Introduction:
Tele-Archives. Reframing Archival Research on
Local Televisions Across Europe

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> "Cramming all of the medium's vast output into existing archives would be like trying to squeeze
> the oceans into a bucket"
>
> Richard Lacayo[1]

In the last fifty years, archivists and historians have been drawing increasing attention to the need to preserve "today's television programming for tomorrow's viewers", as well as to the constraints inherent in this task, given the extensiveness of television production and the fragmentation—when not the actual lack—of systematic archival endeavours. When it comes to television history, archival recording is neither straightforward nor to be taken for granted. Significant archival voids recurrently loom over the possibility of fully restoring the many hidden histories that television holds. More often than not, scholars face huge gaps in television archival collections or even the absence of audiovisual recordings. A proper archival mentality began to emerge among major Western broadcasters only in the late 1960s and early 1970s, leading to the first pioneering efforts to systematise and preserve major television productions, especially information programmes.

However, archival preservation has largely been limited to public broadcasters or to major private TV networks. This reflects the broader structural obstacles faced by local televisions, which often ran short of resources or institutional interest in keeping a historical track of their activity. At the same time, television technological advancements have made recording devices obsolete, frequently preventing accessibility to audiovisual collections, especially those pertaining to off-network TV stations. Systematic initiatives to create accessible television archives are not only relatively recent; they have also struggled to keep pace with the ever-growing and constantly evolving nature of audiovisual production. From the 1970s onwards—when, as a general rule

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1.   Richard Lacayo (1983). "Preserving the Best of Today's Programming For Tomorrow's Viewers." *The New York Times*, October 30, 1983: 31.

and despite significant territorial differences, TV companies began to store and preserve their activity—, the liberalisation of television broadcasting, combined with the increasing globalisation of television markets, led to a rapid proliferation of channels across Europe. In this context, the European television landscape unfolds as a vast ocean: rich in discoveries and hidden depths, yet extremely difficult to navigate and explore systematically.

This special issue of *Cinergie* stems from the need to tackle these challenges. The articles that it brings together testify to the difficulties of accessing (or even locating) archival collections and databases, of verifying private sources and securing rights, of assembling the fragmented pieces left by many locally based TV stations, which have for too long remained at the periphery of mainstream historical investigation. In doing so, the authors of this issue jointly trace new pathways of archival research; they propose innovative strategies to fill archival voids, casting light over so-far hidden television experiences and unveiling their contribution to the history of local communities, as well as to the broader evolution of media systems in different European contexts. The focuses of the various contributions range from analyses of how streaming TV platforms have reshaped approaches to preserving public memory to the mobilisation of television for educational purposes or to the medium's role in crafting regional identities and their public representation. What emerges is the common adoption of what could be considered an archaeological and "patchworking" approach to television archives, integrating sources from a variety of formal and informal outlets, such as private collections, in-depth interviews, and newspaper and magazine libraries. In particular, the authors seem to share the commitment to moving beyond conventional repositories, mapping out a series of counter-archives, digging into dispersed and heterogeneous sources, and recovering lost material. The contributors to this issue thus resurface neglected broadcast histories and marginalised voices, shedding light on television's role in supporting experimental artists—from British independent filmmakers to the Italian Studio Azzurro movement—, in processes of place-making, or in the broader socio-economic and cultural developments that have shaped Europe's media landscape over the last fifty years.

Building on these insights, the themed section of this issue of *Cinergie* aims to redefine the significance of archives within television and media studies. It does so by integrating comprehensive international perspectives with detailed analyses of local and private broadcasting in Italy, alongside an examination of the transformation of traditional television genres on local TV channels. Such an approach is particularly necessary considering that the historiography on European television has often relied on memorialist accounts, whereas systemic historical investigations of commercial and local broadcasting remain scarce. Against this backdrop, the Italian case offers a key example: the Constitutional Court rulings of the mid-1970s and the 1975 Rai reform ended the state monopoly, fuelling the proliferation of private and local stations which paved the way for what Umberto Eco termed the "neotelevision" era. Yet this process was shaped by wider transnational transformations: new technologies, market liberalisation, shifts in audience consumption, and the growing influence of North American models. Such contexts call for a comparative approach capable of situating national evolutions within the international scenario; at the same time, the focus on archives foregrounds the methodological complexities and opportunities of studying local and private broadcasters. Notably, the scarcity of institutional repositories often forces researchers to adopt multilayered action plans, drawing on private collections, "grey" archives, oral history, and cross-media sources such as print press, radio, and cinema.

The first paper to reframe the archive as a field of practices to be approached as a shifting terrain rather than a fixed repository is the one by Grazia Quercia and Marco Manfra. The two scholars follow several thematic and methodological trajectories within the scope of the themed section of this issue: their paper examines the role of television collections in preserving and reactivating pedagogical experiments, focusing on the Open University's course *A305 History of Architecture and Design (1890–1939)*, broadcast in Britain during the 1970s. Their chapter traces how television—often considered an ephemeral medium—was mobilised for educational purposes, merging broadcast content with print, radio, and in-person learning, thus arguing that A305 became a landmark in making higher education accessible beyond traditional institutions. Methodologically, the two authors adopt an ecological-archaeological approach to TV history: their paper reconstructs the history of the course through decentralised and heterogeneous sources, including institutional collections, personal records, student assignments, oral testimonies, and private holdings. By engaging with Joaquim Moreno's rediscovery and re-curation of A305, the chapter shows how archival work is not limited to conservation but involves reactivation, remediation, and reinterpretation of fragmented media artefacts.

Chiara Borgonovo and Laura Marcolini's chapter extends the question of how to work with dispersed records to the historical analysis of archival production within artistic practice and public service routines, notably focusing on Studio Azzurro's work with Rai. Their contribution explores the collaboration between the Milan collective Studio Azzurro and Rai in the 1980s and 1990s, using unpublished documents from the artists' archive, showing both the opportunities and the barriers that Italian public television encountered when opening its doors to contemporary art. While some projects—from Mister Fantasy to experimental set designs and video-theatre adaptations—testify to the group's ability to translate its poetics into the televisual medium, numerous unrealised proposals highlight the structural constraints of Rai's production logics and the marginalisation of artistic interventions. By intersecting television history with art history, the article underscores the historiographical value of artist archives in reconstructing overlooked trajectories of media experimentation and in reassessing the boundaries between cultural production, institutional frameworks, and artistic imagination.

In regional broadcasting, questions of mediation unfold through the interplay of location work, production routines, and institutional logics, shaping regimes of visibility; within this configuration, the performance of place becomes legible, as examined by Victoria Lowe. Her contribution looks at the history of Granada Television, a pioneering TV station based in Northern England. Focusing on Granada's adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1981), Lowe discusses the broadcaster's capacity to use locations in the Northwest to "perform" place. She argues that Granada's relevance to television history lies just as much in its acclaimed drama programming as in its contribution to summoning up a sense of regional identity. Through her research into Granada's television (so-far) unseen archives, Lowe sheds light into the decisions and processes involved in all aspects of television production, thus unveiling the contribution given by regional television to innovation and creativity in broadcasting.

In a parallel register, the national arena reveals how organisational design and commissioning practices structure visibility; the resulting space for independent and artists' production can be reconstructed from counter-archives and long-overlooked materials. In this light, Nicole Atkinson's article explores the forgotten history of Channel 4, an experimental TV station operating under a unique publisher-broadcaster model, whose creation—at the beginning of the 1980s—met the public demand for greater support for independent film-making. The chapter specifically focuses on Channel 4's promotion of artists' moving image and independent film production in the UK between 1982 and 1992. To do so, Atkinson largely relies on counter-archives, fragmented collections, and disregarded historical sources, ultimately making a call to preserve marginalised voices and neglected broadcast histories through the adoption of a pluralistic approach to television archival research.

The inquiry turns from conditions of production to conditions of survival and circulation, following how television's residues are curated and made public within an Italian institutional landscape. The article by Angelo Perrone reconstructs the history and afterlife of Videomusic (1984–1996), Italy's first all-music television channel, whose vast archive has recently been deposited at the National Museum of Cinema in Turin. Beyond the question of preservation, the paper draws attention to the cultural weight of Videomusic: its role in shaping youth culture in Italy, and the way it connected television with both the record business and the film industry. It also highlights the rediscovery of hidden archives and figures, with attention to the methodological and theoretical challenges of accessing both analogue and digital databases. At the same time, the archive raises practical problems, from rights management to cataloguing and digitisation, which complicate any attempt to make its materials accessible. Set against the wider television and media landscape, the article uses this case to reflect on how neglected archives can be recovered and how they continue to function as sites of cultural memory.

Taken together, the problems of preservation and access point to a deeper methodological issue: which traces can carry historical argument when the audiovisual record is uneven? An investigative path opens toward serial print sources and paratexts—guides, listings, magazines—through which programming logics, genres, and editorial choices can be inferred and tested. While Turkish television now enjoys global reach across traditional and digital platforms, the historical changes driving this expansion are still underexplored, revealing a significant research gap. The study conducted by Pınar Aslan, Hakan Koluman and Sena Özşirin is groundbreaking for it focuses on the evolution of Turkish television in 1990, the year private broadcasting began, using

issues of *TV'de 7 Gong* magazine. By adopting a methodology based on qualitative content analysis, the three authors compare shifts in programme types between public and private channels, applying Raymond Williams' categorisation model. Their findings significantly highlight content strategies during Turkey's transition to a multi-channel system.

Extending the methodological lens to digital delivery, the central question becomes how platform architectures curate the past: what is included, how it is described, and under which conditions it can be encountered, all of which act upon public memory. Alessia Casiraghi's contribution addresses a highly debated and particularly significant issue in today's media landscape: the extension and questioning of the concept of archive to streaming platforms. Focusing on a selection of European case studies, the author offers a comparative analysis of the proprietary streaming services of two public service broadcasters—the Italian Rai and the Spanish RTVE—alongside the digital catalogue of INA, France's national body for audiovisual preservation. These organisations, whose mission explicitly includes the preservation, promotion, and dissemination of television heritage, play a pivotal role in shaping forms of public memory, as well as in processes of identity-making and affective engagement. What role do public audiovisual archives play in the mediation—and renegotiation—of nostalgia and historical knowledge, increasingly commodified by the contemporary entertainment industry? How do the imperatives of platformisation and content personalisation, in an era shaped by algorithmic screen outlets, impact the selection, presentation, accessibility, and even the reframing of archival catalogues? Blending insights from archive, memory, and platform studies, the article demonstrates how streaming platforms operated by public institutions function as sites of negotiation between editorial and institutional curatorship, on the backdrop of the growing influence of interface design, platform architecture, and user-centred ergonomics.

The second part of this volume features contributions developed within the scope of the research project "ATLas – Atlante delle televisioni locali" (Atlas of Local Televisions, ATLas), a nationally funded initiative supported by the Italian Ministry of University and Research as part of the 2020 PRIN programme.[2] Conducted between 2022 and 2025, the project has involved four academic institutions: the University of Bologna (principal investigator), the University of Cagliari, Sapienza University of Rome, and the University of Turin.[3] Its aim was to establish the first systematic survey of privately-owned local television broadcasters active in Italy between 1976 and 1990, a blind spot both in scholarly investigation and audiovisual heritage preservation.

As a pilot study, ATLas focuses on five emblematic broadcasters located in several Italian regions: TeleRoma56 (Lazio), Sardegna 1 (Sardinia), Antenna 3 (Lombardy), TeleSanterno (Emilia-Romagna), and Videogruppo (Piedmont). Each of these cases is the subject of a dedicated contribution featured in this volume; together, they offer a wide spectrum of geographical, editorial, and structural characteristics, enabling a multi-layered reconstruction of how local broadcasting developed during the transitional period from public service monopoly to a liberalised commercial landscape. The research also highlighted the crucial role these stations played in reflecting and shaping regional identities and local socio-economic dynamics.

Combining television and media history with oral testimony, infrastructure studies, and archival practice, the investigation tackled the challenges of retrieving and organising fragmentary and often hidden or poorly catalogued materials, which until now had been preserved in informal, private, or commercially structured collections not intended for long-term public access. Alongside in-depth interviews with professionals and key figures, the inquiry shed light on programming strategies, business models, genre experimentation, and the circulation of content and formats across regional boundaries.

As it will be highlighted in the papers produced within the framework of the project, a significant outcome of ATLas was the creation of an open-access digital repository hosted by the University of Bologna's digital library, comprising approximately 400 items. This collection includes audiovisual clips, photographs, production doc-

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uments, as well as interview excerpts, curated and indexed according to rigorous archival criteria.[4] To support contextualisation and engagement, fifteen thematic digital exhibitions have also been developed, offering interpretative pathways into both individual station histories and broader cross-regional trends.[5] Building on these resources and practices, ATLas ultimately proposed a new methodological framework for studying decentralised broadcasting phenomena, promoting public access to otherwise marginalised materials and laying the groundwork for a permanent and expandable online platform dedicated to Italy's local television heritage.

The first analysis drawing on the work conducted within ATLas is by Giulia Crisanti, who investigates the history of Italy's local broadcasting through the case-study provided by TeleRoma56: Rome's first over-the-air TV station. Originally founded by Bruno Zevi in 1976, the Roman TV station was famously owned by the Radical Party throughout the 1980s. Combining a variegated ensemble of oral sources, audiovisual material, TV magazines and national newspapers, as well as public and private documents, Crisanti proposes a multidimensional approach to researching the history of Italian private television. Her analysis of TeleRoma's attempt at combining commercial exigencies with enduring instances of bottom-up political engagement complicates common understandings on the commercial evolution of Italy's private television in the course of the 1980s, encouraging to look for unexplored historical trajectories and archival research pathways.

Myriam Mereu focuses on a second local broadcaster included in the project: her paper reconstructs the historical development of Sardegna 1, based in Cagliari and active since the early 1980s, while also reflecting on the role of archives in shaping media memory. The study is framed within the "archival turn" in television studies, adopting the notion of television as cultural memory and drawing on Hagedoorn's and Assmann's models of canon and archive. The focus lies on both the technological and archival dimensions, as well as on the practices of remediation and reactivation of the past. Localism, linked to Sardinia's insular context, is central: the lack of official archives required research in institutional and private collections, alongside ten oral history interviews with former staff members. Mereu chooses a methodology that combines oral history and "archivability", thus highlighting both the limits and potential of sources, often marked by subjectivity and gaps. The absence of a physical archive and the loss of much early material, due to high costs and the fragility of supports, made it necessary to rely on digitised materials from private archives. This "digital rebirth" of analogue records underscores the challenges of preservation in an era of immateriality and dispersal of audiovisual heritage.

Luca Barra and Emiliano Rossi's contribution explores the pioneering experience of the Lombard TV station Antenna 3, which began operating in 1977 and has long been regarded as "the major among the small broadcasters". In the context of Italian local TV, Antenna 3 represents both a paradigmatic example—reflecting the typical trajectory of a broad range of coeval channels—and a distinctive outlier, due to its inter-regional ambitions, the involvement of high-profile talents, and its innovative equipment and infrastructures. Their paper examines and systematically historicises Antenna 3's development and gradual industrialisation, drawing on original sources—including interviews with former professionals and corporate documents—and highlights both the centrality of entertainment programming in the broadcaster's editorial strategy and its considerable advertising potential. Within the broader framework of the ATLas project, the study of Antenna 3 offers valuable insight into the transformation of Italian local television from early independent and locally rooted television ventures to commercially structured private enterprises, revealing the creative dynamism and evolving operational logics of the broadcasting landscape in late 20th-century Italy.

The following essay, by Luca Barra and Matteo Marinello, traces the history of the Emilia-based channel Tele-Santerno through the triangulation of audiovisual sources, oral accounts, and print materials. TeleSanterno was founded in 1974 as a small experimental and amateur local broadcaster and was soon taken over by entrepreneur Domenico Berti. He sought to combine its strong local roots with national entertainment, through the expansion of its broadcasting area and investments in television genres and personalities made famous by the Rai monopoly. From the broadcast of a fake UFO landing in 1979 to the recruitment of Daniele Piombi, Walter Chiari, and other stars in the early 1980s, the milestones of TeleSanterno's history show how the tension between local and national imaginaries was never fully resolved, culminating in the network's collapse.

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4. The whole database is available on AMS Historica at the following link: https://historica.unibo.it/collections/feb5410b-ce30-4e26-b3d5-6639dad59c89 (last accessed 08-10-2025).

5. The fifteen in-depth features can be found at the following link: https://site.unibo.it/atlas/en/exhibitions (last accessed 08-10-2025).

This was caused by mounting financial difficulties and the fragility of its corporate structure, which could not match Berti's ambitions.

Finally, Paola Zeni and Riccardo Fassone's paper examines the fifth case study considered by ATLas: Videogruppo Piemonte, a Turin-based local broadcaster active from the mid-1970s. Drawing on a dispersed and fragile archive—ranging from U-matic tapes to administrative records and programme schedules—the authors highlight both the precariousness of local television archiving and its historiographical potential. Videogruppo's editorial ethos—summed up in the slogan "Our studio is the city"—favoured proximity, civic engagement, and a willingness to confront political issues over polished form. Its programmes often addressed labour disputes, questions of urban identity, minority voices, and local politics, giving citizens the sense of being active participants in the public sphere. In this way, the broadcaster came to function as a site of democratic experimentation embedded in Turin's civic fabric. Read against the broader European context of deregulated local television, Videogruppo's fragmentary archive illustrates both the possibilities and the vulnerability of grassroots broadcasting.

Among the recurring themes of the themed section of this volume are reflections on how, especially in an age defined by automated media practices, archival practices can uncover hidden narratives as well as the industrial, commercial, and social structures underpinning television. By documenting overlooked, transient, or innovative content, the archives examined in the various contributions appear to function both as institutional memory and as guides to cultural understanding, also in light of their prominent creative potential. By integrating television experiences diverse in location, materials, and concerns, this issue ultimately aims to demonstrate that television archives—whether digital or analogue, institutional or grassroots—serve not only as repositories of historical records but also as dynamic agents in narrating and reshaping European cultural history, thereby contributing to memory, identity, and heritage.

Setting aside any expectation of uniformity, a common interpretative thread comes to the fore: heterogeneity—at times perhaps even *dis*-homogeneity—is less a flaw than an index of the field's present condition. It marks territorial discontinuities, uneven archival 'fortunes', divergent custodial cultures, and a technological diachrony of formats and supports that together structure what can be known and how it can be told. Read in this light, the case studies featured in the themed section of this issue do not merely inhabit an archival perspective; through their very materiality, they widen its scope, accommodating partiality, informality, and the negotiated nature of evidence: archival practice is consequently understood more as a relational labour rather than a locational one. Contributors align formal repositories with private holdings, oral testimony, and paratexts, treating obsolescence, partial survival, and even absence as evidence. Interpretation remains accountable to description and to public mediation, and—because access regimes and technical conditions vary and evolve—methods must stay elastic enough to sustain comparison without flattening difference. Rather than closing matters, these pages aim to open a programme of inquiry, inviting renewed historical investigation. What would a regional cartography of counter-archives look like? How might ephemera and born-digital traces be made to carry historical argument? Which comparative frames can keep local, regional, and national logics in view at once? And what forms of joint custodianship best support durable access? We pose these as questions to organise further research. Considered together, these points suggest a horizon rather than a plan. The collected articles significantly conceive television archives not only as sources for historical knowledge but as objects of care: sites where preservation and interpretation are ongoing, situated practices. In this sense, television heritage names both an object and an ethic, to be expressed in the commitment to keep these moving images publicly researchable and alive.

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