



ATLAS CHRONICLES. DESIGNING AND VALORISING AN ITALIAN ARCHIVE OF PAST LOCAL TV CHANNELS

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Abstract: Establishing a first, pilot inventory of privately-owned local TV channels operating in Italy between 1976 and 1990 is the core aim of the **ATLas – Atlas of Local Televisions** project, a nationally-funded research currently encompassing four Italian universities, with the intent of driving attention on an often neglected area of both academic investigation and archival practice. The research focuses on a sample of five networks which operated in contrast to the national public service monopoly, with vibrant creative innovations and a distinct connection with territories and local economies. After a scientific overview of the project, this contribution will delve into the methodological challenges underlying the design of an open-access repository that hosts a selection of audiovisual fragments drawn from the channels' native archives, now difficult or impossible to access, or archived following random or commercial criteria. Particular attention is paid to the process of inventory, indexing and generating metadata of the various collected sources, in an effort to maintain a balance between creative and historiographical instances, and to allow the development of dedicated digital exhibitions. With accounts referring to three case studies (Antenna 3, Sardegna 1, and TeleSanterno), the article shares and discusses some lessons learnt, as well as the main struggles (and possible biases) encountered through the analysis, highlighting the memorial and testimonial value of this area of media history.

Keywords: archive, Italian television, local television, metadata, private television, production, repository

1 The Goals, Scope and Value of a Pilot Project

ATLas – Atlante delle Televisioni Locali [Atlas of Local Television] has been a research project of national interest, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research as part of the 2020 PRIN program. It has been developed by

four universities between 2022 and May 2025: the University of Bologna (principal investigator), the University of Cagliari, Sapienza University of Rome, and the University of Turin. This project aimed to establish a first inventory of privately-owned local TV channels operating in Italy between 1976 and 1990. It focused on five relevant case histories that were both geographically dispersed and thematically varied. In doing so, the project aimed to draw attention, and give new forms of access, to an area of both academic investigation and archival practice that is often neglected, at least in the Italian context, where the focus is more on public service and commercial television.

The overarching goal of the ATLAS research project was to better reconstruct the complex, stratified and varied history of the transformation of the Italian television (and broadcasting) system from a public monopoly built entirely around Rai to a fully developed commercial market with private players operating on local, transregional and national levels. Throughout the 70s (especially in their second half) and the 80s, in parallel with similar processes happening across Europe,¹ a significant role was played in most cities and regions by dozens of local channels, sometimes very small and closely connected to the territory, in other cases more ambitious.² This significant period in Italian television and media history has often been overlooked: due to its multiplicity, it has repeatedly been oversimplified; due to its position in between two major phases in the evolution of national broadcasting, its relevance has been reduced to a sidenote; due to its constant variety and frequent naivety, it has been (consciously or unconsciously) forgotten, and relegated to personal testimonies, memorial uses and local activities, and journalistic or promotional accounts. While local channels have been studied in connection with the ascent of Silvio Berlusconi as a successful media mogul (and political figure),³ many other relevant personal and professional trajectories of amateurs, idealists, entrepreneurs, creatives, and maneuverers who tried their way in the same media arena have been left aside – including the several histories of the many ‘Berlusconis’ who tried and failed to achieve similar results.

The other main goal of the ATLAS research project, on a micro yet relevant level, has been to explore, find, study the historical programming from a small group of local channels in the 1976-1990 time period, and to give at least partial access to it. On the one hand, the majority of the newscasts, variety shows, talk shows, general entertainment programmes, and more widely the flow broadcast by these channels (including promos, commercials and fillers) have rarely been archived, and those that have been archived have been done so sporadically and with random criteria. Many supports are no longer accessible or have not been digitised, resulting in a significant portion of these incomplete archives disappearing, a loss only partially offset by excerpts uploaded online (often without metadata or license rights) by passionate individuals and grassroots communities using their personal recordings.⁴ On the other hand, other materials, such as photographs, schedules, contracts, production sheets, have been lost or are on the verge of being lost, in abandoned facilities. First-hand testimonies from people involved in these processes at a creative, technical or managerial level are also becoming increasingly difficult to obtain, due to the age of the expert informants and the difficulty of recalling events from such a distant time.

Within this *macro* and *micro* framework, the research could only be partial in order to be feasible. ATLAS was therefore designed then as a pilot project, starting with a limited number of **case histories** (and consequently a limited amount of materials, informal archives, memories and expert informants). The research group selected five local channels scattered across different regions: Antenna 3 in Lombardy, Sardegna 1 in Sardinia, Videogruppo in Piedmont, TeleRoma56 in Lazio, and TeleSanterno in Emilia-Romagna. Together, they provided a diverse range of histories, ambitions and failures, as well as archives. Hopefully, the research will continue with further excavations and case studies (and additional funding) following the model, methods, and spaces established on this initial group of TV stations.⁵

The research project has therefore engaged with video archives⁶ in two distinct ways. Firstly, video archives are a source of information. They are complex and incomplete yet fundamental to tracing the larger phenomenon of local broadcasting in the history of Italian television, as well as the smaller-scale histories of some specific channels. Identifying, entering, accessing, exploring, mapping and digitising the few informal, scattered archives of the five local networks was important for grounding the research more firmly, confronting memories with actual texts, following



Figure 1. Photographic documentation of the Antenna 3 archives, housed in the former production centre in Legnano (near Varese, in the Lombardy region). Note the condition of the materials, which are not always arranged according to formal archival standards. Photographs taken by Luca Barra, Matteo Marinello and Emiliano Rossi on January 11, 2022.

production and distribution trajectories, and sustaining or sometimes contradicting other sources and histories. Founders and their relatives, companies that followed, and amateur and professional collectors provided materials that had been composed, organised and digitised according to mixed, sparse, partial needs and criteria (which will be discussed in the following paragraph). Secondly, the ATLas project has established its own video archive as the main lasting result of the research, properly making accessible a limited yet significant selection of content from these archives, including videos, documents, photos and audio excerpts from the interviews conducted for the project. In this way, scholars, students, researchers and other relevant stakeholders can access this otherwise disperse and rare television programming, following updated and long-lasting archival standards (these processes will be detailed in the final paragraphs).

The **ATLas database**, which is hosted by the digital library at the University of Bologna, is an open, accessible and durable collection of around 400 items, including dozens of fragments from the original TV programming of the five networks. Furthermore, **fifteen digital exhibitions** (in Italian) contextualise the database materials by embedding them in the detailed histories of the five local channels, as well as in cross-readings on genres, topics, hosts and shared objectives, to better demonstrate the parallel, and often intertwined and interconnected nature of these individual histories.

2 Which Sources? Which Archives?

Reconstructing the history of local television in Italy has often involved encountering scattered fragments held in corporate, personal, or commercial archives. In other words, the research group could not properly rely on 'traditional' archives: the team had to build specific repositories, breaking new ground. Until now, many scholars and critics have considered this activity useless, looking at local television stations as providers of mass, low-level content. For this reason, neither state nor regional archives have taken institutional care of their legacy. Indeed, local television stations shape a 'moderate carnival',⁷ where everything is planned to be comfortably mediocre; at the same time, and for the very same reason, they represent a fundamental part of Italian media history in the second half of the 20th century.

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ATLAS. Atlante delle televisioni locali

Tipologia complesso di fondi

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Università di Torino
University of Bologna

Ente Conservatore

Abstract Il fondo presenta alcuni materiali relativi alle emittenti televisive Antenna 3 (Lombardia), Sardegna 1 (Sardegna), TeleRoma56 (Lazio), TeleSanterno (Emilia-Romagna), Videogruppo (Piemonte). In particolare, il fondo raccoglie segmenti tratti dalla programmazione dei canali, con fotografie, documenti, estratti audio di interviste e altre risorse, resi disponibili in formato digitale.

Consistenza 401

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Progetto ATLAS. Atlante delle televisioni locali

URL <https://historica.unibo.it/handle/20.500.14008/85269>

Consulta il Fondo Livello di Descrizione Inferiore Relazioni

Albero Archivistico

- ▼ ATLAS. Atlante delle televisioni locali
- ▶ ATLAS. Antenna 3
- ▶ ATLAS. Sardegna 1
- ▶ ATLAS. TeleRoma56
- ▶ ATLAS. TeleSanterno
- ▶ ATLAS. Videogruppo

Figure 2. Landing page of the ATLAS collection on AMS Historica, showing the structure of the 'albero archivistico' ('archival tree') (screenshot by the authors, with permission from AlmaDL).

ATLAS researchers had to overcome the problem of cultural legitimacy that has affected the preservation of the videotapes on which local television programs were recorded. In fact, many of these tapes were often reused by television stations to save money or were discarded because they required too much storage space. The result was the destruction of an important part of our media heritage. From this point of view, therefore, studying local television means bringing to light stories that were considered not worth telling because they are considered lowbrow and vulgar; stories that do not belong to the grand history of European public broadcasting, thus challenging a cultural canon.

However, this challenge has been made even more difficult by the absence of fully structured historical sources that allow researchers to follow well-known paths: as already stated, it was necessary to create the project's own repositories, but this proved easier said than done. ATLAS' primary sources have been audiovisual materials – TV shows usually recorded on different videotape formats, for instance – which could be collected by mining private archives: what has been left in the archive; the stakeholders' archive; etc. This operation has depended on the extent to which private and/or unofficial partners could be relied upon, as they have often been protective of their materials and have limited full access to the archive

Another crucial issue has been that of reconstructing the history of local televisions through oral history: how can oral sources – and, more precisely, informed and passionate stakeholders – be given credibility in historical terms? What if they are not reliable? What if they are sure that they have a good memory, but this is not actually the case? What if they want to manipulate the narrative?

The truth is that, within such a research, scholars could not trust just one type of source. We needed to rely on many of them: in this sense, we had to search for and collect videos, interviews, and documents such as company financial statements, TV schedules, press releases, letters, contracts, etc., generating an archive composed of *multiple* archives. Our goal has been to link television programs on videotapes with other records left by local television stations as media organisations (e.g., registration documents, mortgages and loans paperwork), old newspapers (where television schedules can be found), private documents, and oral history sources. This has been only the start of reconstructing the multifaceted configuration of this phenomenon, especially in Italy.

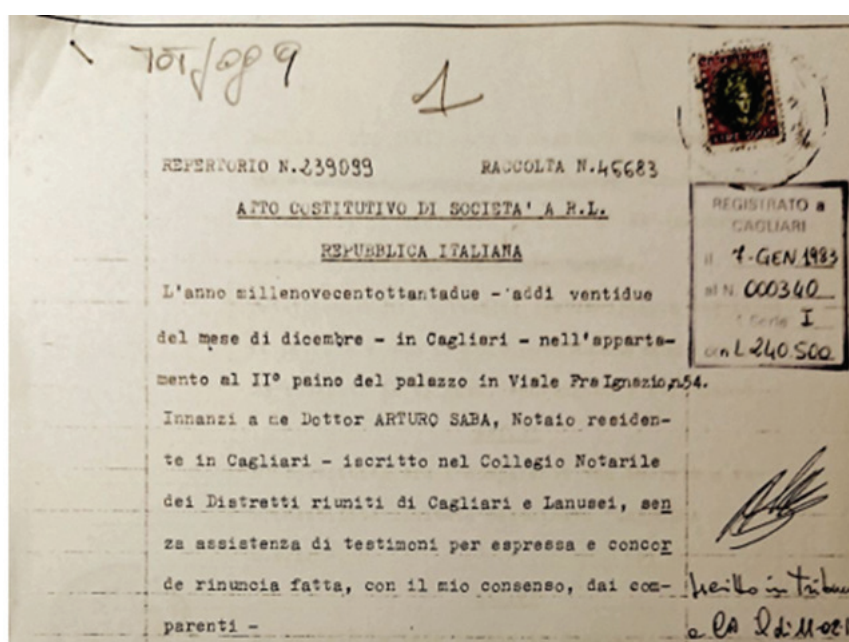


Figure 3. An excerpt from the founding document of the television channel Sardegna 1, obtained by the Cagliari research team from the local Chamber of Commerce (digitised by Myriam Mereu, reproduced in accordance with current copyright regulations).

A short but meaningful example comes from **Sardegna 1**, a Sardinian-based television channel.⁸ First and foremost, this is the history of a media company, established in 1982 and fully operative since the beginning of 1987.⁹ The researchers working on this case have reconstructed what happened in those years through cultural history methodologies, focusing on the documents housed at the Chambers of Commerce, which keep track of the development of the industrial sector in Italy. For instance, at Cagliari's Chamber of Commerce,¹⁰ the research team was able to obtain the article of incorporation of Sardegna 1, which states that Paolo Ragazzo, his son Riccardo and his daughters Carolina and Valentina founded the media company in Cagliari on December 22nd, 1982. As claimed in those documents, the objective of Sardegna 1 was 'the management of radio and television stations for broadcasting throughout the region of Sardinia'.¹¹ This source was part of a broader repository in which financial statements, and minutes of board meetings could also be found. Furthermore, there were working documents, contracts, press releases, and union letters belonging to private archives, such as those of Giacomo Serreli and Roberto Sini, former journalist and former editor/studio operator at Sardegna 1, through which the team was able to reconstruct what it was

SARDEGNA 1	
7.30	Cartoni animati
12.00	TG Flash
12.05	Novela: I cento giorni di Andrea
13.00	Tf.: Batman
13.30	Cartoni animati
14.00	Sardegna 1 TG
14.30	Tf.: Le storie di Edgar A. Poe
15.30	Tf.: Get Smart
16.00	Cartoni animati
16.30	Tf.: Batman
16.50	Cartoni animati
18.45	TG Flash
18.50	Tf.: Get Smart
19.20	Novela: I cento giorni di Andrea
20.10	Sardegna 1 TG
20.40	Telefilm
21.30	TG Flash
21.30	Tf.: Bronk
22.30	Dadaumpa
23.15	Sardegna 1 TG
23.30	Bella Italia
24.00	Tf.: Cronaca

Figure 4. An excerpt from the *L'Unione Sarda* page dedicated to television schedules: among the 19 listed broadcasters, space is also given to Sardegna 1 (page published on January 6th, 1987, digitised by Myriam Mereu).

like to work in the local television context. Moreover, Serreli was appointed editorial staff's representative during a union dispute in November 1987 and still has many documents from that period.

Another question to answer has been: how to analyse television schedules? Newspapers have played an important role in this, as they used to publish TV schedules, at least partially.¹² For example, *L'Unione Sarda*, the most important newspaper in southern Sardinia, published the schedule for Sardegna 1 on January 6th, 1987:¹³ Cartoons, soap operas, news programs, TV series, and other shows were broadcast from 07.30 AM to 00.00. In this specific case, the most relevant thing is that, on that date, for the first time, a proper newscast was aired, directed by journalist Sandro Angioni.

TV schedules and documents from the Chambers of Commerce and private archives have provided a solid basis for reconstructing the history of local and private televisions in Italy. However, they are certainly not sufficient on their own: they must always be cross-referenced with audiovisual materials, which represent the most important items for our research on local TV and media history.

3 Accessing the Archives, and Making them Accessible

Giving space, voice, and visibility to a variety of heterogeneous and complementary sources, often precarious and geographically dispersed, entails first and foremost engaging with pre-existing archives which are often only partially institutionalised or formally recognised.

In the case of the Lombard broadcaster **Antenna 3**,¹⁴ for instance, the researchers involved in the ATLAS project were confronted with a historical collection that had been only partially digitised – and thus, to a certain extent, formalised – thanks to the tireless efforts of the founding family of the station's creator, Renzo Villa, as well as the current ownership of the channel, Gruppo Mediapason. The personal archive that documents the first decade of Antenna 3's history (1977–1987), in addition to over 200 recorded clips from around forty different programs, also includes press reviews, stage photographs, and a broad range of technical and industrial materials (broadcast schedules, yearbooks, contracts, release forms, scripts, production plans, budgets, social reports, and more). It is precisely the materiality of these sources that once again confirms the notion that the first encounter with an audiovisual archive is, above all, a *lived and embodied experience*.

Preview	Data di pubblicazione	Estremo cronologico iniziale	Estremo cronologico finale	Titolo	Fondo Radice	Autore/i	Altri autori	Tipo di risorsa	Tipologia fisica
	-	1974	1975	"Scacciapensieri", Musica e balli con dj Vecchi nel retrobottega di Tonino Ronchi	ATLAS. Atlante delle televisioni locali	Orsi, Fabio		still image	photographs
	1-feb-1979			"L'ora del topo", La notizia del presunto atterraggio alieno irrompe durante la trasmissione	ATLAS. Atlante delle televisioni locali	Marchi, Eugenio	Gulmanelli, Giampaolo	video	television programs
	11-mar-2023			Intervista a Gabriele Matteucci e Gabriella Pirazzini, I motivi del fallimento di TeleSanterno (1984)	ATLAS. Atlante delle televisioni locali	Matteucci, Raffaele; Pirazzini, Gabriella; Ronchi, Tonino	Antoniazzi, Luca; Rossi, Emiliano	sound	sound recordings

Figure 5. Detail from the beta version of the repository, featuring a sample selection related to TeleSanterno channel. Note (highlighted in green) the typological variety of the inventoried sources, including video clips, audio interview segments, images, and documents (screenshot by the authors, with permission from AlmaDL).

Trasmissione/video	No puntate/anno	Consistenza clip
Altri frammenti	vari/ignoto	316
Affare fatto	1x1985	9
Ambarabà	3x1984	30
Aria di mezzanotte	5x1980	31
Arrivederci a settembre	2x1987	15
Bazar	3x1980	
Bingo	31x1978	
Rucc...	11x1983	

personalpicture	Foto
fullName	Cognome, Nome
wikidataLink	Link wikidata
wikipediaLink	Link wikipedia
variants	Variante Nome
role	Ruolo
nationality	Nazionalità
birthdate	Data di Nascita
personalsite	Sito personale
viaflink	Link Vial
birthyear	Anno di nascita
birthplace	Luogo di nascita
deathdate	Data di morte
deathyear	Anno di morte

metadati
dc.contributor.author
dc.contributor.contributor
dc.contributor.corporatebody
dc.contributor.family
dc.title
dc.title.alternative
dc.date.issued
dc.date.start
dc.date.end
dc.subject
dc.subject.keywords
dc.coverage.temporal
dc.coverage.temporalperiod
dc.description

Figure 6. Numerical and textual tables used during the metadata process for the ATLAS sample; the descriptors reflect the predefined standards of the Historica platform (screenshot by the authors, with permission from AlmaDL).

It is from this premise that one of the key interpretative frameworks guiding the entire research project can be introduced, namely the concept of the auto- or trans-archive.¹⁵ On the one hand, ATLAS engaged with the private collections (made up of native sources) that the research team acquired and interrogated in search of materials to (re) catalogue and enhance. On the other hand, the creation of an open-access collection imposes an additional layer of selection, often carried out through a 'cherry-pick' procedure, based on a spurious and inevitably fragmentary corpus. This corpus has also served the construction of some thematic paths, which required the identification of internal hierarchies.

A crucial aspect of the cataloguing work involved the analysis and evaluation of the technical standards of the platform used by ATLAS for the dissemination of its materials. This platform is **AMS Historica**, the digital library supporting Open Science developed by **AlmaDL**, the unit responsible for managing the University of Bologna's digital collections. Launched in the early 2000s, AMS Historica established itself as the institutional repository for the **open-access preservation and dissemination** of University of Bologna's digital cultural heritage, supplied by its libraries, archives, museums, and research groups. As of the end of 2024, the platform hosts and publishes over 400.000 files of various documentary types, made available under specific licensing agreements with rights holders. It is, therefore, a pre-existing and general-purpose platform, not specifically designed for the dissemination of research outputs in media history. As such, ATLAS was required to both *adopt* and *adapt* a range of internal conditions and mechanisms defined by the platform, particularly in relation to the processes of digitisation and metadata creation.

The classification of ATLAS items progressed through several phases. First, the indexing and cataloguing. Then, the development of primary and secondary tags (in the form of descriptors) as well as the creation of templates and tabular formats for naming occurrences. Finally, the application of standards relating to aspect ratio and audio fragment quality. While adhering to a principle of internal coherence across both front- and back-end, it became necessary to mediate between the constraints imposed by the protocols and technical constraints in use for Historica and the potential for customisation within the infrastructure and its architecture. This entailed negotiating a certain – albeit limited – degree of flexibility and alignment with project-specific needs. One example concerns the platform's



Figure 7. Detail from the entry “Ed è subito sabato’, Foto di scena e di backstage”, available on the ATLAS database ([link](#)). The item consists of a collage of production stills from the programme *Ed è subito sabato* (lit. *And suddenly it's Saturday*), taken in 1982 by photographer Bernardo Ricci (reproduced with the author's permission).

"Ed è subito sabato", Foto di scena e di backstage

Corporate Body	TeleSanterno
Punctual date	1982
Chronology	20th Century A.D.
Description	Collezione di negativi relativi a "Ed è subito sabato" (1982): è ben visibile il conduttore Daniele Piombi, affiancato da numerosi ospiti coinvolti in esibizioni e segmenti di dibattito. Presenti anche scatti che ritraggono tecnici e operatori al lavoro nel backstage
Size	2 foto
Is part of	Ed è subito sabato
Place	Casalfiumanese, Italy
Publisher	TeleSanterno
Color	Bianco e nero
Languages	No linguistic content; Not applicable
URI	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14008/82440
Medium	photographic paper
Project	ATLAS. Atlante delle televisioni locali
Fonds	ATLAS. TeleSanterno. Materiale fotografico
Physical type	photographs
Material and technique	photography (process)
Data provider	TeleSanterno
License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Rights Holder	Berti, Domenico

Figure 8. Metadata associated with the item “Ed è subito sabato’, Foto di scena e di backstage” ([link](#)). Among the visible tags are temporal information, authorship data, format and preservation status, type of IP licence, as well as internal links to other items within the collection (screenshot by the authors, with permission from AlmaDL).



Figure 9. The graphic interface used on the ATLAS repository to feature the interview with Domenico Berti, founder of TeleSanterno ([link](#)). The interviews with witnesses and other informants were conducted in audio format only, without video support (screenshot by the authors, with permission from AlmaDL).

high-performance zoom functionalities, which are not always compatible with the actual preservation state of ATLAS documents and video materials, or with the volume levels and compression formats of audiovisual files – some of which derive from analogue originals over forty years old.

As of May 2025, the ATLAS repository hosted on Historica includes segments from the programming of various channels, accompanied by photographs, documents, audio extracts from interviews, and other resources made available in digital format. The collection comprises a total of 400 items. The open access provision of these research outcomes reflects some of the most advanced practices in the cultural and social enhancement of audiovisual heritage, with particular reference to international best practices for audiovisual cataloguing, such as Dublin Core, Europeana, OpenAIRE, and the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF). Special attention has also been paid to issues of intellectual property, along with the corresponding legal requirements: the entire collection is made freely accessible under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence, in compliance with a rigorous Data Management Plan and following data governance practices aligned with the FAIR principles.

The navigability of the materials is the result of the careful development of a controlled and shared vocabulary, modelled after the [Getty Thesaurus](#), and applied during the inventory phase. This process required extensive disambiguation of several classification terms used within the repository, raising further scientific and methodological questions – for instance, in relation to the term ‘author’ of a television programme, which may refer either to the director or to the main host.

4 Some Challenges

Before concluding, it is possible to delve deeper into some of the open issues in the process of cataloguing and inventorying the ATLAS sample on the digital library, using a few examples. [This entry](#), for instance, pertains to a series of stage photographs taken in 1982 by the photographer Bernardo Ricci during the programme *Ed è subito sabato* on the Emilia-Romagna broadcaster [TeleSanterno](#),¹⁶ and forms part of a larger documentary corpus that includes, in addition to the photographs, other operational materials, both public and semi-public.



Figure 10. Screenshot from the entry “Serata di inaugurazione delle trasmissioni, Il saluto di Renzo Villa ed Enzo Tortora”, available on ATLAS database ([link](#)). Here, Renzo Villa inaugurates the broadcasts of Antenna 3 from outside the station’s studios, greeting the home audience with a theatrical gesture (November 1977; screenshot by the authors, with permission from AlmaDL).

This period marks a time when the channel was able to attract a significant amount of advertising investment, to the extent that the well-known presenter Daniele Piombi was recruited to host the show. The programme alternated between pure entertainment segments and talk-show-style discussions on current affairs: the negatives feature numerous guests engaged in performances and debate segments, as well as technicians, operators, and crew members working backstage. As can be seen in the document record, the metadata includes details relating to the time frame, a brief description of the item, the geographic location it pertains to, information about the support website, materials and production techniques, as well as a stable URL for the item. Many of these tags are clickable and expandable, providing further aggregated results based on similarity, affinity, or correlation.

At [this second link](#), the interview with Domenico Berti, the founder of TeleSanterno, is available. This is a particularly valuable testimony of a witness over ninety years old, which was collected in March 2023, in a challenging context. In the audio extract, in a faint voice, the former entrepreneur recalls what he believes were the reasons for the broadcaster’s success (synchronisation with the daily rhythms of life of the audience, the familial aspect of the programming, and television as an antidote to loneliness), thereby offering a narrative of the company’s underlying mission and implicit values. An in-depth interview as such, therefore, provides a significant insight into the production cultures of the time, bringing the researcher in contact with the interviewee’s own reflexivity and self-representation, a moment with a profound emotional impact which can be difficult to manage. As is often the case in oral history, the treatment of such a contribution demands particular caution: not only is the researcher, in effect, a co-producer of the interview they have conducted, positioning themselves as a mediator of memory before the respective witnesses (with the related issues of attribution on the platform), but one must also consider the level of partiality and self-censorship in the responses provided.¹⁷ This underscores the importance of ensuring that the contributions of witnesses and informants do not unduly influence scientific analysis, and are always being cross-referenced with other sources.

Finally, regarding the audiovisual material, it is worth noting the focus on clip format (i.e., portions of programming lasting less than ten minutes) as an inevitable compromise between operational, legal, and public outreach objectives. In this regard, selecting the material to be uploaded to the database required finding a balance between the fraction, the segment, and the whole, with the utmost respect for the originals, where possible. The **clip presented here** is from the long television marathon, divided into three nights, which in November 1977 officially marked the beginning of Antenna 3's transmissions from the Legnano production headquarters. The fragment in question, taken from a broadcast lasting over fifteen hours, is a rarity: recorded on a two-inch tape in use at the time, and preserved for 46 years in airtight and fireproof cases in the station's *nastroteca* (tape archive), its digitisation required substantial work, involving an expert from the United States specialising in transfers with specific equipment, followed by an additional restoration carried out in Italy.

In the clip, the founder of the broadcaster, Renzo Villa, alongside one of Italy's most prominent television personalities, Enzo Tortora, thanks the audience and all the external collaborators, in the form of a prologue before the grand inauguration gala. The words of Tortora and Villa convey strong emotion and represent a pivotal moment in the channel's history, as the very first moments of transmission aired by the station, justifying its inclusion in the public repository. This fragment, which demonstrates the increasing industrialisation of local television in Italy, also highlights the broadcaster's relationship with its local territory, serving as an incubator for talent and cutting-edge artistic ideas. Among the tags in the record, there is also a timecode with the most significant moments within the sequence, as well as links to related items, including other fragments of the programme and a series of interviews with various witnesses on the topic, conducted between 2021 and 2024.

5 Conclusion

As this brief account illustrates, in the case of ATLAS, the archive functions less as a provider of definitive answers and more as a generator of many new questions. Far from being a neutral repository, it constitutes a space shaped by ongoing negotiations among diverse stakeholders, deeply intertwined with economic, technological, and industrial variables.

Although partially, the ATLAS database works as an additional (and often substitute) archive, allowing access to otherwise hidden and lost audiovisual materials and documents. It is, and will be, an access point to a small glimpse of the full programming and production/distribution files of these private local channels and their smaller-scale histories. At the same time, it is also a repository, keeping track of the developments of the research through selection, metadata, and the availability of portions of the many interviews to professional informants. The same database, then, complements the original materials with other relevant information, allowing a more grounded use of videos, photos, and texts.

In attempting to preserve a medium as ephemeral and elusive as TV broadcasting – interrupting its liveness and continuous flow – the essence of the audiovisual archive lies not in the mere accumulation of material, but in the structuring logic which organises it.¹⁸ Ultimately, the aim of the ATLAS project has been to highlight and enhance the richness and significance of a selection of case studies that are both paradigmatic and exceptional. In doing so, on a smaller scale this research reaffirms the role of television and its archives as vital tools for analysis, public discourse, and societal representation, endowed with a strong memorial and testimonial value.

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Endnotes

1. An overview of the development of European private broadcasters, including the Italian case, is in Luca Barra, Christoph Classen, and Sonja De Leeuw, eds., "History of Private and Commercial Television in Europe", *View. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 6, no. 11 (2017) ([available here](#)) and Luca Barra, and Massimo Scaglioni, eds., "Moving at Different Speeds. The Commercialization of TV Systems in Europe and Its Consequences", *Comunicazioni sociali* 35, no. 1 (2013).
2. Histories of Italian television with a specific focus on this historical phase include Aldo Grasso, *Storia critica della televisione italiana* [*Critical History of Italian Television*], in collaboration with Luca Barra and Cecilia Penati (III vol., Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2019); Irene Piazzoni, *Storia delle televisioni in Italia. Dagli esordi alle web tv* [*History of Television in Italy. From its Beginnings to Web TV*] (Rome: Carocci, 2014); Luca Barra, Paola Brembilla and Veronica Innocenti, *La televisione italiana. Storie, generi e linguaggi* [*Italian Television. Histories, Genres, and Languages*] (Milan: Pearson 2024). More specifically on this period, see Peppino Ortoleva, *Un ventennio a colori. Televisione privata e società in Italia (1975-1995)* [*A Twenty-Year Period in Color. Private Television and Society in Italy (1975-1995)*] (Milan: Giunti, 1995); Enrico Menduni, *Videostoria. L'Italia e la tv: 1975-2015* [*Videohistory. Italy and its TV*] (Milan: Bompiani, 2015).
3. Specifically on Fininvest/Mediaset, see Mario Molteni, *Il gruppo Fininvest. Imprenditorialità, crescita, riassetto* [*The Fininvest Group. Entrepreneurship, Growth, Restructuring*] (Turin: ISEDI, 1998); Gabriele Balbi and Benedetta Prario "The History of Fininvest/Mediaset's Media Strategy: 30 Years of Politics, the Market, Technology and Italian Society", *Media, Culture & Society* 32 no. 3 (2010): 391-409. A wider, systemic account is included in Matthew Hibberd, *The Media in Italy* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007).
4. On Italian television public service and commercial television archives and their use, into a wider debate, see Peppino Ortoleva, "Gli archivi audiovisivi e la ricerca storica" [*Audiovisual Archives and Historical Research*], *Archivi e cultura* 31 (1998): 25-38; Aldo Grasso, ed., *Fare storia con la televisione. L'immagine come fonte, evento, memoria* [*Making History with Television. The Image as Source, Event, Memory*] (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2006); Luca Barra, and Massimo Scaglioni, "Making the Most of the Archive: Commercial Exploitation of the Digital Archive on Contemporary Italian Network TV", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2012): 40-47 ([available here](#)); Aldo Grasso, ed., *La storia pubblica. Memoria, fonti audiovisive e archivi digitali* [*The Public History. Memory, Audiovisual Sources, and Digital Archives*] (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2020); Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni, "La storia che si ripete. Alcune note sugli archivi della televisione" [*History Repeating. Some Notes on Television Archives*], in Massimo Scaglioni, ed., *Appassionati dissodatori. Storia e storiografia della televisione in Italia. Studi in onore di Aldo Grasso* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2019), pp. 115-121. On the specific case of Mediaset commercial archives, see Emiliano Rossi, "Beyond the Flow, from Tape to Digital: Insights from Mediaset's Archives", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 13(26): 77-86 ([available here](#)).
5. A discussion on the role of local television in Italian television and media history can be found in Luca Barra and Riccardo Fassone, "Una questione locale. Televisioni private, storia della televisione e storia dei media" [*A Local Issue. Private Channels, Television History and Media History*], *Imago. Studi di cinema e media* 15, n. 29: 101-114 (2025). Some results from the ATLAS research on five Italian local channels and their histories can be found in Giulia Crisanti, Myriam Mereu, Emiliano Rossi and Paola Zeni, eds., *Tele-Archives. Reframing Archival Research on Local Televisions Across Europe*, special issue of *Cinergie. Il cinema e le altre arti* 28 (2025).
6. As exemplary insights of a wider, ongoing discussion, see Robin Nelson and Lez Cooke, "Television Archives: Accessing TV History", *Critical Studies in Television* 5(2), xvii-xix. <https://doi.org/10.7227/CST.5.2.2>; Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect. Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013); Berber Hagedoorn, "Television as a Hybrid Repertoire of Memory: New Dynamic Practices of Cultural Memory in the Multi-Platform Era", *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture* 2, no. 3 (2013): 52-64 ([available here](#)); Shiming Shen, Matteo Treleani, Dario Compagno and Marco Winckler, "From Stock Shots to Ghost Data: Tracking Audiovisual Archives about the European Union", *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 12 (2023): 4-23 ([available here](#)).
7. As defined by Peppino Ortoleva, *Un ventennio a colori*.
8. The Sardegna 1 (Sardegna) case history has been studied by the Università di Cagliari local unit of the ATLAS project, and especially by Diego Cavallotti and Myriam Mereu. For their invaluable help, we need to thank Giacomo Serreli and Roberto Sini.

9. Andrea Corda, “Origini e sviluppi delle emittenti radiotelevisive private in Sardegna negli anni Settanta e Ottanta” [*Origins and Development of Private Radio and Television Broadcasters in Sardinia in the 1970s and 1980s*], *Storia e future. Rivista di storia e storiografia online*, 39 (2015) ([available here](#)). See also Michele Rossetti “In Italia e in Sardegna. Quarant’anni di radio e Tv locali” [*In Italy and Sardinia. Forty Years of Local Radio and TV*], *Periodico del Rotary Club di Cagliari*, 1-2 (2015): 9-16.
10. Cagliari is the capital of Sardinia.
11. “Act of incorporation of Sardegna 1”, December 22nd, 1982, Archive of Chamber of Commerce of Cagliari.
12. On the double promotional and operational role of television schedules, see Luca Barra, *La programmazione televisiva. Palinsesto e on demand [Television Programming. Schedules and On Demand]* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2022).
13. Anon., “Sardegna 1”, *L’Unione Sarda*, January 6th, 1987: 9.
14. The Antenna 3 (Lombardia) case history has been studied by the Università di Bologna local unit of the ATLAS project, and especially by Luca Barra and Emiliano Rossi. For their invaluable help, we need to thank Sandro Parenzo, Wally Giambelli, Alessandro Di Milia, and Fabio Ravezzani.
15. See Diego Cavallotti, *Transarchivi. Media radicali, archeologie, ecologie* (Parma: Diabasis, 2021).
16. The Telesanterno (Emilia-Romagna) case history has been studied by the Università di Bologna local unit of the ATLAS project, and especially by Luca Barra and Matteo Marinello. For their invaluable help, we need to thank Fabrizio Colliva, Fabio Orsi, and Bernardo Ricci.
17. The complexities inherent in the use of oral sources have been extensively theorized within media production studies, a framework to which this study is explicitly aligned; the seminal text of this scholarly approach is John T. Caldwell, *Production Culture. Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). It has spawned a rich literature including Miranda Banks, Bridget Conor and Vicky Mayer, eds., *Production Studies, The Sequel! Cultural Studies of Global Media Industries* (New York–Abingdon: Routledge, 2015) and Vicky Mayer, Miranda Banks and John T. Caldwell, *Production Studies. Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (Routledge, New York–Abingdon: 2009). From continental Europe, see also Patrick Vonderau and Petr Szczepanik, *Inside European Production Cultures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). An Italian perspective is offered in Luca Barra, Tiziano Bonini and Sergio Splendore, eds., *Backstage. Studi sulla produzione dei media in Italia* (Milan: Unicopli, 2016); for a methodological analysis, see Luca Barra, “La virtù sta nel mezzo (e nel confronto). Questioni di metodo per i ‘production studies’ televisivi e mediali”, *Schermi. Storie e culture del cinema e dei media in Italia* 3, no. 5: 65-80.
18. See Luca Barra, “La chiave del deposito. Accumulare contenuti” [*The Key to the Repository. Accumulating Content*], *Link. Idee per la televisione* 14 (2013): 82-89.

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