BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

FOR ESTABLISHING A PERMANENT OBSERVATORY FOR ARCHIVES AND LOCAL TELEVISIONS

ICA
International Council
on Archives

Ajuntament de Girona

CRDI
CENTRE DE RECERCA
I DIFUSIÓ DE LA IMATGE

ARXIU
NACIONAL
D'ANDORRA

Associació d'Arxivers de Catalunya

Xarxa
de Televisions
Locals

Observatori d'Arxius
i Televisions Locals

BACKGROUND

On 6 March 2008, a memorandum of understanding was signed by four archival and local television organisations to establish a **Permanent Observatory for Archives and Local Televisions**. Thus the signatory organisations – the City of Girona's CRDI (Centre for Image Research and Diffusion), the ANA (National Archive of Andorra), the XTVL (Local Televisions Network) and the AAC (Archivists Association of Catalonia) – promoted a pioneering joint initiative between Catalonia and Andorra, and between two professional fields involved in preserving our audiovisual heritage: archives and local televisions.

The initiative's goal was to help archives attain better knowledge and practices in order to preserve the audiovisual heritage generated by local TV.

In its first year and a half of operation, the Permanent Observatory for Archives and Local Televisions has been highly productive. The four founding organisations have been joined by many others, including local TV and municipal and county archives. A variety of meetings and conferences have also been held, which helped improve professional practices and also advanced knowledge about the existing audiovisual materials (their current condition and risks to their survival). Specific initiatives were set up to help those archives that do not have the resources necessary for successful fulfilment of their mission.

Since this project could be replicated in other territories with similar needs regarding preservation of local audiovisual heritage, this **best practices guide** was created to systematise all of the work carried out thus far by the Permanent Observatory for Archives and Local Televisions. The idea was to go beyond the particular needs of Catalonia and Andorra, and take a more generic approach to realities that may exist elsewhere.

1   MISSION

A Permanent Observatory for Archives and Local Televisions (abbreviated OPATL in Spanish) is an ongoing joint project of several organisations and institutions whose mission is to safeguard the preservation of part of our documentary heritage generated in the context of local televisions and other producers of local audiovisual documentation, while establishing the methodological bases for working in audiovisual archives, promoting knowledge about and use of new technologies, encouraging best practices and respect for intellectual property rights, contributing to training for professionals and awareness among Civil service and society at large about the richness of local audiovisual heritage and the need to preserve it.

2   OBJETIVES

Its objectives include any initiatives that contribute to protecting local audiovisual heritage, such as:

2.1. LEARNING ABOUT AND ESTABLISHING THE METHODOLOGICAL BASES FOR WORKING IN AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES.

▶ Working in audiovisual archives involves special challenges given the specific nature of the materials being preserved, traits which are often not well known. On one hand, archival professionals often lack the technical training needed to deal with the problems associated with preservation of analogue videotape, maintenance of recorders and players, setting digitisation parameters, electronic editing techniques, or even the use of television production vocabulary. On the other hand, at many small and medium-sized televisions, there are no professionals devoted exclusively to managing the archive. Instead, archival duties are carried out by the same professionals who work in other areas: editors, camera operators, producers, etc., with no solid knowledge of professional archival practices.

▶ It is necessary to establish shared methodological bases for the professionals who work in these archives in order to address future challenges collectively and more effectively.

▶ Full advantage must be taken of the experience accumulated through years of work in these archives in order to develop theoretical texts and technical reports as professional reference materials.

Case study: OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra.
Survey sent to archives and local televisions in Catalonia and Andorra. When asked whether they had one or more professionals dedicated full time to the audiovisual archive, the organisations answered as follows: of the 26 TV that responded to the survey, 21 said No and only 5 said Yes. The results were similar among municipal and county archives: 15 No, 4 Yes. At the conferences and meetings, the managers of these companies and institutions acknowledged that it was impractical to hire staff specifically to work in the audiovisual archive. What they needed, they said, was a shared, easy to implement methodology that would allow their existing staff to manage the archive while still carrying out their usual duties.

2.2. BEING FAMILIAR WITH THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVAL MATERIALS IN THE REGION.

▶ **Difficulty of knowing about locally generated audiovisual heritage.** Part of this material remains hidden for a variety of reasons. In Catalonia, for instance, in the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a proliferation of local television projects that never really took off. Many of these companies closed after a few years and their audiovisual output languished in forgotten locations. As a result, the recordings are often difficult to track down.

▶ **Instability and fragility of the materials.** In most cases the physical medium is analogue videotape of semiprofessional or home-video quality. These TV' material is commonly stored on U-Matic or VHS tapes that are fairly vulnerable to degradation. We need to know what type of materials these archives contain and what condition they are in.

▶ **Need for an inventory.** It is necessary to have as complete an inventory as possible of the audiovisual heritage generated within the territory, in order to know both the volume of documentary material and its current condition. We can get a better sense of the situation by developing survey instruments and through fieldwork. The advantage of the OPATL is that since it is a joint project of several organisations spread throughout the territory, each entity can conduct research on its immediate geographical area.

Case study: OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra.
Survey sent to archives and local televisions in Catalonia and Andorra. When asked if they knew of any televisions or other entity that produced documentary audiovisual material in their immediate area, 21 archives responded Yes and 14 No. Some of the archives preserve audiovisual documentation from televisions or producers that ceased operations and which donated their holdings to government agencies, aware that they themselves could not preserve them.

There are also TV still in operation that donated their holdings to public archives since they were unable to look after them properly themselves. The members of the OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra include some televisions that donated their holdings, as well as the municipal and county archives that received them.

2.3. CREATING A USEFUL SPACE THAT CAN SERVE AS A REFERENCE POINT FOR THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR SAFEGUARDING THIS HERITAGE: archivists, documentary makers, conservators, media professionals and, in general, anyone interested in the topic.

▶ Answer the questions that arise in the day-to-day work of audiovisual archive professionals. The OPATL should be a forum for debate where people can find solutions to problems, for executives and managers as well as technicians. Rapid responses, reciprocal communication and shared effort should be the keys to its good operation.

▶ Facilitate sharing information about experiences, both positive and negative, through a multidirectional free flow of communication among all members, either through electronic means or at in-person gatherings.

Case study: OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra.
In 2008 the XTVL (Local Televisions Network) decided to completely change its audiovisual archive management system, as they were very unhappy with the one they had been using in recent years. The report on the previous system's shortcomings helped other OPATL members decide not to acquire that system.

2.4. ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION AND COMMITMENT AMONG ALL THE INVOLVED PARTIES TO HELP RESOLVE TECHNICAL ISSUES THAT ARISE IN THE COURSE OF ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT AND PROVIDE RESOURCES TO IMPROVE IT.

▶ Share resources – not necessarily monetary in nature – to help solve or alleviate certain deficiencies. For example, a TV disused, obsolete production equipment may prove very useful in digitising an archive.

▶ Join forces to acquire mass storage devices for any electronic documents that may be generated, share digital repositories and alert public institutions about the need to make space available in their repositories to protect our shared heritage.

▶ Adopt shared technical solutions for the various archives with the goal of lowering costs and increasing efficiency. For instance, acquiring one software package with multiple licences costs less than buying a custom program. There are additional advantages: in error detection in the system, for example, or maintenance and update tasks.

▶ Help design specific computer applications for audiovisual archives management. If it is not practical to create software, then at least create a list of requirements it should meet.

> **Case study: OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra.**
> One initiative of the OPATL has been to compile a technical equipment inventory of the recording and playback devices for various video formats. For instance, most public archives do not have a U-Matic player to use in digitising videotapes, and these devices are no longer commercially available. Borrowing this equipment from another OPATL member is a good solution. The OPATL is also currently busy with a market study of the existing audiovisual archive management software and a joint study of the features that users might require from such programs.

2.5. BEING A SPACE OPEN TO ALL INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANISATIONS INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING.

Be open not only to those people and entities actively involved in this initiative but also all those who may someday wish to become involved, either as full members or as occasional participants.

> **Case study: OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra.**
> The OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra has an extensive knowledge of the network of TV and archives within its geographic area, and lets them all know about the conferences and meetings so they can attend if they wish.
>
> The best way to reach everyone is to make the most of the advantages offered by the web. To this end, a blog has been created at http://www.xtvlblocs.cat/observatori/ containing information on projects and events, and providing public access to the documentation generated.

2.6. ALERTING ADMINISTRATIVE BODIES ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR AUDIOVISUAL HERITAGE.

▶ Alert the responsible administrative bodies about the destruction of local audiovisual heritage, either through poor practices, through omission or through passive neglect.

▶ Make the OPATL's own members aware of how making wrong decisions can affect the preservation of their holdings.

2.7. ESTABLISHING THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES FOR ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION OF DOCUMENTATION IN A STANDARDISED FRAMEWORK.

Develop description standards and metadata schemes that follow international standards, and adapt them to the reality of the territory. In practice, televisions have created their own finding aids based on their particular information retrieval needs. Archives, however, use international cataloguing standards or their equivalents, though in many cases, given the specificity and complexity of audiovisual documents, these materials are described rather superficially. The result is tremendous heterogeneity among catalogues. There is thus a need to use shared metadata schemes that allow for the sharing of resources and interoperativity among the various systems. It is therefore useful to know the national and international standards and apply them correctly. To this end, an OPATL should take initiatives that translate into agreed-upon ways to create and manage metadata.

2.8. BEING FAMILIAR WITH THE EXISTING DIGITAL VIDEO PROCESSING TECHNOLOGIES.

▶ Keep informed about new technological advances.

▶ Compare the different products on the market, their prices and features.

▶ Learn what suppliers and providers operate in the territory, and what products and services they offer. Assess not only the quality of the products but also the equipment repair and maintenance services, updates, and technical advice.

Case study: OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra.
One committee within the OPATL is in charge of looking into new technologies and digital formats. Some TV in the OPATL conducted market studies before acquiring software to manage their audiovisual archives, and have shared those studies with the other OPATL members.

2.9. ESTABLISHING EVALUATION CRITERIA SO THAT SELECTION AND DEACCESSIONING DECISIONS CAN BE BASED ON CONSISTENT RULES.

▶ There is no unanimity among the various organisations regarding criteria for selection and deaccessioning of materials. The lack of established norms has led each TV to retain those documents it considers likely to be of interest or value in the future, based on experience and a degree of intuition. However, these decisions have not always been the wisest.

▶ The impossibility of devoting resources to the archive has, in some cases, led to the loss of much material that should have been preserved. Clear criteria for selecting and eliminating material would make more cost-effective use of resources and boost the archive's efficiency. Such criteria will also make it less likely that historically, culturally or financially valuable documentation will be lost.

Case study: OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra.
Survey sent to archives and local televisions in Catalonia and Andorra. When asked if a selection process was used to determine what material to preserve, 23 televisions said Yes and 3 said No. The exact opposite was true of the archives: 0 said Yes and 20 said No. This shows that those archives which received holdings as a donation did not use a selection process as there was no standard to apply. Instead, to be prudent, they decided to keep everything.

As for the TV, they applied a variety of criteria: some said they kept all broadcast material and a sampling of raw camera footage, others kept a sampling of broadcast material and certain raw footage, and there were even some televisions that kept only the broadcast material or only the raw footage. This range of criteria shows the need for standards or guidelines that can be applied across the board.

2.10. PROMOTING BEST PRACTICES FOR THE USE OR EXCHANGE OF AUDIOVISUAL DOCUMENTS IN WAYS THAT RESPECT INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS.

▶ Promote best practices for the respect of intellectual property, initially by raising awareness among the OPATL's own members.

▶ Advise the various members and other interested parties about how to proceed properly in the various circumstances that may arise.

2.11. HELPING TO ADDRESS THE NEED FOR TRAINING IN THE FIELD OF AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT.

An OPATL can carry out eminently practical training functions since through its members, it has access to the necessary facilities and material for first-hand observation of the different ways to manage these archives, from the most modern approaches to the humblest. Though it is not the OPATL's mission to produce professional archivists, it can undertake some training activities.

▶ Identify gaps in specialised training and, having done so, communicate them to the competent institutions.

▶ Hold occasional training courses or workshops that fill gaps in the training of those professionals already working in these archives.

Case study: OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra.
The resolutions and commitments made by the OPATL include conducting a travelling digitisation workshop in workplaces volunteered by different OPATL members.

An OPATL safeguards the preservation of locally generated audiovisual heritage.

3.1. Unreleased video documentation. Traditionally, cinema releases and other released audiovisual material are preserved in film archives and similar institutions whose collections include copies deposited as part of copyright registration. Most of the documents dealt with by the OPATL are unreleased video documentation. In any case, this should not exclude amateur output in film formats such as 8 mm or Super 8, or released material that had limited distribution or which is hard to find.

3.2. Audiovisual output of local televisions. An OPATL focuses primarily on audiovisual production generated in the context of local television or nonprofit community television. This should not, however, exclude audiovisual output generated in the home environment, personal productions or amateur reporting, which can contribute to a greater understanding of the territory's history or culture.

3.3. At-risk documents. An OPATL helps to conserve documents at risk of permanent loss due to physical degradation or obsolete technology, such as the analogue video generated in the late twentieth century. However, we should not forget about long-term digital preservation procedures, since in a few years it is very likely that new conservation challenges will arise regarding electronic documents such as the rapid obsolescence of the encoding languages.

3.4. Audiovisual archives with few resources. An OPATL helps improve the management of the archives of small organisations and institutions or which have few resources and whose archives are not well equipped or lack the characteristics needed for good preservation of the materials. Nonetheless, its field of interest also includes modern, efficient archives since, first of all, anything can be improved, and second of all, such archives can serve as a model and, in a way, have a greater responsibility to help to preserve a shared heritage.

Case study: OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra.
The televisions that participate in the OPATL vary widely in size. Logically enough, BTV in Barcelona – with a potential audience of several million people – has more resources than other local televisions whose potential audience is just a few thousand viewers. The same is true of the participating archives: there are municipal or county archives, but also the Andorra archive, which is national in scope.

4.1. CONSIDER WHETHER THERE ARE LOCAL TELEVISION AUDIOVISUAL DOCUMENTS IN THE TERRITORY OR OTHER SIMILAR TYPES OF AUDIOVISUAL MATERIAL.

▶ Local television is a phenomenon that does not exist in some parts of the world. In general, a local TV is a public or commercial broadcaster that offers audiovisual content produced in-house, with a transmission range limited to a particular municipality and its suburbs.

▶ Other types of audiovisual production, such as personal videos, reports by amateur videographers, educational resources, or documentation of political life are also part of our cultural heritage and can present the same or very similar problems regarding their handling in an archive.

4.2. KNOW WHERE DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN DEPOSITED, THEIR CURRENT CONDITION, AND WHAT RISKS THREATEN THEIR SURVIVAL.

▶ Know who the producers are, whether they still exist, whether they are still generating audiovisual documents or if they have ceased production, whether their archival holdings are stored under controlled conditions or if there is risk of their being lost.

▶ Know what resources are available to those in charge of maintaining the archive.

▶ Do research if it is suspected that there are audiovisual documents in the territory whose current location is unknown.

4.3. KNOW WHETHER THERE IS ALREADY AN INSTITUTION IN THE TERRITORY THAT IS CARRYING OUT THE FUNCTIONS OF AN OPATL.

▶ If there are national or regional public agencies, private foundations, or any other type of organisation devoted to ensuring the safeguarding of the local audiovisual heritage, obviously there would be no need to create an OPATL.

▶ If there are other similar organisations whose focus overlaps somewhat with that of an OPATL, it would be appropriate to make contact in advance to establish possible areas of cooperation.

4.4. KNOW WHETHER THERE ARE INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAMS THAT ARE DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF SUCH DOCUMENTS.

▶ Find out whether government agencies have already defined programmes or strategies which, for whatever reason, have not yet been implemented. If so, consider whether it is advisable to wait for the agency to take the initiative or, on the contrary, if it is best to take action urgently. Remember that many of the materials we work with have a very limited shelf life. In some cases, media can degrade irreversibly in just a decade, so it is sometimes necessary to intervene even if success is not guaranteed.

▶ Find out whether grants are available for these or similar projects, and apply for them if appropriate.

▶ Learn whether any institutions offer archival services in the form of digital repositories and if it is appropriate for OPATL members to use these services. To that end, one should assess the cost involved in outsourcing the archive, the assurance of quick, secure access, and assurances about controlling public display of the archives' contents and about the rights inherent in the documents.

4.5. WORK WITH PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OR OVERSIGHT BODIES THAT CAN FACILITATE CONTACT BETWEEN TELEVISION PROFESSIONALS AND ARCHIVAL PROFESSIONALS.

▶ There are associations and federations of local televisions, which jointly represent the companies' interests and serve as an audiovisual content exchange. Similarly, there are professional associations and oversight bodies of archivists, documentary makers, conservators and other related professionals. An OPATL should work together with these associations.

> **Estudio de caso: OPATL de Catalunya y Andorra.**
> There are two associations among the founders of the OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra. The first is the AAC (Archivists Association of Catalonia), which brings together the professionals who work in archives within Catalonia; and the second is the XTVL (Local Televisions Network), which offers services to its member televisions in the form of audiovisual content and other services.

5   BENEFITS

Once the goals of an OPATL and any preliminary concerns have been defined, some questions should be asked: What impact could it have on the territory? What positive repercussions could it have in the regions it serves, and how do these compare with the effort involved in founding it? What benefits can it provide to potential members of the OPATL? And can these benefits be extended to the community at large?

Criteria for assessing the contributions of an OPATL might include:

▶ **Cultural criteria.** Protecting the cultural heritage represented by the media's audiovisual output, works created by individuals, educational resources, reflections of everyday life, etc., as part of our heritage.

▶ **Professional criteria.** Improving theoretical and practical knowledge of the archival profession.

▶ **Financial criteria.** Financial yield from the marketing, exchange and distribution of content.

▶ **Territorial criteria.** Assess whether the functions carried out by the OPATL could have a relevant overall impact, or if its impact would be so marginal that it is not worth the effort to set it up.

▶ **Competition criteria.** Assess whether the OPATL would be competing with other organisations or institutions already in existence, whether its operations would complement such bodies' work, or if it would fill a void.

6   MEMBERS

Taking into account the specific traits of each territory, it should be determined up front what organisations or institutions' involvement would be desirable, either as full participants in founding the OPATL or by taking part in its growth and development.

▶ **Producers of the audiovisual documents:** obviously those most familiar with the documents are the people and entities that produced them, even if they do not currently hold the rights to the material. Though not essential, their participation is certainly a good idea.

▶ **Organisation holding the performance rights:** presumably, the holders of these rights have a direct interest in the long-term preservation of these materials and in facilitating access and exhibition of their content, since these are assets that can continue to generate revenue over time.

▶ **Public archives:** especially those in the same territory as the audiovisual documentation. It falls within the mandate of public archives to make an effort to preserve and provide access to the documentary heritage of a city, region or nation. Many public archives, through donations or materials on deposit, are the present custodians of audiovisual documents and are therefore key figures in an OPATL.

▶ **Private businesses** with an interest in corporate philanthropy, protecting culture and promoting social development.

7   ESTRUCTURE

The structure of an OPATL can vary widely based on the specific traits of the place in which it is established. However, we primarily understand it as a non-hierarchical association that promotes participation and cooperation among its members.

▶ Its work should be cooperative.

▶ It can operate effectively without one member assuming its leadership, though a person or group may lead a specific initiative or project in order to energise it, monitor it, and guarantee its results.

▶ It is advisable to divide up the work areas into different work groups or committees that make the most of the skills related to the professional profiles that the OPATL brings together.

▶ There should be flexibility as to the number of people involved, and the OPATL should be open to anyone who wishes to participate. There should therefore be a way for new members to join.

▶ It should ensure communication among a cross-section of professionals who belong to the OPATL, so that executives, administrators and technicians can bring their knowledge to the various discussion groups.

8 PROFESSIONAL PROFILES

▶ **Executives and managers:** strategic planning and decision making require the involvement of people with leadership positions in these organisations.

▶ **Specialised technical staff:** The nature of audiovisual documents means it is beneficial to involve specialised technical staff who understand how audiovisual technology works, as well as specialised technical staff from the archives sector.

▶ **Professionals in the OPATL:** The professionals who participate in the OPATL are the same ones who work for the member companies and institutions.

▶ **Volunteers and paid staff:** Participants provide services to the OPATL on a volunteer basis, but that does not rule out hiring paid staff for specific projects.

9 FUNDAMENTALS FOR SETTING UP AN OPATL

Some concrete actions that should be taken when setting up an OPATL for a particular territory:

9.1 DEFINE THE GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE
The geographical area served by the OPATL does not necessarily have to coincide with a geopolitical unit. Rather, questions such as cultural, linguistic, social and professional matters should be taken into account.

9.2 CONTACT THE ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS THAT SHOULD BE PART OF IT
Local television or nonprofit community TV, municipal and county archives, professional associations and boards, production companies that generate audiovisual content, and institutions of higher learning with a remit to protect cultural heritage.

9.3 SIGN A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING AMONG THE PARTIES
Determine who will participate in the OPATL, the principles underlying its founding, and its goals, and make feasible agreements and commitments.

9.4 CREATE AN INVENTORY OF THE AUDIOVISUAL DOCUMENTS
This should be done through surveys or fieldwork, attempting to be rigorous and exhaustive, in order to determine the volume and characteristics of the local audiovisual documentation that survives in the territory.

9.5 STUDY THE DOCUMENTATION

The characteristics of the recording media, the characteristics of each format, the related technical requirements, the risks threatening their preservation, etc.

9.6 STUDY THE ARCHIVES

▶ Storage conditions, capacity of digital repositories, technological equipment available for playback, copying and digitisation of the documents and for maintaining the materials, etc.

▶ Organisation and classification of the materials in the archive, catalogues and finding aids, reference access tools, etc.

9.7 STUDY THE PRODUCTION ORGANISATIONS OR COMPANIES

Determine how many organisations exist and how many have shut down, what operations they conduct, how they are funded, whether they retain the performance rights for their audiovisual products, etc.

9.8 STUDY THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Learn what the shared and specific legislative framework is for each territory regarding intellectual property rights, cultural heritage, the evaluation and deaccessioning of documents, etc.

9.9 CREATE A WEB SITE

Create a web page, a blog, a forum, a social network, a work group or any other Internet-based communication mechanism that lets OPATL members interact on line and announce their activities.

9.10 COMMUNICATE AND INFORM PEOPLE ABOUT THE PROJECT

Design strategies to publicise and disseminate the project through participation in international bodies such as the ICA.

Case study: OPATL of Catalonia and Andorra.
There is a blog at http://www.xtvlblocs.cat/observatori/ where you can find:

• All the management documents related to the founding and development of the OPATL: the founding agreement, meeting minutes, grants received and other internal management documents for each member.

• News about OPATL activities: tours, workshops, presentations, etc.

• News about events related to audiovisual archives in general

• Links to web sites of interest

• Documentation of international regulations and standards

• Related projects

• Bibliographies

✔ Establish the methodological bases for working in audiovisual archives

✔ Make an inventory of the local audiovisual heritage

✔ Promote sharing of experience

✔ Respond to specific issues that may arise in everyday work in the archives

✔ Create alerts about the possible destruction of documents

✔ Train the staff of audiovisual archives

✔ Design computer-based tools and applications specifically for archival management

✔ Promote the use of standards

✔ Establish criteria for selection, evaluation and deaccessioning

✔ Raise awareness of copyright and intellectual property law

✔ Learn about the technology currently on the market

✔ Create joint digitisation projects

✔ Organise hands-on workshops and tours of other facilities

✔ Share hard-to-find equipment

✔ Exchange audiovisual content

✔ Create shared distribution platforms for audiovisual content

✔ Generate new audiovisual products that incorporate archival material