

Blog El Documentalista Audiovisual

July 1973, Santiago de Chile. Amira, a 20 year old girl proudly leaves the Universidad. She's just received her diploma in information management. And what's even more, she can start right away with her first job, at the archives department of the public television TVN. It's the time of Victor Jara, Pablo Neruda, Salvador Allende and the Unidad Popular. She will manage the collection of movie tapes, raw materials and broadcast programs, by means of a carefully constructed card catalog.

Barely two months after she's started at her new job, Chile is shaken completely. General Pinochet takes power after a military coup, in which also the public broadcaster is under siege. Soldiers burn what they do not like, before it can be transmitted, and the archive will not be spared. Barely a few days later, Amira gets a call from her boss. He asks her to destroy the recordings from the Allende era, but also the ones witnessing about the horrors of the coup. But Amira can't execute such a falsification of history. That night drags Amira a place in Chilean history. She decides to hide the card catalog, the key to the archive, for seventeen years. Risking her own life, until the dictatorship fell. In 1990, Chile is totally impoverished, but thanks to her ultimate preservation reflex Amira has preserved history.

Of course not all audiovisual archivists put their lives in jeopardy. And luckily this is not necessary either. But the ultimate preservation reflex is something we all have. It provides the necessary passion for the profession, even though we know that we work in a small niche of a very particular sector. It's a feeling that others often don't understand. We've heard it all sometimes, "you work in such an interesting company, but you do such a boring job!" We all know that this is not true, and that our job is the most interesting in the world, but on such moments, it comes down to be able to share your passion. And then it's good to know that there are people out there who have the same feeling. And what's even better: ever more of these people get united in international professional associations. They provide recognition, solidarity, knowledge exchange, but also professional development and advocacy.

There are seven international organizations globally that focus specifically on audiovisual archives. These are associations where professionals can meet and learn from each other, in short, to share their passion. These associations organize all kinds of activities worldwide. They bring people together, conduct research and publish it, organize training courses and grant scholarships, and they defend the audiovisual heritage in general at international organizations such as UNESCO. And even more, anyone can attend the events and most organizations are open to everyone, individually or as an organization.

The oldest of these organizations is the [Fédération Internationale des Archives de Film](#) (FIAF), which unites merely film archives. AMIA, the [Association of Moving Image Archivists](#) has an individual membership and it is especially successful in the United States. This also applies for ARSC, the [Association of Recorded Sound Collections](#), but ARSC mainly focuses on sound collections. Also IASA, the [International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives](#), used to focus on audio. For about 15 years however, also moving image archives are welcome to join. Finally, there are [SEAPAVAA](#) working in South East Asia and the Pacific, and [FOCAL](#), which focuses specifically on organisations who trade archival footage commercially.

The organization I would like to present is called FIAT/IFTA, standing for [Fédération Internationale des Archives de Télévision / International Federation of Television Archives](#). FIAT/IFTA was officially established on October 4, 1977 in Paris, and thus celebrates its fortieth anniversary in 2017. The association unites over 250 archives from all over the world. Some are part of a broadcaster, others are national or private archives, but they all have a particular interest in television collections.

The activities of FIAT/IFTA are very diverse, but they all try to contribute to the professional development of television archives and their employees. The '[Where are you on the Timeline?](#)' Survey for instance, assesses annually with a very short survey where members are in the transition to a fully digitized archive. The results are made public in October each year, so that all members can situate themselves on the timeline and can use the numbers, for example when making their case for financial support.

Next to that there is also the [Media Studies Grant](#). By this grant FIAT/IFTA annually supports one or more academic researchers in their work at the archives of one of the members. Thus, research in the field of television history is promoted and archivists and academic researchers are brought closer together.

With the [Save Your Archive program](#) FIAT / IFTA annually supports one or more preservation projects of threatened television archives, financial or in the form of equipment, training or consultancy. Often these are small projects, but with a large leverage: the archive is put in the spotlight and international support will bring it to the attention of the general public and policy makers. For example, archives preservation projects in South Africa, Madagascar, East Timor, Colombia and Romania were supported in recent years.

FIAT/IFTA also wants to act as a forum where professionals from the world of television archives (archivists, researchers, archive users, vendors, ...) can meet and learn from each other. Regularly seminars are organised throughout the world, each around a specific theme. The best known are probably the biennial [Media Management Seminars](#) of the 'Changing Sceneries, Changing Roles' series. Each seminar features more than twenty research projects and case studies presented in the field of media management, metadata and cataloging strategies. A special focus also goes to the changing role of archivists themselves. Next to that, another kind of seminar focuses on specific archival content topics: in 2017 one is planned in Paris, about how the [events of May '68](#) have been preserved in the television archives. Sometimes the seminars also focus on a specific region. Thus the [Seminar in Rio de Janeiro](#) in May 2016 specifically addressed the situation of television archives in South America.

Probably the best-known initiative of FIAT/IFTA is the [Archives Achievements Awards](#). By this FIAT/IFTA wants to reward special archival projects in three categories: Best Archive Preservation Project, Most Innovative Use of Archive and Best Use of Archive. Candidates can register at the beginning of each year, and following a nomination process the top three for each category is selected. The professional jury and the public eventually choose the winners. In addition to these three awards in recent years the tradition of a Lifetime Achievement Award is established. Dominique Saint Ville (INA), Dietrich Schüller (Österreichisches Phonogrammarchiv) and Steve Bryant (BFI), three giants of audiovisual archives world, are already on the list of honor.



The winners of the 2016 FIAT/IFTA Archive Achievement Awards - foto: Marcin Oliva Soto

The winners of the Awards are announced every year during the [World Conference](#). This is the annual event *par excellence* for television archivists from all over the world: managers, catalogers, engineers, researchers, users, the industry, ... For three days, usually around mid-October, presentations and workshops are organised, new projects are discussed and old friendships are strengthened. Sharing knowledge and expertise and building a network are the key purpose. According to a long standing tradition, a World Conference is held outside Europe after three editions in Europe. The 2017 edition of the World Conference will take place in [Mexico City](#).



Discussion table at the 2016 FIAT/IFTA World Conference
in Warsaw, Poland – foto: Marcin Oliva Soto

All these initiatives and events rely on the efforts of many volunteers. They are grouped into [four commissions](#) (Media Management, Television Studies, Programs and Projects, Preservation and Migration), topped by the Executive Council. The organization as a whole is headed by a President, a Secretary-General and a Treasurer. Every member (through their employer or individually) can apply to cooperate with a commission. For a place in the Executive Council there are elections every two years, during the General Assembly taking place during the World Conference.

If you'd like to know more about FIAT/IFTA, please visit the [website](#) (where you can also register for the newsletter) or at one of the social media channels: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#). Many of the presentations of the conferences and seminars can also be found on [Slideshare](#) and of course FIAT/IFTA has its own [Youtube](#) channel. Via all these channels you can stay informed about FIAT/IFTA's activities. Feel free to register and to join in. Like-minded people are everywhere. We can help you, and you can help FIAT/IFTA. We hope to see you around!