

# **Project VOCS (Voix de la Culture Suisse - the voice of Swiss culture)**

Kurt Deggeller, Director of Memoriav

VOCS is a pilot project by MEMORIAV (Association for the preservation of the audiovisual heritage of Switzerland). The partners are the Radio Suisse Romande (French-speaking Swiss radio network) and the Swiss National Library. The goal of the VOCS project is to ensure the preservation and communication of audio-, written and visual documents concerning key figures in Swiss culture. The final phase will be to make the documents available in digitised form in co-operation with SIRANAU a system which can store, search, consult and handle sound recordings in digitised form as well as other information (text, technical data right images...)

## **Memoriav**

Preservation of audiovisual heritage (i.e., information in the form of photographs, recordings, films and videos) has developed into a task which ancient mythology would have entrusted to Hercules, if not Sisyphus! The reasons for the difficulty of this task are numerous: The materials on which the information was recorded were not made to last a long time, anymore than the devices enabling access to those sounds and moving pictures. Audiovisual documents are produced in large volumes by institutions and individuals of the most varied origin and goals. What's more, use of audiovisual archives occurs under the most varied guises. These include commercial purposes, scientific research, or pure pleasure. The legal situation is thus anything but clear. Audiovisual documents are, on the whole, barely understandable without some form of written information accompanying them. In the worst cases, serious misunderstandings can result.

Since 1992 a working group has been concerned with the preservation and diffusion of audiovisual cultural heritage in Switzerland. The group was formed by representatives of the most important public production sites and archives for audiovisual documents. An initial reckoning has made it clear that the existing institutions in Switzerland are incapable of doing justice to the tasks confronting them. The first project entrusted with the task of creating a new institution was a failure, not only because of the high costs, but also because of the traditional Swiss dislike for overly centralised structures.

Subsequent considerations led to the concept of a network, a less cost-intensive solution which also took Swiss fears of excessive centralisation into account. At the end of 1995, the association known as Memoriav was founded as the sponsor of this structure.

The group of founding members includes two important federal institutions with archiving tasks: The Federal Archives and the National Library. The producer side is represented by the public radio/TV enterprise SRG with its nine units which possesses an extremely large collection of audio and video documents. The other members include the National Supervisory Body for Radio and Television, the National Office for Communication. Also belonging to the original members were the Swiss Film Archive and the Swiss National Sound Archive, both of which are organised as private foundations.

The projects for which Memoriav plays a role in overseeing or financing the activities can be divided into three categories: "Urgent" measures, projects of the Board of Directors, and external projects which receive financial support.

The urgent measures began already in 1992 upon realising that certain materials would not survive a possibly long process toward a definitive solution to the problem of archiving audiovisual cultural heritage in Switzerland. A special fund provided by the federal government was employed for restoring and copying a large collection of historical radio programs recorded on lacquer discs which are highly susceptible to deterioration. Nitrate films were copied onto security film, and some collections dating from the dawn of photography were saved. By the end of 1999 Memoriav will have spent a total of 6.2 million Swiss Francs for these urgent measures.

The Board of Directors has two goals for its own projects: Firstly, it wants to try out new ways of preserving audiovisual documents and making them available to the public. Second, it wants to venture into those fields whose archiving situation was hardly known up to now. These include private radio and TV organisations or video production other than for television.

## **The project VOCS**

The project known as VOCS (Voix de la Culture Suisse-Voice of Swiss Culture) is positioned in a field which concentrates on preserving and disseminating culture-oriented information. The goal here is to complete a collection of materials provided by authors while still living or after their deaths to the Swiss Literary Archive in Berne (which is part of the National Library) by adding radio productions from the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Both categories of documents could then be provided to users in a more co-ordinated manner. Selection of audio documents was carried out with the assistance of experts in the field of literary history. Fortunately, this also testified to the extremely high research value of audio documents from radio archives which had been inaccessible up to now. To insure that supply of those documents will be more innovative, the project was connected with development of a modular mass storage system.

## **The project SIRANAU**

SIRANAU (Système Intégré Radiophonique pour l'Archivage Numérique AUdio) is born from the co-operation of the Radio Suisse Romande with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (EPFL Lausanne), the Hewlett Packard Company and the Swiss National Sound Archive (Lugano). The project has the financial backing of the Commission for Technology and Innovation (CTI) of the Swiss Confederation.

The objectives of the SIRANAU are following:

- Develop a prototype of a digital mass storage system by selecting and assembling in a modular view the best hardware and software components for this purpose,
- experiment different technical choices, for example the generation of three types of audio files (original linear WAV - or BWF - format, reduced MPEG L3 at 56 KHz for listening and strongly compressed MPEG 8 KHz for public distribution,
- Verify the feasibility of the integration between SIRANAU and the broadcast production systems, making possible the exchange of sound files,
- communicate with the already existing documentary databases (and not replace them), so as to keep the unicity of search in the whole archives.

The prototype of SIRANAU is now operative. It consists in a Unix HP 900 server, a Informix IUS database, and different storage media. At the day we have tested three categories of media: Fast disks (RAID), Slow disks (MOD) in a HP Surestore 600 FX and Tape system (DLT).

The digital library management software AMASS provides security features for the control of the consistency of audio files.

The integration of the existing databases (one for music and one for spoken word, based on the ID BASIS documentary system in Radio Suisse Romande and VTLS Library System in the National Library) is made by the insertion of an intermediate frontend application, with MS Transaction Server.

SIRANAU is still a prototype but it has yet proved to be a solution for the needs of the radio production as well as for those of the preservation and communication of the audio heritage.