

BEST PRACTICES GUIDE FOR ESTABLISHING A PERMANENT OBSERVATORY FOR ARCHIVES AND LOCAL TELEVISION

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Catalonia is a region in the northeast of Spain that borders France. It has a population of 7.5 million people and its capital is Barcelona. **Andorra** is an independent state situated between France and Spain, which has a population of 85,000 inhabitants.

Catalan is the official language in both countries, although Spanish is co-official in Catalonia.

In these areas, and particularly in Catalonia, between 1980 and 2004, when new licenses for Digital Terrestrial Television, DTT, were awarded, **175 local television stations** were created. Of these, only 47 are still broadcasting. 11 of these are public stations, and the rest are in private hands.

The emergence of a large number of television projects in such a small geographical area is due to **socio-cultural** and **technological factors**. The restoration of local democracy after Franco's death brought with it the need to express what was happening at a local level. This was combined with much more affordable equipment for filming, editing and transmission than had been used previously by the major television networks. These local television projects were often very amateur and tended to be of limited economic viability.

Surveys show that the total amount of material generated by these local television stations over this period consists of at least **140,000 hours of video**. As you are aware, these documents are very vulnerable to damage, even more so when we are dealing with local television stations from small towns. This risk also continues when this audiovisual material has been donated or deposited in local and/or regional archives.

The reality of the situation is the following:

1. In many cases professional archivists have had to manipulate materials without possessing the required technical skills. Along with that, television professionals do not know how to implement archival criteria for the material they create.
2. The vast majority of local television stations do not have a strategy for organizing and preserving their collections. Material in various formats and media has been produced and accumulated in a disorganized fashion, preventing the information it contains from being taken advantage of in a systematic way.
3. The establishment of strategies for describing (or redescribing) and digitalizing the documentation that has been generated requires a large financial investment, even more so when the action taken is not agreed on by all concerned.
4. The possibilities of using archive materials for the creation of new content are very limited.

5. Opportunities for generating income by using the information are practically non-existent.

6. This documentation is essential for studying the areas in which it has been generated. It is, unquestionably, the country's audiovisual heritage.

Although there is a good network of facilities devoted to the conservation of both the written and film heritage in Andorra and Catalonia (a good example being the Film Archive of Catalonia), there is no public body that specifically manages video heritage generated by local television. Surely an explanation for this circumstance can be found in the fragmentary nature of its origins, the diversity of ownership and the very "recent" nature of these documents, in places where the archives are overflowing with medieval documents.

Faced with this situation, and as a result of the experience that both the Centre for Image Research and Diffusion (CRDI) in Girona and the National Archives of Andorra (NAA) had accumulated through the management of material created by their respective local television stations, these two centres proposed and signed an agreement in Girona in March 2008 for the creation of a **Permanent Observatory of Local Archives and Television (OPATL)**.

Ensuring the viability of the project, however, required the involvement of two bodies that are well established throughout Catalonia and are directly involved in the production and management of this documentation. For this reason, the agreement was also signed by the Archivists Association of Catalonia (AAC) and the Local Broadcasting Network (XAL). This latter organization has become a coordination and support structure for local television, providing both content development services and technical support and training for member television stations.

The **Mission** of the Permanent Observatory is, as can be expected for all new observatories, very ambitious and focused on the long-term. Its core elements are as follows:

1. Ensuring the safeguarding of the documentary heritage of local television and other local producers of audiovisual content.
2. Establishing the methodological basis of the work of audiovisual archives.
3. Raising awareness and fostering the use of new technologies.
4. Promoting best practices and respect for copyright.
5. Contributing to the training of professionals.
6. Making government and society in general aware of local audiovisual heritage and the need to preserve it.

To carry out this mission, eleven general objectives were established, grouped into the

following areas: **Information, Cooperation, Coordination** and **Training**. We cannot explain them all in detail here, but their implementation should allow us to:

1. Obtain an accurate picture of local audiovisual content.
2. Foster communication and engagement between the different bodies involved.
3. Consolidate common criteria already established by international standards relating to content description and the choice of preservation formats and standards for the evaluation and selection of documents.
4. Contribute to updating the expertise of professionals and the adoption of best practice in the use of audiovisual materials.

After almost two and a half years of operation, we believe that the results of the Permanent Observatory's work have been positive. There are now 20 members, up from the initial 4, which includes both local television stations and archives. Various surveys have been established and carried out, regular meetings have been held and the Observatory has participated in various forums in its sector.

It is important to explain that four issue-based committees were created, dealing with **Strategy; Technologies and Formats; Documentary Treatment and Selection;** and **Content and Copyright**. The various members of the Observatory, according to their responsibilities and capabilities, formed part of these committees in order to advance the goals outlined above. A sample of this study is available at the blog: <http://www.xtviblocs.cat/observatori/>, which is the communication tool used by the members involved.

Our wish to export our expertise to try to help people and institutions elsewhere in the world that find themselves in similar situations encouraged us to write a **Best Practices Guide for Establishing a Permanent Observatory for Archives and Local Television**. This has received support and funding from the Programme Commission (PCOM) of the International Council on Archives (ICA).

The Good Practices Guide aims to become a **roadmap** for anyone interested in establishing an observatory similar to ours in their territory. It provides a model that allows them to approach the development of these types of projects with more confidence and avoid, as far as possible, errors and setbacks that always arise in the early stages.

Without wishing to be exhaustive, since the guide can be downloaded from the website of the International Council on Archives, we would like to emphasize the following aspects:

Who should be a member? The answer is quite obvious: the agents producing the content, rights-holder bodies, public archives and, if possible, private companies.

What should the professional profile of these members be? The directors and heads of the various organizations must participate, because their presence is essential for strategic planning and decision-making. It is also essential that specialized technical staff be involved. There is also a role for volunteers to carry out those tasks that have been identified as benefiting from their input.

What structure should it be given? Clearly, there are many answers to this question. We, however, have understood it to be a non-hierarchical structure of associations that promotes the participation and cooperation of the different members. Although there is no need for explicit leadership, it is necessary to establish direct responsibility for the different projects undertaken. To optimize results, it is essential to set up working committees to integrate the various profiles and specializations. The structure must be flexible, open and inclusive, with the aim of welcoming new members showing interest in the project. This structure must also ensure transversal communication among members in order to share knowledge and strategies.

What is the basis for its implementation? We consider the following factors to be the most important:

1. **Establishing the geographic area it covers.** This does not necessarily have to coincide with an administrative region and can take into account cultural, linguistic or social factors.
2. **Contacting the institutions and organizations that are to form part of it.** In addition to the organizations already mentioned, it is important to involve private producers of audiovisual content.
3. **Signing a collaboration agreement between the parties,** explaining the observatory's mission, goals and the commitments required from members.
4. **Preparing an inventory of audiovisual documentation,** by carrying out the most rigorous survey possible.
5. **Studying the characteristics of the documentation,** i.e. media, formats, technical requirements and related risks and conditions that threaten its conservation.
6. **Studying the conditions of the archives.** What are the storage facilities like? What is the capacity of digital storage facilities? Which technology park is available for the playing, copying, scanning and maintenance of the material? At the same time, one must be aware of an archive's ability to organize, classify and describe the documentation, and the potential for use and accessibility it can offer.
7. **Studying the producing agents.** How many are still active? Which have disappeared? What activities do they carry out? How do they finance or manage the rights to use their audiovisual products.
8. **Studying the legislative framework.** In other words what is the general and specific legislation in each territory regarding copyright, cultural heritage, evaluation and selection of content, etc.
9. **Establishing partnerships between the public and the private sector.** On the one hand this can guarantee the preservation of heritage in private hands, while on the other help to bring in financial resources through the use of audiovisual content from the archives.
10. **Creating spaces for the communication and dissemination of the project.** The use of the Internet and its social networks can be an indispensable tool here.

What impact could the creation of an observatory have in a particular territory?

From our point of view, its contributions can be:

Cultural, in the sense of contributing to the protection of the legacy made up of audiovisual products by the media, works of personal creation, educational resources and testimonies of everyday life.

Professional, in the sense of contributing to the improvement of the theoretical and practical knowledge of the archivists and professionals involved in the production of audiovisual content.

Economic, in terms of generating income from the sale, exchange and dissemination of audiovisual content.

The vocation of acting locally and thinking globally is what motivated us to draw up this Best Practices Guide. As we mentioned before, thanks to the support of the International Council on Archives, we can offer the complete version in four languages (English, French, Spanish and Catalan) and a summarized version in Arabic, Hindi, Russian and Japanese.

The best reward we could have is that one day we will be able to see that our experience has been useful somewhere in the world.