

ESARBICA JOURNAL

**JOURNAL OF THE EASTERN
AND SOUTHERN AFRICA
REGIONAL BRANCH OF THE
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON
ARCHIVES**

Volume 41

2022

ISSN 2220-6442 (Print), ISSN 2220-6450 (Online)

<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/esarjo.v41i1.10>

Archiving the voices of the once voiceless: strategies for digital preservation of oral history at the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Archives

Mbongeni Tembe (Malokotha)

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
mbongeni.malokotha@gmail.com

Zawedde Nsibirwa

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
Nsibirwaz@ukzn.ac.za
Orcid ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-852-15601>

Received: 30 April 2021

Revised: 31 March 2022

Accepted: 30 June 2022

Abstract

With the urge for instant access to records resulting from the rapid development of technology, there is a need for the digital preservation of vulnerable oral history records. Oral history records are primary sources that confirm certain aspects of historical events and preserving oral history records is crucial to ensure societal memory. In the South African context, oral history has given a voice to the people who were voiceless in the past due to colonialism and the apartheid system. This study investigated possible digital strategies and techniques for preserving oral history records at the KwaZulu-Natal Archives and Records Service (KZNARS) Oral History Unit (OHU). A qualitative approach was used, and data were collected using semi-structured interviews from purposely selected members of the OHU staff. In addition, an observation guide was used to collect data regarding the current playback equipment, storage conditions and the state of the oral history records. Content and thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The findings revealed that the strategies and techniques used for the preservation and access to oral history records have been ineffective. Issues identified included legislation that does not provide for the preservation of oral history records in the contemporary digital era, the lack of policy, deficient strategies for preservation and access, and a shortage of resources, funding, and qualified staff. Various recommendations, stemming from the issues identified, are made.

Keywords: oral history records, digital preservation, strategies, KwaZulu-Natal Archives and Records Service, South Africa

Introduction

Several scholars (Denis, 2005; Denis & Ntsimane, 2008; Bhebhe, 2015; Nkala & David, 2015; Denis, 2016; Ngulube, 2016; Garaba, 2016) have conducted studies concerning oral history in the southern African context. However, very little has been written about preserving and accessing oral history, especially identifying digital preservation strategies in the African context. According to Ncala (2017:23), preservation “is one of

the mandated archival functions that ensure the longevity of records through their lifecycle”, making oral history accessible to all. Preservation is necessary to maintain the past in the present, and preservation concerning oral history records is about preserving the recently captured records about the past for the future. It cannot be denied that without oral history, much of the memory of the past will be lost, and this could affect the cultural heritage and social cohesion of South Africa.

Preservation is an umbrella term that includes all strategies and methods (new and old) of action. Current preservation strategies and activities include stand-by duplicates, repairing and cleaning damaged tapes and physically preserving analogue materials for the long term (Okahashi, 2011). Another method is the community-oriented storytelling method, which is not a precise or reliable method to preserve oral history for present and future generations. However, these strategies could be considered “traditional”, and it is now evident that any archive that places value on oral history records that are fragile and delicate needs to ensure that the intellectual content is preserved through long-term digital preservation to provide greater access. Ritchie (2014:164) points to the complexity of preserving oral history:

Oral history is an entirely different type of record from those they [archivists] normally handle since it is not an artifact preserved from the past but a present record that attempts to re-create the past and is subject to memory failures and reinterpretation through intervening events.

Only a few institutions in the developed world have initiated digital preservation strategies and techniques for oral history records since it is costly and demands technical skills (Stamp, 2015:6; Matusiak, Tyler, Newton & Polepeddi, 2017). While many archives, especially in developing countries, lack the appropriate digital infrastructure, digital preservation for oral history records cannot be perceived as only a concern for information and other memory institutions – it is a challenge for all who are curious about creating, acquiring, and providing access to oral history records (Stamp, 2015:6). However, Matusiak et al. (2017:89) state, “the digitisation of oral histories also addresses preservation concerns, as many analogue recordings were originally created on fragile and deteriorating tapes.” Due to the fragility of oral history records that are a particular category of audio-visual records, namely sound recordings, there is a need to discuss preservation issues as records are created.

Mnjama (2010) states that audio-visual records play a vital role in maintaining cultural heritage; however, these records are often neglected in developing countries, which prefer paper records. Many authors (Mnjama, 2010; Khayundi, 2011; Msibi, 2015; Mtshali, 2016; Ncala, 2017; Lukileni-Lipinge & Mnjama, 2017; Abankwah, 2018) have discussed the deterioration of archival material, including paper, electronic and audio-visual records. They have identified various factors that play a role in the deterioration (and thus damage) of records, and these are:

- i. human factors: include handling and care, storage equipment, building and manmade disasters.
- ii. environmental factors: include air quality and light, temperature and relative humidity, moisture or dirt and natural disasters; and
- iii. physical and chemical factors: include the relative stability of optical format, enclosures, scratches and breaks CDs and periodic testing.

Apart from the abovementioned factors, with the paradox of preservation objects changing over time, preservationists should fight the battle to keep records in a usable

state. Especially in South Africa, a post-colonial country, where much of the historical information was not documented; some of the information was destroyed by the apartheid government (Dick, 2018). Ensuring the preservation of, and access to, oral history is crucial and will help fill the gap of inadequate literature of South Africans caused by both the colonial and apartheid systems.

Oral history is defined by Garaba (2016:1390) as the “complex interaction between an interviewer and the interviewee about particular events of the past” and transferring information about historical events through “word of mouth” as a personal witness. Similarly, Denis and Ntsimane (2008:3) state that oral history is “the complex interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee about events of the past, which require questioning, as well as listening, on the part of the interviewer.” These authors (Denis & Ntsimane, 2008; Garaba, 2016) do not associate oral history with a particular approach to collecting records, namely ethnographic, social history or politically inspired. However, Ngulube (2016:1674) described oral history as associated with the ethnographic approach of storytelling through interviews and described it as the interpretation of memories of the historical event. In this article, oral history records refer to the intangible interviews about historical events recorded on specific physical carrier types, namely compact discs (CD), digital versatile discs (DVD), video home system (VHS format) and transcribed documents (kept as MP3 audio recordings and Microsoft Word documents). Therefore, in this study, oral history records are sound recordings that are analogue and born-digital records, mostly on physical carriers that are fragile.

However, the current oral history records on physical carriers limit access to these records due to the need to visit the archive physically to access them. Yet records are preserved for users to access them. Preservation is nullified if access is prevented, as traditional preservation without reformatting hinders access due to obsolescence of physical carriers and playback equipment of oral history records. Lukileni-Lipinge and Mnjama (2017:83) state that the absence of hardware (playback equipment), standards, policies, guidelines, and trained staff affect long-term preservation of audio-visual records and therefore affect access. Furthermore, easy access enhances the chance that oral history records can be understood and used as sources of information.

Digital technology has allowed new methods like preservation reformatting, which involves migrating information on records from one carrier to another for preservation and improving access to oral history records. People’s expectations to access oral history have increased with the Fourth Industrial Revolution and that has altered technological development even further with faster computers and internet speeds, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and many other factors. Currently, researchers expect easy digital access to records at little or no expense. Therefore, the demand for easy access involves the reformatting of oral history records from analogue to digital digitisation/digital conversion that requires the principles and long-term direction of technological development that a digital policy and preservation strategies should guide.

Today digitisation is considered as a remedy and a responsible act of the archivist’s strategy for the preservation and greater access to records made possible by the development of technology and a globalised economy (Nsibirwa, 2019:84).

Ritchie (2014:173) states, “the evolving technology that made it easier to do. Oral history also made its preservation more difficult”.

Digital preservation involves the processes and actions that will help to ensure continued and indefinite access to information and records that exist in a digital format, even when the digital files are taken out of their creation context (Van der Merwe & Van Deventer, 2009; Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC), 2015; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2019). However, the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) (2016:13) states that digital records preservation is about tasks and activities such as digitisation, conservation, restoration, and reformatting that need to be correctly managed to ensure continued access to digital records for as long as they are required. The digital preservation of oral history records protects societal memories, ensures the longevity of oral history records, and transmits information to current and future generations (Stamp, 2015: 4). Therefore, the preservation strategy of valuable records is about making them accessible for posterity and this is possible through digital conversion and application of relevant preservation methods. Scholars such as Garaba (2010:119), Nsibirwa (2012:73) and Mills (2017:10) concur, arguing that there is a correlation between preservation and access, and both concepts have a fundamental association. In other words, the concepts go together and are complementary, and neither oppose the future right to use the records.

Furthermore, the programme of preservation and access requires clear and straightforward guidelines and policies to operate effectively and guarantee permanent access to oral history records. Nevertheless, there will always be emerging challenges related to digital preservation, as records are machine dependent. In addition, digital records need to be protected from alteration, damage, and technical obsolescence.

Currently, the preservation of oral history records challenges are related to the content (the recording). In addition, the carrier, which has an “array of threats such as storage media can decay over time, leading to corrupted files; storage media may become obsolete and unsupported by contemporary computers” (Stamp, 2015:8). The ability to hear the sound recording depends on the carrier’s physical integrity, the recording process, record format, availability, and functionality of playback equipment. For example, the oral history records on video cassettes (analogue format) have become obsolete, as playback equipment is no longer manufactured. Some need to be digitised, while others, like CDs, may become obsolete and may have to be migrated to a more stable medium or platform. In addition, if the CD is damaged, the files may be lost.

However, the DPC (2015:5) states that “as technology becomes more sophisticated this dependence becomes an ever more elaborate chain of inter-dependencies that are hard to track and tricky to maintain.” As technology develops, organisations are forced to upgrade their software and hardware to keep up with the times, which may impact on the access of the oral history records as with digitisation and migration, specific components of the files may be lost. “Failure or inability to keep up with these developments means loss of whatever cultural heritage that may be stored on the obsolete media.” (Khayundi, 2011:292). Nevertheless, oral history needs proper preservation for the benefit of posterity, for building social cohesion, facilitating reconciliation and research purposes. Khayundi (2011:292) emphasises this by stating that “it is instructive that the preservation of such priceless collections must be of great concern as they form an integral part of humankind’s cultural heritage.” Therefore, records professionals need to know what is involved in the long-term preservation of oral history records, especially regarding reliability. However, the IRMT (2016:15) state that:

From a technology perspective, the key digital preservation requirement for records management and business systems is interoperability. That is, the

In addition, Nsibirwa (2019:94) states that “the quality and quantity of metadata attached to a record affects the ease of access of the record.” In other words, it is crucial to develop full and clear metadata for any records to facilitate easy access. This includes the collection of descriptive, structural, administrative, and contextual metadata.

Background to oral history records in the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Archives context

In South Africa, oral history came to the fore when people started to understand the praises of traditional kings from different clans (Mulokozi, 1999). However, Koopman (2002:14) states that there were no information institutions like museums, libraries, and archives in South Africa before the colonisation by Europeans. These only emerged in the 19th and 20th century during which there was a process of writing down activities. The recording of oral history records was initiated at the KZNARs in 2012 with the establishment of the OHU to help bridge and fill in the gap in history by recording the undocumented history/or destroyed public records within the province. According to Harris (1999:6):

The tools of forgetfulness, of state-imposed amnesia, were crucial to the exercise of power in apartheid South Africa. The state generated huge information resources, which it secreted jealously from public view. It routinely destroyed public records in order to keep certain processes secret.

Archives were also used as a mechanism to support the former political system of apartheid, and services were geared to support mainly white people. According to Khayundi (2011:298):

Before the dawn of the new democratic dispensation, South Africa’s archival collections were politically constructed to reflect the political ideology of the ruling or power elite. This resulted in the creation of an archival system which excluded the collective memory of the black South Africans.

Although user services were open to all and offered free of charge, black South Africans made up only a tiny proportion of the users. According to Harris (2002:71), South Africans enjoyed only nominal access to public archives due to systemic barriers like:

- i. low educational standards, high illiteracy rates, and physical isolation from city centres; and
- ii. lack of proficiency in Afrikaans and English which were the official languages.

The poor appraisal and selection of records created gaps in records about segregation, black people’s experiences and gender issues related to women and the disabled. The State Archives Service did nothing to help with the barriers. On the other hand, anti-apartheid individuals and organisations also were reluctant to commit certain types of information to paper and destroyed records rather than allowing them to fall into the hands of the state (Harris, 2002:70). Gaps in written records also contribute to our understanding of the actions against whole groups of people who, perhaps because of gender, race, class, or ethnicity have not been represented in the archival collections (Ritchie, 2014:163).

The KZN Provincial Archives has three branches comprising the Ulundi, Durban and Pietermaritzburg archival repositories and oral history records are initiated by the Oral History Unit located at Pietermaritzburg (KZN Department of Arts and Culture, 2020). It is crucial to point out that due to lack of space, the OHU is located within the KwaZulu-Natal Museum Services, not within the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository.

The OHU began operations in 2013 (Department of Arts and Culture Oral History Framework and Strategy, n.d.:11). Its collection includes workers history, family history, women history, indigenous knowledge system, heritage and culture, amakhosi (chiefs and traditional leaders), struggle veterans, domestic workers, sports, Khoi-San and Griques, uMkhonto Wesizwe Veterans Association and Azanian People's Liberation Army, religion and culture, family trees, artists (performing and non-performing) including musicians, writers, visual artists and poets (Department of Arts and Culture Oral History Framework and Strategy, nd:11).

Problem statement

Preservation of, and access to, oral history records is crucial and vital, especially, as emphasised above, in the context of South Africa as a post-colonial country. The fundamental umbrella under which preserving and accessing oral history records is contained within South Africa's Constitution (National Gazette No. 17678, 1996). Nsibirwa (2007) and Mtshali (2016) state that the South African Bill of Rights (section 32 of the Constitution) gives everyone the right to access information. The legal context is a critical and complex subject both locally and abroad, and many discussions have taken place about legal issues surrounding oral history records. The proper preservation of records facilitated public access the records (Ngulube, 2009; Mtshali, 2016; Matusiak et al., 2017).

Oral history confirms historical events by verifying the event and recovering certain aspects of the past event that may not have been captured (Bhebhe, 2015). Oral history enhances the understanding of the past for both present and future generations. It is vital to preserve historical information because the people who have such information are older and eager to pass this information on to present and future generations. Nsibirwa, Hoskins and Stilwell (2014:53) state that "the development of technology has fostered new and faster ways of publishing electronically, but many countries are losing a significant proportion of their cultural heritage because they are unable to capture and preserve" these records for posterity. If not documented and preserved, this information will not be accessible to either generation (Khayundi, 2011; Msibi, 2015). Access to oral history records is the fundamental core element for the entire mission of preservation. Proper strategies for adequate access to oral history records ensure that society's memory is available and can be used for good purposes. Traditional storage of analogue oral history records and born-digital records kept on physical carriers limits access to these records.

Anecdotal evidence and observation of the OHU, including informal conversations with archival staff, indicate a lack of practical, effective programmes for the preservation of oral history records, therefore affecting access. The informal conversations revealed the absence of the preservation policy, strategies, and resources for oral history records. However, during the Covid-19, the need for remote access of records has increased tenfold, becoming the new standard access method. According to Nsibirwa (2109:2), "though with the continual development of technologies, new practices are emerging, yet legislation, policies, strategies and the professional archival practice especially in the developing countries are not at par with the technology." Yet, preservation should be at the centre of collection management to "support current and future access to recorded information" (Ngulube, 2003:4).

It must be noted that oral history records are very fragile forms of records, and the physical integrity of the carrier and the playback equipment required must be ensured, which further emphasises the need for effective preservation and subsequent access (Lukileni-Lipinge & Mnjama, 2017; Abankwah, 2018). Challenges include the composition of the physical carrier (CDs, DVDs, and VHS) made of various chemical compositions and sizes, shapes and configurations depending on when and where they were manufactured, and this makes them susceptible to damage, destruction and loss. Furthermore, the relative stability of oral history records is not consistent due to different formats of oral history recordings from different industries coming to the fore. Secondly, the ability to hear the recorded sound depends on the physical integrity of the carrier, record format, availability, and functionality of playback equipment. In addition, placing oral history records in close contact with some materials causes harmful chemical reactions due to several factors, especially temperature and relative humidity. In addition, improper storage and handling can damage them beyond repair, causing catastrophic loss of valuable information.

The KZNARS and the OHU must possess the needed strategies and techniques in the digital preservation of oral history records in the contemporary digital era. Oral history records play a more significant role in the archives by capturing omitted information and societal memories based on storytelling. It is vital to preserve such historical information digitally in this digital era to make them accessible to the present and future generations. If not digitally documented and preserved, this information may be lost and not accessible to current and future generations (Msibi, 2015). Proper strategies and techniques for practical digital preservation of oral history records ensure that society's memory is available and safe, since sustainable access is crucial and may be affected by technical challenges and the continual fluid development of technology.

Aim and objectives of the study

The study aimed to examine the necessity for strategies and techniques for the digital preservation of oral history records. The Records Continuum Model lens was used to inform the objectives which are concerned with the long-term preservation and ensuring societal memory and essential evidence. This study dealt with inactive (analogue) records and proposed digital preservation strategies to enhance access. The model assisted the study in suggesting strategies of preserving and accessing oral history records, especially using modern technical methods of preserving archival materials. The specific objective of this study were to:

- Identify the need for digital preservation of oral history records.
- Determine the strategies for the preservation of, and access to oral history records.
- Recommend possible strategies and techniques to ensure oral history records will be accessible in the long term.

Literature review

The literature reviewed by the current study indicated that most of the studies about the strategies and techniques for digital preservation of oral history records were conducted in the developed countries like Britain, Germany, and the United States of America (USA) (Edmondson, 2013; Stamp, 2015; DPC, 2015; Irwin, 2016; Matusiak et al., 2017). Not much has been written specifically about attaining digital preservation strategies for oral history in the African context. Therefore, there is a need to unfold and unpack our understanding of the role of oral history and current issues concerning oral history both locally and internationally, including the need for digital preservation as well as strategies and techniques for digital preservation of oral history records.

Role of oral history

Oral history is useful for research, both in society and the academic environment, which compels archivists to actively make the records accessible (Ritchie, 2003:19; Irwin, 2016:98). It can be said that oral history is part of the heritage as it is unique, restores society's history and signifies views or opinions that may not be found in published literature. Oral history plays a part in various activities in society, particularly in stabilising the culture and heritage, and this is evident in South Africa (Moss & Mazikana, 1986) by verifying and recovering historical information from the older generations. Various pieces of legislation underpin the maintenance and restoration of the South African heritage (and thus archives and oral history), namely:

- i. The 1996 Constitution of South Africa (Sections 30 and 31);
- ii. The National Heritage Council Act (No. 11 of 1999);
- iii. The National Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 of 1999);
- iv. The National Policy on the Digitisation of Heritage Resources of 2010; and
- v. The White Paper on Arts and Culture, Third Draft 2017 (Harris, 2000; National Department of Arts and Culture, 2010).

However, the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act (No. 43 of 1996), is the primary legislation that governs “the proper management and care of the records of governmental bodies; and the preservation and use of a national archival heritage; and to provide for matters connected therewith.”

Oral history has a role in archives and special collections, which is to fill the missing gaps in the archival collection (Ritchie, 2014; Bhebhe, 2015; Matusiak et al., 2017). Similarly, Ngulube (2016:1675) claims, “oral history can contribute immensely to the collection building at public archival institutions.” Ritchie (2014:163) states that researchers and archivists are aware of the limitations of written records; therefore, oral history is recognised as “auxiliary documentation.” Oral history thus, restores pride and dignity in people, as it provides them with a chance to voice their historical experiences and to bring historical events and incidents to the surface. Therefore, oral history records should be considered in South Africa as more than a supplement and less than a substitute for other archival records.

However, even if oral history has an important role to play, and one needs to note that the records of personal accounts may have limitations. These limitations may result based on various facets, including age, memory, personal opinions and experiences. Therefore, at times, oral history is labelled as a less reliable source of information.

Digital preservation

Digital preservation work requires careful consideration of the entire lifecycle of the oral history records (Stamp, 2015). The process of digital records preservation consists of methods aimed at ensuring the continued accessibility of digital records as part of a records management task. The records continuum supports the whole record-keeping enterprise and accommodates the care of electronic records. Matusiak et al. (2017:89) state, “digital recording tools provide new means of capturing and telling life stories, while digital collections make them available to wider audiences” However, the IRMT (2016) emphasises that “digital preservation is not simply a process of capturing digital records and holding them in a digital repository.” UNESCO (2019) concurs with the IRMT (2016) and states, “comprehensive programmes must take control of appropriate digital materials and ensure they remain understandable and usable as authentic copies.” There are mechanisms that help the digital preservation of oral history records activities and applying them promptly can be central not just in avoiding loss, but also in ensuring the best use of limited resources (Stamp, 2015; IRMT, 2016:9; Matusiak et al., 2017:89). According to Matusiak et al. (2017:89),

“long-term preservation of digital assets requires technical infrastructure and significant investment in resources and expertise.” The mechanisms and technical infrastructure required include the digital preservation policy, strategies and techniques for digital preservation.

Digital preservation policy

Policy and legislation are required for the digital preservation programme of oral history records and must be established and implemented. “The digital preservation policy provides a mandate under which an archive can oversee these processes and manage digital preservation” (National Archives, 2011:5). However, a policy is not a law, but it identifies with a law/s to achieve its goals. Nevertheless, IRMT (2016:19) states that, “few laws reflect specific references to the requirement to manage records effectively.” Although the legislation does exist in many countries, unfortunately, “legislation governing archives and records management in most Eastern and Southern Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) countries is outdated” (Msibi, 2015:45). The National Archives and Records Services Act 43 of 1996 was last amended in 2001. The Act does not cater for digital preservation and only allows the national archivist to determine how the electronic systems are managed and which records may be microfilmed or reproduced electronically. Since South African legislation is dated, the digital preservation policy will not have the architecture to support it. On the other hand, the IRMT (2016:19) states, “if the laws exist, they are often ignored because there are few sanction[s] in place for non-compliance.”

Digital conversion and migration are becoming integral in protecting audio-visual and digital collections from deterioration and obsolescence, and preserving them (Okahashi, 2011). However, many South African archival institutions do not have policies for preservation and conservation, particularly for oral history records (Olatokun, 2008:4). The preservation of, and access to, oral history records must be supported by regulations and plain, well-defined policies, guidelines, and procedures (Mnjama, 2010:142). Policies and procedures need to include taking the appropriately prepared records and accompanying documentation or metadata into an archival digital repository, where they can deal with the threats of data loss and technological change. Equally important are well-trained staff members as oral history professionals and knowledgeable users regarding the use of oral history records (Mnjama, 2010; Msibi, 2015).

Strategies and techniques for digital preservation

A strategy is usually drawn from the digital preservation policy that sets out the standard rules and regulations. “Both the policy and the strategy are essential to ensure there is a verifiable and trusted means of preserving the integrity of digital records” (National Archives, 2011:9). Achieving effective strategies and techniques for the digital preservation of oral history records requires institutional response and to be better informed about the digital challenges (DPC, 2020). “The strategy works by identifying specific triggers which will determine when digital preservation activities may take place” (National Archives, 2011:7). Therefore, it will help recognise the oral history records that need urgent attention and are becoming obsolete. Good practice and standards are the two activities that make digital preservation achievable and promote effective preservation for oral history records (DPC, 2020).

Understanding the technology on which oral history materials are dependent enables appropriate action as part of the strategy to ensure their digital preservation (National Archives, 2011:9; Stamp, 2015:8). This includes identifying triggers for migration, digitisation, and digital conversion as early intervention to head off technology obsolescence, which may provide greater confidence of long-term sustainability (National Archives,

2011:9; Stamp, 2015:10). In addition, the nature of digital technology for the digital preservation of oral history records dictates that it is not feasible simply to hand over stewardship of the resource in future without having to manage it sufficiently to facilitate sustainability (Stamp, 2015:9). Therefore, information management systems for digital preservation of oral history records need to link to essential contextual information regarding the procedures for digital preservation (Stamp, 2015: 9). However, Matusiak et al. (2017:89) state:

The development of open-source CMSs and preservation services, especially those with hosted options, has enabled smaller cultural heritage institutions with limited technical infrastructure to participate in building digital collections.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach to establish the need for digital preservation and recommend possible strategies and techniques to ensure long-term access to oral history records. The focus was on the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR) only, excluding Ulundi and Durban archives repositories, because all the oral history records are stored in Pietermaritzburg. The interpretivism paradigm using a qualitative case study was used to examine oral history records exclusively. The study population consisted of 12 purposely selected members because they all worked at the OHU. The 12 respondents participated in one-on-one (face-to-face) interviews. The head of the unit (a deputy director), four researchers (assistant directors), four researcher assistants, two administrative officers and one intern of the OHU were purposely selected because they had knowledge and experience regarding oral history records. All other staff members of the PAR were excluded from the study.

However, only seven interviews were conducted and analysed due to the following reasons. First, the researchers could not interview four of the staff members, as two were no longer working in the unit; at the time of the interviews, one withdrew from the study, and the fourth was on maternity leave. Furthermore, it was subsequently found that the recording of one of the eight interviews held was not audible, and the participant was unwilling to redo the interview.

Apart from the semi-structured interviews, other data collection tools were used, including a structured observation guide to help determine the playback equipment available and the current state of the equipment, storage conditions and the state of the oral history records. The qualitative data analysis was guided by the theoretical framework (the records continuum model) to ensure that the study focuses on societal memories. In addition, thematic analysis was used, and the main themes of preservation and access were used as a basis for the data analysis in response to the aim and specific objective formulated in view of the research problem.

Results and discussions of the findings

The results and discussion relating to the objective concerning identifying the need for digital preservation and recommending possible strategies and techniques to ensure oral history records will be preserved and accessible in the long term. These are presented below. In order to identify the need for digital preservation, one needs to assess the different facets related to the preservation and access of oral history records. Assessment of the different preservation facets is required to establish the need for reformatting/media conversion of the records. The findings are presented and discussed as follows:

- i. Participants' demographics;
- ii. Policy and legislation; and
- iii. Preservation of oral history records

Participants' demographics

In order to identify the need for digital preservation, it was essential to look at the staff knowledge and skills. To protect the participants' privacy (confidentiality), labels were used. They were referred to as OHU 1 – OHU 7. Four (OHU 1, OHU 4, OHU 6 and OHU 7) were female and three (OHU 2, OHU 3 and OHU 5) were male. Other demographic data collected included the participants' level of education and work experience, as appropriate skills and knowledge are required for the preservation of oral history records. In addition, relevant knowledge and skills are required to handle the different carriers and formats (analogue and born-digital).

The findings indicated that the OHU was well-resourced with well-educated staff. However, out of the seven, only two participants had qualifications related to archival science; therefore, most lacked the knowledge and skills for preservation. One female participant (OHU 1) had a Postgraduate Diploma in Records and Archival Management and one male participant (OHU 5) with seven years of work experience had a master's degree in history. According to Stamp (2015:7), those with existing skills in either information management or information technology within an organisation are well placed to build on these skills and apply them to digital preservation activities for oral history records. However, most participants' qualifications were not related to archives, history or heritage and cultural studies as recommended qualifications. These included a bachelor's degree in social sciences (OHU 4), B.Tech Degree in Public Management (OHU 6) and a national diploma in public management (OHU 7) for the female participants. Except for the intern, all three had worked at the OHU for three or more years. In addition, one of the male participants (OHU 3) had a master's degree in political science, and the other (OHU 2) had a national diploma in office management and technology. In terms of work experience in the unit, OHU 3 had six years' experience and OHU 2 had five years' experience.

The lack of staff with formal training and qualifications in archival management is a major challenge because it compromises the archival institution's preservation (traditional and digital) activities, including professional services. Moreover, the lack of training for staff members to improve their knowledge and skills goes hand in hand with the unit's lack of archivists and historians. Therefore, staff lacked fundamental skills to manage the digital preservation of oral history records. However, Matusiak et al. (2017:92) emphasises that the staff require knowledge of preservation terminology and workflows to use open-source software. Open-source software is usually chosen, as funding is a challenge in developing countries, and archives are under-resourced.

Policy and legislation

Policy is vital to help govern, guide and formalise the OHU preservation activities. To determine whether OH had a preservation policy, a question was asked. The findings established that the policy about preserving and accessing oral history in the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR) was deficient. OHU 1 stated that:

In oral history, we have a framework but what is supposed to guide us is the policy, and the oral history policy is something we recently worked on, that guides us how we collect our oral history.

The researchers probed further, and OHU 1 explained that:

It is a policy that hasn't been signed, a policy which is sitting with our directors.

OHU 3 also confirmed that the policy was not yet finalised and that they were working on it:

The preservation policy, I must tell you that currently we only have a draft policy that is not yet been approved. It has been recently drafted and it does not only focus on preservation, but I think it's divided into three parts. It covers acquisition, preservation and how to make records accessible that is what we have acquired as a unit.

In addition, OHU 5 claimed that the policy issue is a critical matter because there is a lack of teamwork because a policy is a course of action set to guide employees and helps to formalise activities. According to OHU 5:

That one is difficult... That one is not going to happen overnight because we don't have a dedicated team that is just looking at the policy; we must be on the ground so when we are free then we will look at the policy.

Only three out of the seven participants who were interviewed knew about the draft policy document. The absence of a preservation policy at the PAR was also indicated as a problem by Mtshali (2016:114), although the focus of his study was not on oral history specifically. The results from the current study and those from Mtshali's (2016) study indicated that the lack of a working preservation policy at the PAR is a challenge for all types of records, including oral history records. Similarly, Ncala (2017:122) found that the National Film, Video and Sound Archives of South Africa (NFVSA) did not have a preservation policy. Nevertheless, Mnjama (2010:142) and the National Archives (2011:5) emphasise that the preservation and access to oral history records must be supported by regulations and plain, well-defined policies, guidelines, and procedures. Lyons (2016:3) agrees with the authors and asserts that a designated clear policy is vital to determine what constitutes oral history records and to provide the framework for "collections management and institutional planning for description, storage, preservation, and access." In addition, Lukileni-Lipinge and Mnjama (2017:85) posit that, "it is important that archival institutions make it mandatory to establish policy priorities with regard to the audio-visual records." The PAR needs to finalise the existing draft policy not only for preservation generally but also specifically for the digital preservation of, and access to, oral history records. Preservation concerns not only the conservation of a record in its original format and, quite literally, the safeguarding of the intellectual content of records and the maintenance of the physical plant where records are housed.

The study revealed that the programme of oral history records preservation in the PAR was ineffective due to various reasons, including:

- i. outdated national and provincial archival legislation that regulates oral history records; and
- ii. absence of general and digital preservation policy for oral history records.

According to the National Archives (2011:5), a digital preservation policy provides a directive that assists an archive to manage digital preservation processes.

However, according to the Western Cape Government, Cultural Affairs and Sport (2015), some policies regulate oral history in South Africa, including "The National Policy on the Digitization of Heritage Resources, 2010." However, this policy has not yet been promulgated and is still in draft form. Therefore, the policy cannot be used, as it is still open for comments and debate and will be changed.

The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act No. 43 of 1996, the Copyright Act No. 98 of 1978 and National Heritage Resources Act No. 25 of 1999 that impact oral history records and provide a framework for policy are out of date and do not address the digital environment. Although a Copyright Bill (B13 2017) was developed in South Africa, it still has not been passed to become legislation. In addition, the KwaZulu-Natal Archives and Records Service Act (No. 8 of 2011 as amended) (KZN Archives Act) needs to be revisited to ensure that it fully supports audio-visual materials. Finally, the legislation needs to be reconsidered carefully regarding the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the advantages and disadvantages posed by ICTs concerning the digital preservation of, and access to, oral history records.

Preservation of oral history records

In order to identify the need for digital preservation and recommend possible strategies and techniques to ensure that oral history records will be accessible in the long term, both the semi-structured interviews and observation guide were used.

The findings related to observation revealed that oral history records were stored in an adapted building. The OHU is housed in the Old Greys Hospital building (an ancient building) that was not purposely built or adapted to archival building standards to accommodate oral history records for preservation and access. Concerning the building, the interview participants stated: [OHU 5]

That one [challenge] will always be there until the day we have an archives repository that has custody to the records as papers, and to digital records and to the records as recordings. These archives when they were established, the archives repository they did not cater for the audio-visual material.

[OHU 1]

The building we [are] in, is very old and when there were heavy rains like a month ago it leaked that side, we don't really have ventilations so there are things that compromise the space.

The location of OHU is problematic because it is separated from the main Pietermaritzburg repository. Negative aspects relating to the OHU were a lack of storage area for oral history records within the unit, scarcity of working space for the staff, a lack of visibility to the users and inadequate equipment. Therefore, according to Nsibirwa (2016:110), the building's location is an important consideration and must be suitable to accommodate the aims of the archival institution.

Observations revealed that the environmental conditions of the storage area were unfavourable for the preservation of oral history records, as the area had windows, it was carpeted and had cracks in the walls. In addition, the temperature, relative humidity and light were not controlled according to archival standards, as the area was also used as an office. However, according to two respondents, there is a final agreement to build a new archives repository even though it is unclear when the building work will start. Below are responses from the two respondents concerning the proposed new building:

[OHU 1]

We have money for the building, we have [had] it for the past two years. I think we have 300 million to build in [on] a new site in Pietermaritzburg and they are working on it.

[OHU 5]

Treasurer gave us money this was through the previous MEC Sibhidla Saphetha... So [the] treasurer gave us money 300 million to establish a new archive building... Because there is a lack of free space, we are here now at the museum which makes it as if we are the separate thing from the archives.

Building the new archives would solve the current challenges relating to preservation of, and access to, oral history records. The design of the current archives building does not accommodate preservation of, and access to, the records for various reasons, including the lack of space. The response from OHU 6 also touched on the challenge with the building:

[OHU6]

I also believe that the building is not conducive wise...[sic]

Given the above, there is a special and urgent need to improve the building currently housing the OHU to enable proper preservation of, and access to, the oral history records. However, digital preservation/conversion needs to be done as soon as possible and cannot wait for the new building that may not even materialise.

In addition, Lukileni-Lipinge and Mnjama (2017) and Abankwah (2018) state that playback equipment must be availed. This further emphasises the need for practical preservation and subsequent access and process for digital conversion. The scarcity of playback equipment such as that found at The Recorded Sound Reference Center (Library of Congress, 2018) (and resources to preserve and access oral history) is a severe challenge facing the OHU.

In addition, the OHU faced inadequate funding. Many of the challenges listed above could be resolved should adequate funding be made available. However, this is unlikely in the current financial climate, and without a general and digital preservation policy, the chances of securing funding are curtailed.

Conclusion and recommendations

A country with gaps in records is a country that lacks history and the memory of society. These words emphasise that preserving information for posterity on the heritage of South Africa is a significant undertaking (National Film, Video and Sound Archives of South Africa, 2019). The article and its findings have shown that an essential role of oral history lies in filling in the gaps in the archives about historical events. This is vital because most of the records in archives in South Africa were produced during colonial and apartheid times. Without the proper preservation (including digital preservation/conversion), the people who were given a voice may become voiceless once again due to the deterioration of the records.

From the findings above, the study recommends the following:

Legal framework/legislation

Legislation does not provide enough detail concerning the acquisition, management, and preservation of, and access to, oral history records. It is recommended that the KZN Archives Act should be amended to accommodate audio-visual materials. This Act should provide regulations and address the processes required to preserve and access archival records through their life cycle. It is recommended that this Act should also provide enough detail about how to initiate and coordinate the digital preservation and conversion of audio-visual material.

Policy

The PAR should develop a preservation and access policy with some urgency because a policy will help with processes and procedures. It will also assist in soliciting funding, equipment, and resources, and negotiating for an environment more conducive to archival practices. The policy should govern all preservation and access activities, including digital preservation and conversion. Therefore, digital preservation strategies should be drawn from policies. The policy should also stipulate clear guidelines on online access to oral history records.

Building

The plan for building the new purpose-built archival building should be completed, like the policy above, as a matter of urgency, and thus requires immediate and special attention from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture. It is recommended that the new building be constructed along modern archival design principles ensuring that there is enough space for the OHU, including preservation space for audio-visual resources and a recorded sound reference room in which users can access oral history records.

Staff training

The staff should receive practical training regularly and frequently in the preserving of, and access to, audio-visual material in general and oral history records, as sound recordings are complex in nature. Partnerships with archival experts from the local and international universities and institutions (Eastern and Southern Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives and International Association of Sound and Audio-visual archives) could be considered to provide in-house training. Staff should also attend conferences and workshops provided by these professional associations. The Department of Arts and Culture should encourage and sponsor the unit staff members who need to enrol with universities (including University of KwaZulu-Natal and University of South Africa) to obtain the knowledge and skills and, importantly, the formal qualification relating to archival science. The pursuit of further studies in ICTs is also recommended.

Funding

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture should increase the budget allocation for the Provincial Archives. Furthermore, with a proper preservation policy in place, the OHU should approach external stakeholders for funding. Secondly, the OHU may consider using open-source software like Omeka, Archivematica and Xena for digital preservation due to funding challenges.

Strategic planning for preservation and access to oral history records

The recommendations outlined above all point to the need for the PAR to develop strategic plans regarding how it intends to put the recommendations into effect. The revision of the KZN Archives Act is the first strategy to be implemented. Secondly, the development and implementation of a policy are required to guide operations within the PAR, and specifically the OHU. Organising regular staff training and making use of archival professionals is an excellent strategy to ensure that the approach to the preservation of, and access to, oral history records is a professional one. In addition, the resources and equipment needed must be identified and prioritised, and a strategy should be devised to ensure that the necessary finances are in place to realise the recommendations. This will result in oral history preservation since preservation is carried out for access, and digital preservation/conversion will increase access during this digital era.

References

Abankwah, R.M. 2018. Managing audio-visual resources in selected developed and

- developing countries. *Handbook of research on heritage and preservation*: IGI: Global. Reference Title in Library and Information Science for 2019. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://www.igi-global.com/book/handbook-research-heritage-management-preservation/179828> (accessed 13 October 2019).
- Bhebhe, S. 2015. Overview of the oral history programme at the national archives of Zimbabwe: implications for nation building and social cohesion. *Oral History Journal of South Africa* 3(1): 43-56.
- Denis, P. 2005. Oral history: research in the South African context. *Journal for Contemporary History* 30 (2): 88-100.
- Denis, P. 2016. Oral histories of HIV/AIDS support group members, NGO workers and home-based carers in KwaZulu-Natal. *African Journal of Aids Research* 15 (1): 27-34.
- Denis, P. & Ntsimane, R. (eds). 2008. *Oral history in a wounded country: interactive interviewing in South Africa*. Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Department of Arts and Culture. n.d. *Oral history framework and strategy*. Province of KwaZulu-Natal: South Africa.
- Dick, A. 2018. *Op-Ed: how (and why) the apartheid regime destroyed tens of thousands of books*. University of Pretoria News. Department of Information Science. [Online]. Available WWW: https://www.up.ac.za/news/post_2730771-op-ed-how-and-why-the-apartheid-regime-destroyed-tens-of-thousands-of-books (Accessed 20 November 2019).
- Digital Preservation Coalition. 2015. *Digital preservation handbook*. 2nd ed. [Online] Available WWW: <http://handbook.dpconline.org/> (Accessed 4 January 2021).
- Edmondson, R. 2013. *Audio-visual archiving: a view from Australia*. Paper presented at Korean National Archives, Seoul, 2013, and later included in its e-journal *Conservation of the Archives* 6, 2013. [Online]. Available WWW: https://www.academia.edu/9923123/Audiovisual_archiving_a_view_from_Australia?email_work_card=thumbnail (accessed 24 February 2020).
- Garaba, F. 2016. Tabernacles of memory revisited: an assessment of the oral history projects in institutional repositories in the Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Libraries (PCTL), KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *Information Development* 32(5): 1387-1401.
- Harris, V. 1999. They should have destroyed more: the destruction of public records by the South African state in the final years of apartheid, 1990-1994. Paper presented at the Wits History Workshop: The TRC; Commissioning the Past, 11-14 June 1999. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/7871/HWS-166.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. (accessed 8 January 2021).
- Harris, V. 2002. The archival sliver: power, memory, and archives in South Africa. *Archival Science* 2: 63-86.
- International Records Management Trust (IRMT). 2016. Understanding Digital Records Preservation Initiatives. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://www.irmt.org/education-and-training/education-and-training-2> (accessed 20 March 2021).
- Irwin, K. 2016. Moving forward: enhancing preservation of and access to oral histories at University of Nevada, Las Vegas university libraries. *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 34(1): 97-111.
- Khayundi, F. 2011. Preservation of photographs and audio-visual materials to guard against collective amnesia. *ESARBICA Journal* 30: 291-305.
- Koopman, J.M. 2002. Staff attitude to access and outreach in KwaZulu-Natal Archives. MIS thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal.
- KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture. 2020. Understanding archives & records services. [Online]. Available WWW: https://www.kzndac.gov.za/?page_id=2881 (accessed 20 March 2021).

- Lukileni-Lipinge, H. & N. Mnjama. 2017. Preservation of audio-visual records at the National Archives of Namibia. *Journal of the South African Society of Archivists* 50: 79-100.
- Matusiak, K., Tyler, A., Newton, C. & Polepeddi, P. 2017. Finding access and digital preservation solutions for a digitised oral history project: a case study. *Digital Library Perspectives* 33(2): 88-99.
- Mills, A. 2017. "Wakingthedead": preserving obsolete audio-visual formats in New Zealand heritage libraries and archives. MIS Research Paper/Project. Te Kura Tiaki, Whakawhiti Korero: University of Wellington. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/xmlui/handle/10063/6630?show=full> (accessed 9 June 2018).
- Mnjama, N. 2010. Preservation and management of audio-visual archives in Botswana. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* 20(2): 139-148.
- Moss, W.W. & Mazikana, P.C. 1986. *Archives, oral history and oral tradition: a ramp study*. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Paris. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0006/000687/068747eo.pdf>. (accessed 20 February 2018).
- Msibi, N.M. 2015. Preservation of public records and archives in Swaziland Government Ministries and Department of Swaziland National Archives (SNA). MIS thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Mtshali, S.C. 2016. Preservation of, and access to records at the KwaZulu-Natal Archives. MLIS thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Mulokozi, M.M. 1999. *The common oral traditions of Southern Africa*. A survey of Tanzanian oral traditions. UNESCO. University of Daresalaam, Tanzania. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001395/139564eo.pdf> (accessed 13 May 2018).
- National Archives. 2011. Digital preservation policies: guidance for archives. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/digital-preservation-policies-guidance-draft-v4.2.pdf> (assessed 29 April 2021).
- Ncala, B.N. 2017. Preservation of, and access to audio visual records at the National Film, Video and Sound Archives of South Africa. MIS thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Ngulube, P. 2003. Preservation and access to public records and archives in South Africa. PhD dissertation. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Ngulube, P. 2009. *Preservation and access to public records and archives in South Africa*. Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Ngulube, P. 2016. Professional ethics in building collections from oral trace of the past in Zimbabwe. *Information Development* 32(5): 1674-1690.
- Nkala, G. & David R. 2015. Oral history sources as learning materials: a case study of Zimbabwe's National University of Science and Technology. *Oral History Journal of South Africa* 3(2): 82-93.
- Olatokun, W.M. 2008. A survey of preservation and conservation practices and techniques in Nigerian University Libraries. *LIBRES. Library and Information Science Research Electronic Journal* 18(2): 1-20. [Online], Available WWW: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.555.5039&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. (accessed 13 June 2018).
- Library of Congress. 2018. *The Recorded Sound Reference Center*. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://www.loc.gov/rr/record/>. (assessed 21 March 2021).
- Nsibirwa, Z.B. 2007. Preservation of, and access to, legal deposit materials at the Msunduzi Municipality Library. MIS thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

- Nsibirwa, Z.B. 2012. Preservation of, and access to, legal deposit materials in South Africa. PhD thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Nsibirwa, Z. 2019. The ethical implications of digitisation of the Alan Paton Centre Struggle Archives. *ESARBICA (e-journal)* (38) (24 pages).
- Nsibirwa, Z., Hoskins, R. & Stilwell, C. 2014. Building the South African nation through legal deposit: the impact of legislation on preservation of digital materials. *African Journal of Library, Archives & Information Science* 24(1): 53-65.
- Okahashi, A. 2011. Preservation of audio-visual collections at the National Diet Library. World Library and Information Congress: 77th International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) General Conference Assembly. 13-18 August 2011, San Juan, Puerto Rico.
- Ritchie, D.A. 2003. *Doing oral history: a practical guide*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ritchie, D.A. 2014. *Doing oral history*. Cary: Oxford University Press. Available WWW: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ukzn-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1777649>. (Accessed 26 February 2021).
- Stamp, J. 2015. *Digital preservation handbook: digital preservation briefing*. 2nd ed. Digital Preservation Coalition. Denmark. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://www.dpconline.org/handbook> (accessed 20 January 2020).
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2019. Concept of digital preservation. [Online]. Available WWW: en.unesco.org/themes/information-preservation/digital-heritage/concept-digital-preservation (accessed 25 February 2021).
- Van der Merwe, A. & Van Deventer, M. 2009. *Planning an effective digital preservation from a research organisation*. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://www.a.s.a.p.ac.za/Digi/docs/avdmerwe-paper.pdf> (Accessed 14 July 2010).
- Western Cape Government, Cultural Affairs and Sport. 2015. *The Transversal oral history framework of the department of cultural affairs and sport*. [Online]. Available WWW: <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/assets/departments/culturalaffairs>. (accessed 25 August 2019).