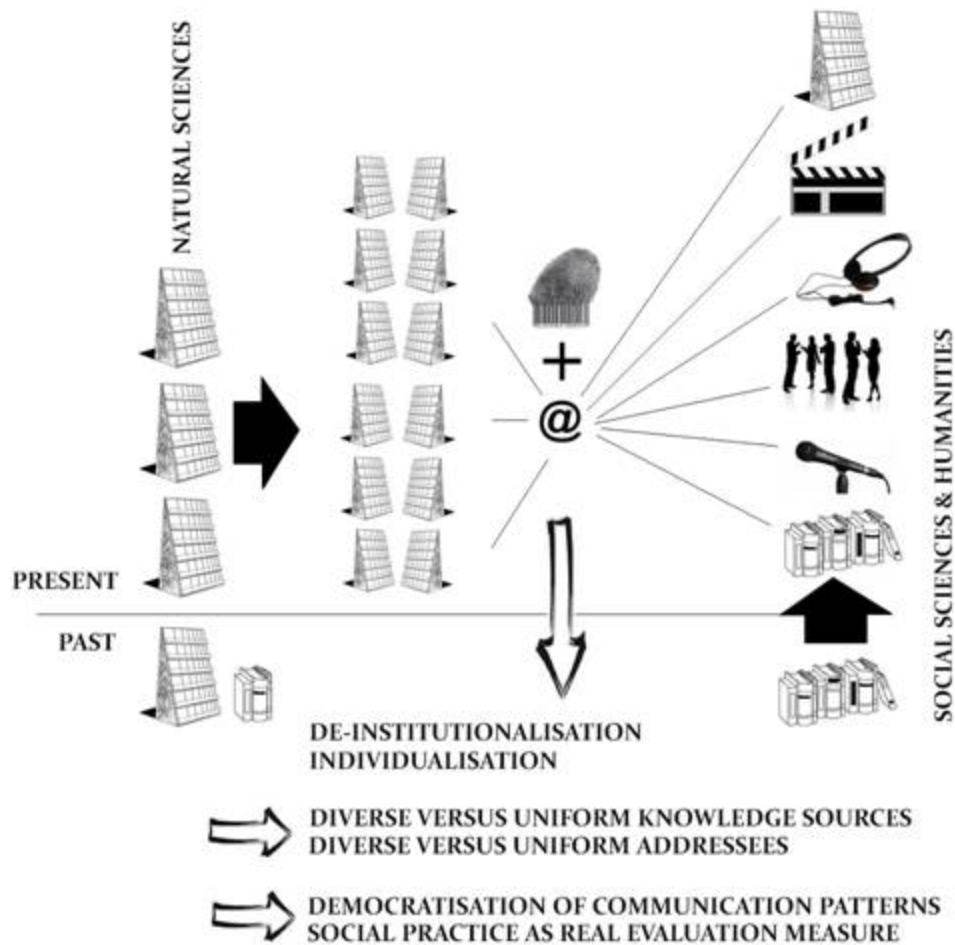


Figure 1: Knowledge Distribution Format From A Historical Perspective In Natural Sciences And In The Social Sciences And The Humanities, Partly Caused Through Evaluation Policies. Internet Possibilities And Digital Identification Tools Can Help To “Cross-Fertilize” Knowledge Distribution Formats.

Do we need micro-institutional archives at universities and institutions of higher education and/or research which provide an authorisation as a standard requirement for the recognition of audiovisual documents including metadata delivery as scientific contribution? Seen from my experience, the answer can only be ‘yes’, we need them urgently, especially in countries with fast developing research sectors, where such micro-institutions do not as yet have any support from experienced archiving professionals. The main emphasis is not on national or even regional needs – advice and support is mostly of universal ‘hard-science-like’ nature, hence they can be provided from any part of the world. Rather, the crucial point is to establish micro-institutions at faculties or departments or at special sections, which have to be recognised as places of knowledge distribution with all necessary parameters of an archive in good standing quite similar to a standard publisher. Only then can audiovisual materials such as for example experimental compositions performed under special conditions, edited theatre discussions, fieldwork collections of various formats all coming with classified metadata, become an asset in terms of evaluable academic

research contribution. And possibly only then can academia be compelled to use, distribute, and make accessible audiovisual documents thus enhancing in a broader sense its quality, which would help to include these knowledge sources into wide-scale research budgets.

The parallelism between recognition as equal part of academic evaluation and its treatment in social reality cannot be clearer than in the field of audiovisual archives. Even in highly developed countries, only a few archives could reach the status of being academically important thus socially relevant for policy makers, cultural decisions and economic strategies. The diversity of knowledge sources is deeply ignored in the academic evaluation industry where they are seen as distractions initiated by researchers in fields that have little “impact” on something of importance to the evaluation industry—their participation in the exercise of power through controlled knowledge distribution.

We could assume that such issues do not play any role in the era of the internet, but then, we overlook the fact that this very medium is itself ignored or at least downgraded due to its diversity in knowledge sources that are often incompatible with academic linguocentrism. This partly addresses the question of how future diversity in scientific communication will be treated in evaluation processes and how audiovisual archives in a large scale will respond to support knowledge distribution – for example through advisory help and backups to university micro-institutions which necessarily have to come into being for the sake of research in social sciences and humanities. Finally, what can audiovisual archival organisations such as the International Sound and Audiovisual Archive Association (IASA) or others contribute to overcome procrustean evaluation standards in academic research that fail their main aims in many aspects, to serve the society through improving academic research quality?

The Archivist’s Viewpoint

Schüller (2008; 10) describes in his inimitable style how among scholars of developing countries – he relates his observation to those from the former East European social system – there exists a

“...significant distrust of any cooperative solution. Although researchers produced field recordings under the aegis of their employing institutions,..., they considered these recordings “their” property. This attitude, combined with a widespread habit in anthropological disciplines to claim sort of exclusive rights for certain research topics, regions, or ethnic groups, has even led to the foundation of parallel institutes under one parent institution’s roof. A standard comment on the recommendation of cooperative models was often the assumption that such cooperation would only end up in the theft of one’s own field documents by rivals from the same discipline. Fortunately, there are clear signs that with further societal development this attitude is fading out.”

Additionally, Schüller (2010) remarks that audiovisual collections that represent an important part of scientific efforts in the field of social sciences and humanities were ignored over decades by scholars who could have been much better prepared for their

own fieldwork through notice of previous recordings that are accessible in public archives. He criticizes these one-project-stand scholars for degrading archival values. His correct observation, however, seems to reflect the result of current academic evaluation practices that do not care about audiovisual sources and their exploration. Thus researchers are not encouraged to deal with “non-verbal” sources such as audio or video recordings in a comprehensive way. For their “market value” as researchers, the verbal discussion of written sources, illustrated with some specific experiences, is far more imperative. In a few cases, ethnomusicologists entered academic discussions through cross-references that are partly known to journal reviewers, so, researchers ensure sympathetic consideration to their publication proposals. The coincidence of paradigm shifts in ethnological and musicological research in the 1960s and 1970s seems not to be the main reason for neglecting publicly accessible audiovisual documents. It can be partly seen as an adaptation to academic quality standards as well as to competitive conditions at universities and research institutions in terms of a ‘scientification’ that abandons to a big part non-verbal knowledge. Thus, researching music ‘without music’ led in the following period to the retrospective impression of a factional struggle between those who are under the pressure of competitive ‘scientification’ and those who could still afford to deal with special details and to work in larger groups on selected areas.

A modern holistic approach to culture and society, in which, for example, ethnomusicology is extended to become a complex of interdisciplinary studies, needs both the exploration of existing and the production of new audiovisual documents. These interdisciplinary studies require pioneering in and with non-written sources (Edmondson 2004). But they are – unfortunately – often followed by ‘source-biased’ reviews for ‘not citing professional literature’. Therefore, the introduction of audiovisual document “publishers” that are equally evaluated is absolutely essential to many subjects in social sciences and humanities.

Outlook or Publishing the “Unpublishable”

To turn audiovisual archives indeed into assets serving society in enhancing research quality and knowledge distribution, audiovisual archive organisations could help to develop models for these publisher-like micro-institutionalised archives in terms of audition and recommendation based on the rich experience of its members working in different sections and committees. The high reputation of the organisations’ international body in collaboration with other national or local organisations dealing with audiovisual archiving can have an important effect on an urgently needed breakthrough in scientific evaluation practice, especially in fields where scientific linguocentrism meets intangible knowledge that unfolds in art production and their audio-visualised reflection. To connect competencies related to content and related to information technology, new conditions for co-operation in small scale archiving environments have to be negotiated in a way that evaluation parameters can be applied on both the content and the technological aspects. Therefore I call for practical solutions that can contribute to a multi-format recognition of knowledge assets.

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