

FIAT IFTA #ArchivalReads



The 'Value Use and Copyright Commission' (VUC) of FIAT/IFTA has decided to publish a series of interviews and articles about use of audiovisual archive materials. This article outlines how the corona virus outbreak has affected the functioning of various audiovisual archives around Europe, and how they subsequently set up a diversity of initiatives that respond to the questions and needs of their audiences. The article also features links to six case studies on the same subject.

Article and case studies by Montserrat Bailac - documentalist at TV3 Televisió de Catalunya - and Dale Grayson (MD at Northbound Television) - published on 3 May 2020.

A variety of organisations are involved in protecting and preserving the world's film and television heritage, whether as physical film and tape collections or digital collections and not forgetting their related paper archives. This includes large public service broadcasters and publicly funded national archives, independent regional archives, production companies and commercial businesses, including those with remit to generate income from audiovisual content.

Like many other organizations, the global Corona virus pandemic has challenged this network of film and television archives in ways never seen before. Even with robust business continuity plans in place, a crisis on a global scale that threatens human life and involves national lockdowns and severe restrictions on movement, has simply not been anticipated by many of us. Archives have had to respond quickly by adapting their services and activities in innovative ways. To ensure the safety of staff and users, most archives have closed their buildings to external users, until further notice. In light of this, plus ongoing health and safety guidance from the different governments, archives have had to take steps to avoid shutting down on-site operations and services. Employee safety and wellbeing, the security of collections, continued access to content (or loss of access) and potential impacts on finances and revenues have been key considerations for archive practitioners and management teams in these first few weeks of the crisis.

With thanks to everyone who has given their time to contribute to this exercise whilst in the midst of dealing with their own very challenging circumstances, the paper below sets out a summary view of areas in which archive experts in Spain, Italy, Portugal and the UK have been dealing with an unprecedented situation. This includes an early view on potential long-term impacts and considerations that will emerge from the crisis. Links to some specific case studies are included at the end of the article.

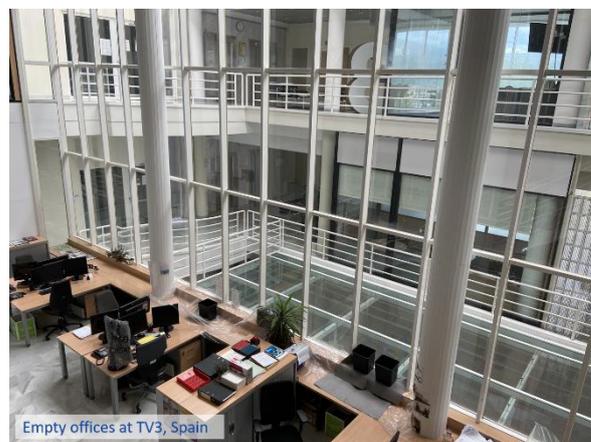
The Challenges and Considerations

What, if anything, can we still do on-site?

Many archives are part of or based in larger organisations. This means that decisions about site access have often been out of their control and archive managers have had to respond quickly to a rapidly changing situation happening around them. These archives cannot act independently but must follow the decisions and instructions of others regarding building lockdowns and access to sites. They must also take into account government and company advice about social distancing, employee safety and welfare, and what to do in situations where employees or their family members have Corona virus symptoms or fall ill. How will their teams manage if they cannot get into buildings? What if a number of people in the team are ill or self-isolating

at the same time? Archive managers then have to consider which on-site activities are essential and make a case for continued access. Those aligned to broadcast operations, news and production needs have a stronger argument - but only if supported by their customers - for continuing to be on site and means they can continue to carry out some office based and collection/vault management duties. However, in many instances, even in broadcast and news organisations, archive operations have reduced to a skeleton staff (often on a rostered basis) and certain functions, such as digitisation projects or restoration work have stopped or significantly reduced.

Conversely, some archives have found themselves compensating for other departments (e.g. programme makers) who are remote working without their usual systems and viewing equipment - archive workers with access to machines on-site have stepped in to support research and viewing activities that would normally be done by their customers. And simple archive tasks, such as moving tapes around a building or handling multiple machines each day, take on a new significance with a heightened focus on cleanliness and distancing within the office environment.



Putting remote working into practice

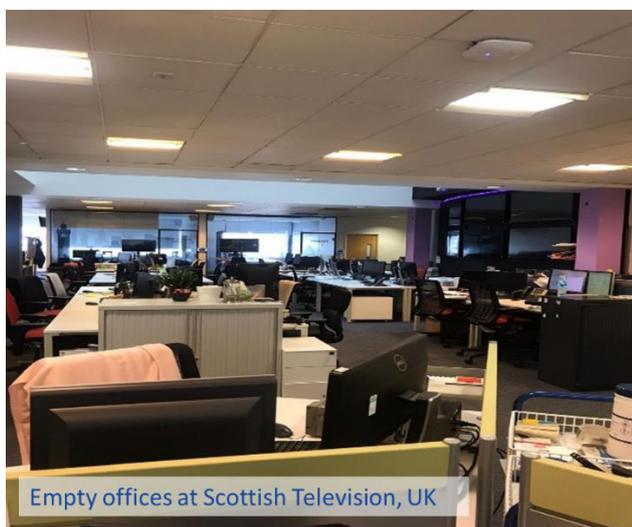
From both a logistical and cultural perspective, archive teams are typically office-based, used to working together as close units, often enjoying close proximity to their collections. Remote working is generally not the norm and many organisations are not set up for sustained periods of working from home. In a period where many have been uprooted at short notice to leave their buildings, the challenge has been to ensure some continuity of service and determine which functions can be done most effectively by remote workers.



Many have been advantaged by being part of organisations with good technology departments to support them and generally the shift to remote working has worked well from a technical perspective. There is a greater emphasis on communications - not only to know that work is being delivered but also with a strong sense of employee welfare - and a need to adopt new tools such as Zoom, Slack and WhatsApp for keeping in touch. While strengthening communications has emerged as a key priority for many, the situation varies according to the type of audiovisual archive.

Commercial archives are more used to teleworking, offering their collections online and managing requests and sales from a distance, often working with a global network of clients. The variety of archives and a wide range of situations means that the ability to implement effective remote working has been influenced by the size of the company and its infrastructure, the types of archive roles and responsibilities they have, existing levels of digitisation and whether any had an existing culture of flexible working.

Those with large amounts of digitised content, catalogue data and rights information accessible online have been at a significant advantage and the importance of digitisation cannot be overstressed at this time. Without access to physical collections, the focus shifts to the archive's digital offering. Some organisations - including large broadcasters - may have been surprised that large volumes of content are still only held on film or tape (and information held in paper files) and therefore the archive does not simply have everything ready and available for use. Others have seized the opportunity to promote their digital collections, repackaging and representing material, using the digital tools to ensure delivery to customers and focussing on promotional and social media activities. Some have moved festivals and screenings online, often with great success, and some teams are using the remote working opportunity to focus on data cleansing, database developments and employee training and development - things that might have been a lower priority in normal times.



Opportunities arising

Digital innovation has come to the fore. Those with a strong digital presence are likely to be doing better than those who rely on (now closed) access to their physical film, tape and paper collections. For those who are struggling, the crisis presents an opportunity to make a case for further digitisation of their collections, especially at risk content, and all archives will no doubt be looking to strengthen their operational infrastructures to enable remote and more flexible working in the future. Office working and travel comes with a financial cost (alongside the many upsides of people working together in teams!) and this may be an opportunity to

rethink how work is done and what roles are needed in future. The strongest cases for change will be made in conjunction with archive users (audiences, researchers, programme makers) and management that recognises that audiovisual heritage has an important part to play both in normal times and especially right now. Production on many shows worldwide has been stopped or postponed at a time when audiences are stuck at home with a huge appetite for content. Could archives help fill the gaps? Could they do more online - either themselves or through partnerships?

Funding and revenue streams

With many different types of organisation involved in audiovisual heritage, there is no one model for how film and television archives are financed. Some are advantaged by being part of a larger organisation (a broadcaster for example) and this will bring some financial protections with it, though it also means that archives are usually competing with other parts of the business for profile and resources. Others are independent, which has the advantages of autonomy in decision making but often a lack of supporting infrastructure around them.



This might be fine in normal times but, at a time of crisis, some archives have quickly moved from having dealt with the immediate logistical challenges of closed buildings and remote working, to considering the potential financial impacts of the crisis. In the short term, consideration is given to which archive activities can still be carried out with some legitimacy and which have to be stopped - with a possible knock on effect to individual roles. What if somebody has no work to do? What if somebody has no technical devices, conditions or skills to work remotely?

In the UK, employees can be furloughed (if they meet specific criteria) and the government will fund 80% of their salary to a maximum of £2,500. Archive managers, sometimes without HR and finance support in place, are having to interpret and implement government advice and schemes, which may have some short-term financial benefits. In the longer term, some will be looking to develop their digital offerings and operational infrastructures and will already be thinking about developing business cases in order to secure the funding for that.

Archives that rely on public funding will be working with other organisations in their heritage network to ensure that those funding streams will continue to deliver - indeed, in the UK there is active discussion around emergency funding initiatives. Others that rely on ad hoc project funding will be mindful that those funding streams could be withdrawn if projects cannot deliver due to current logistical and operational constraints. Those who rely on footage licensing revenues for a significant part of their income will know that digitisation

is the way forward. Customers cannot be serviced from locked-down vaults and the potential damage to this funding stream for some archives is not to be underestimated. However, commercial businesses involved in footage licensing from digital collections may be seeing an upside from the crisis as the demand for footage increases if programme makers cannot get out to film, though much will depend on the appetite of channel commissioners and platform operators for archive-based programming and repackaging of existing digitised content. There may be opportunities for archives to put forward creative ideas.

What are we learning from the crisis?

In general, archives remain operational, but significantly changed. With more time to plan, many would have done things differently. Even those with good business continuity plans in place were focussed at a micro operational/business level of planning and had not anticipated an unprecedented crisis happening at national and global level. However, talented and dedicated archive teams have moved quickly to implement remote working with a focus on delivering digital services to their customers. There has been much innovation - those with significant digital collections have been able to switch to improving, developing and promoting their digital offers. In some larger organisations, a case has been made for continued on site working, particularly where there is a clear need to support broadcast and news operations. The importance of public service broadcasting at a time when the public needs to be well informed and kept entertained is particularly relevant and has helped some archives to demonstrate that they have an important ongoing role to capture television output and service customer and audience needs with valuable content. But these are difficult times for those who rely on access to their physical collections - without that, some functions have stopped and there has been a knock-on effect to individual roles and responsibilities. Some archives have furloughed some employees and there is already a look towards the potential longer-term financial impacts of the crisis. Film and television archives always have to compete for funding and resources, either within the heritage sector or within their own larger organisations. All sectors of the global economy will be hit by the Corona virus crisis and archive management teams will be working harder than ever to maintain a profile and make a case for investment, but it is clear that the way forward for archives is digital.

Case Studies

BFI National Archive

[case study](#)

Screenocean

[case study](#)

MACE and YFA

[case study](#)

Scottish Television

[case study](#)

RAI case study

[case study](#)

RTVE case study

[case study](#)

Tell us your story!

What was your archive's answer to the challenges and opportunities that the corona virus crisis caused? FIAT/IFTA has [created a special form](#) where you can leave your answer to three short questions.

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