Can we make all 78 rpm records available on the Internet?
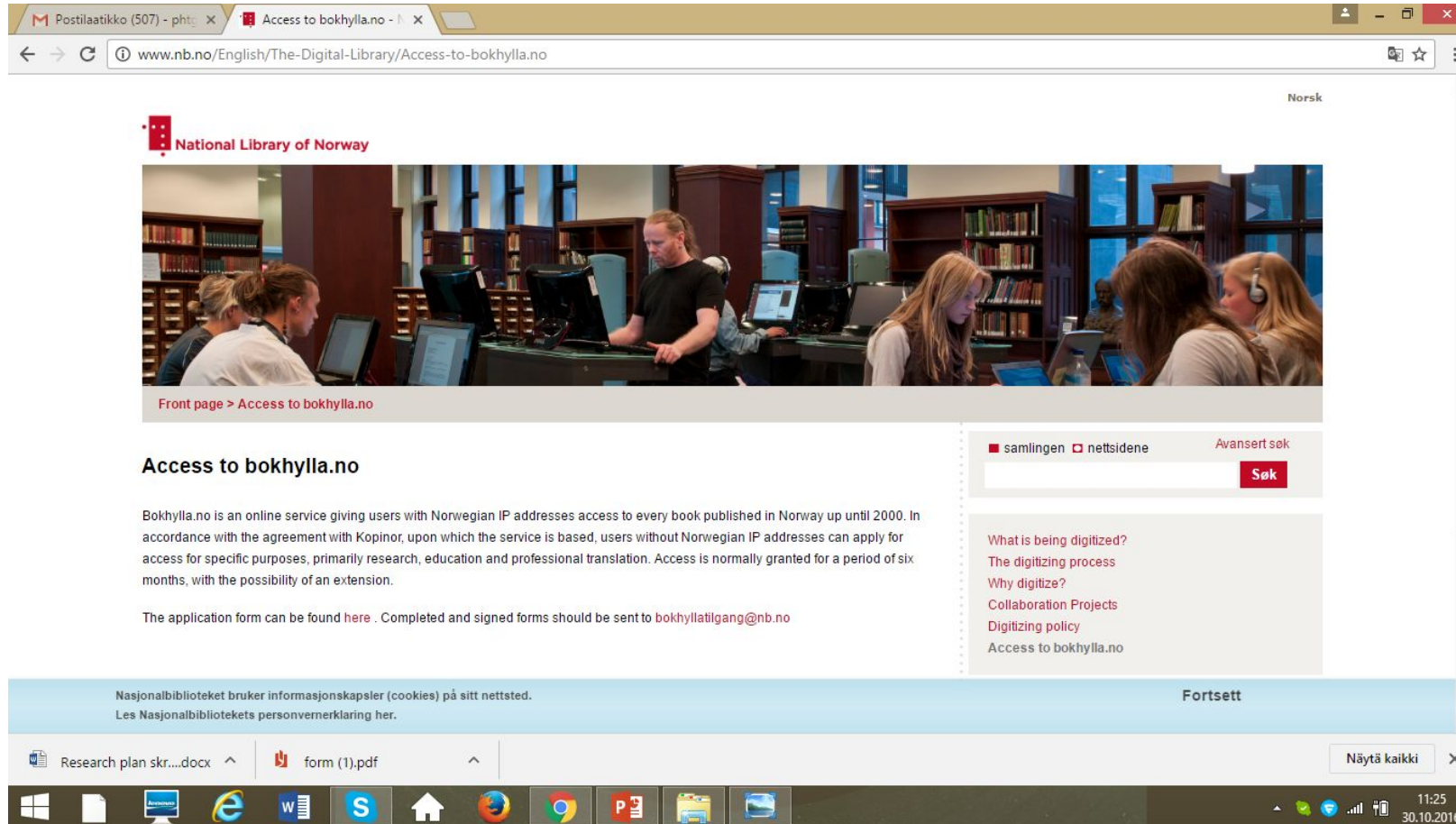
Pekka Gronow

BAAC, Vilnius, 2-3.11.2016

Both commercial web sites and heritage institutions are publishing an increasing amount of material on the Internet

- Streaming services such as Deezer and Spotify have already 20+ million sound recordings available

- Norwegian National Library and "Bokhylla": all pre-2000 books

- Finnish National Library's digital newspaper library

- Bibliothèque Nationale de France and "Gallica"

- Europeana Sounds and Dismarc: gateway to many different collections

"Bokhylla" (The book case) contains all Norwegian books before 2000. It is also possible for foreigners to obtain a license for research purposes. No audio, sorry!

"Streaming services already have all commercial recordings, sound archives should focus on unique recordings such as folklore etc"

- The metadata on commercial sites such as Spotify is so poor that they are often useless for research, and there is too much duplication
- The further back we go, the less we find: little material before 1950. There is no indication that this will increase

- Heritage institutions and private collections are in practice the only source for historical recordings, such as 78s.
- The year 1963 forms a "natural" dividing line, as the neighbouring rights of older recordings have expired

The Internet Archive is planning to digitize their 200,000 78s

- "While audio CDs whiz by at about 500 revolutions per minute, the earliest flat disks offering music whirled at 78rpm. They were mostly made from shellac, i.e., beetle (the bug, not The Beatles) resin and were the brittle predecessors to the LP (microgroove) era. The format is obsolete, and the surface noise is often unbearable and just picking them up can break your heart as they break apart in your hands. So why does the Internet Archive have more than 200,000 in our physical possession?"
- http://blog.archive.org/2016/09/02/saving-the-78s/

Is it realistic to digitize **all** the 78s in the world? Yes!

- The number of 78s ever issued is only about one million (plus some). If we include pre-1963 vinyls (LPs, 45s), we are still below two million

- When divided by country of origin, the numbers are quite reasonable. For instance, there are fewer than 20,000 Finnish 78s, and they are already digitized (but not online).

- A lot has already been done, in 10 – 20 years the project could easily be completed

- We need to discuss the best way to achieve this, in order to avoid confusion and duplication of work

Here are some problems to be considered

- No national sound archive has all records issued in their country, important records may be missing
- Many recordings were issued and reissued in many countries under many catalog numbers
- Sound quality?
- Many recording are still (partly) in copyright

- Cooperation with other archives and collectors

- Proper metadata is essential; identification of matrix numbers

- Prepare to identify the best copy
- There will be solutions, time is on our side

No archive has all records

- National libraries usually have good collections of books printed, thanks to legal leposit. Not so for sound recordings. Even important recordings may be missing (just search any online catalogue!)

- The problem still exists, if the responsibility for preservation and access is divided between several archives. Who has what?

- Archives also need to know what records they do NOT have. They may exist in other archives and/or private collections

- Example: The Latvian National Library, the national discography and the "virtual" digital record collection   http://audio.lndb.lv/en/

An important part of the Latvian National Library's digital audio collection originates from private collections
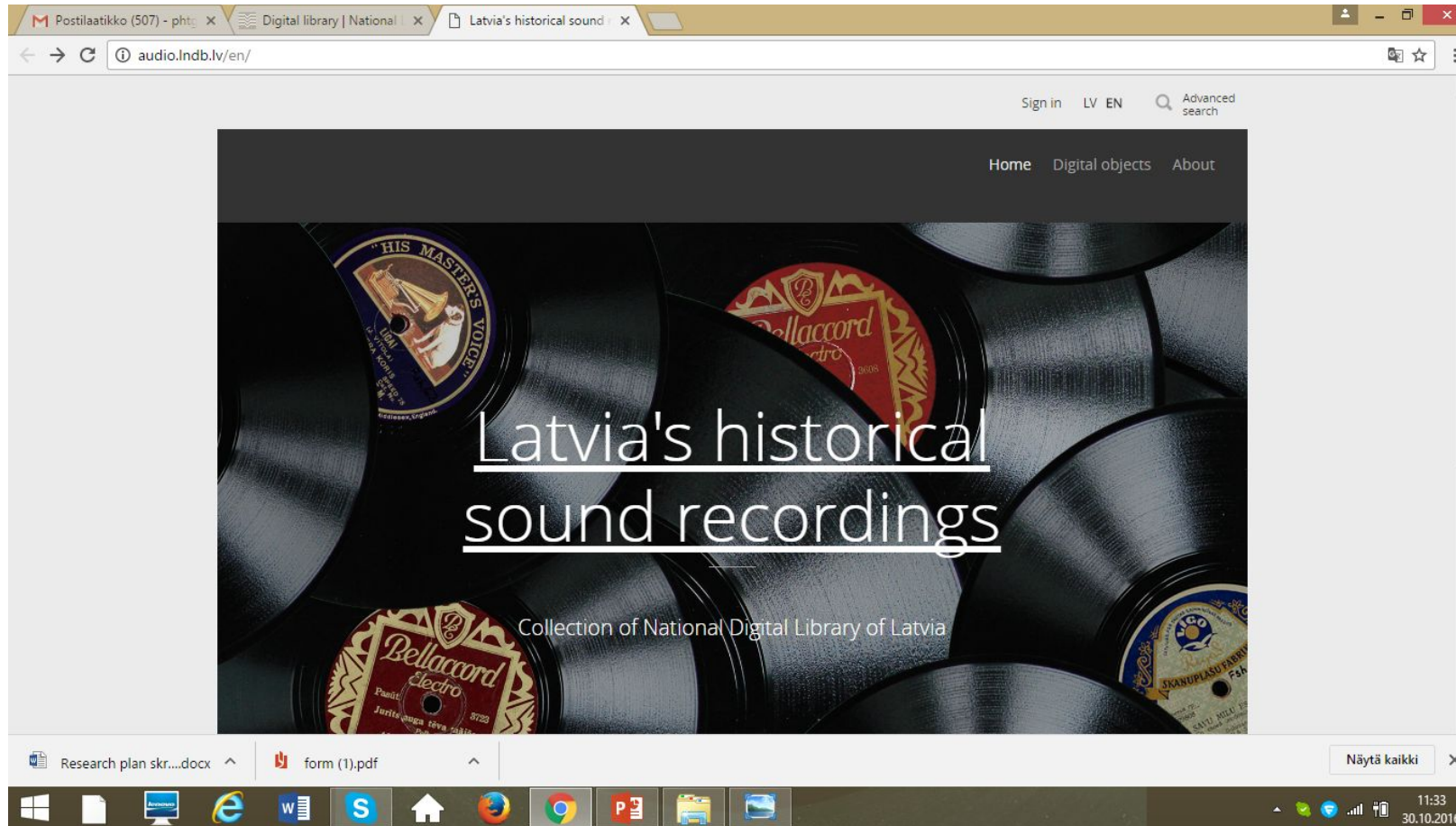
Proper metadata is essential

- If many archives digitize all their 78s, there will be much duplication. Recordings were also issued and reissued in many countries under many catalog numbers. Do we want to digitize all these variants, if the content (audio) is the same? How do we help users to identify them?

- Proper documentation of matrix, take and catalog numbers, recording dates etc is essential

- On the other hand, information on variants may be important for some users. Cooperation and guidelines are needed.

The significance of label scans

- Record labels often contain information which may be missing from catalogs

- Details such as label design, dealer's markings, typography etc can also be important

- It may be useful to scan label variants, it duplicate copies exist

Discography of American Historical Records: metadata first, audio later

- DAHR presents an interesting model. It started as a discograhy the Victor label (c. 150,000 78s). It is slowly growing into a discography of all American 78s. Audio is added later

- Full metadata and background information. Shows parallel issues of recordings (including Europe)

- Benefits: optimal control of variants and missing records

- Much work required

- http://adp.library.ucsb.edu/

HOME HELP

DAHR
Discography Of American Historical Recordings

Browse   Search   Resources   News   About

Featured Artist

George M. Cohan
(composer)

On this Date...
10/30/1930

Discography of American Historical Recordings

Welcome to the Discography of American Historical Recordings (DAHR), a database of more than 138,000 master recordings made by American record companies during the 78rpm era. It is part of the American Discography Project (ADP)—an initiative of the University of California, Santa Barbara and the Packard Humanities Institute that is edited by a team of researchers based at the UCSB Library. The DAHR is an expansion of the Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings (EDVR) database. It incorporates all the contents of the former EDVR database and adds previously published discographic works under license from various publishers, folding them into the search and display framework of DAHR.

Documentation of the activities of the Victor Talking Machine Company and RCA Victor in the DAHR derives primarily from consultation of publications of the companies and original documents held in the archives of Sony Music Entertainment in New York City. The DAHR entries describing recordings made by Columbia Records, the Berliner Gramophone Co., and OKeh Records are based on authoritative published discographies, the four-volume *Columbia Master Book Discography* by Tim Brooks and Brian Rust (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999) and *Berliner Gramophone Records: American Issues, 1892-1900*, by Paul Charosh (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995) and *Discography of OKeh*

News

Smith and Stanley

August 2nd, 2016
By: Sam Brylawski

Among our present projects is documentation of OKeh masters of the 1920s. Early OKeh repertoire is not very different from contemporary pop releases of Victor and Columbia: concert bands, dance ...

Read More »

Foray into OKeh

April 11th, 2016
By: Sam Brylawski

We recently began posting OKeh

A Discography of European Historical Records???

- Would it be possible the create a Discography of European Historical Records as well, following this model?
- "Europeana Sounds 2": a joint project for many archives, European financing needed
- Start with a limited period, like 1898 - 1925
- Or choose one record company with a history in many European countries: Odeon, Pathé, Ultraphon etc? Partial discographies exist
- Project leaders create the metadata from discographies, participating archives add audio and scans from their collections

Before starting, some questions to consider

- The EMI archives in UK have a huge heritage collection of 78rpm records from almost all European and Asian countries (but only one label, Gramophone / HMV, and not complete. Their aims are uncertain. Cooperation or competition? After Brexit, forget them?

- The status of sound archiving and discography varies considerably in European countries. Russia, for instance, has no real national record collection. There are other weak links.

Conclusions - 1

- **IT IS** realistic to plan to publish all commercially issued (78rpm and vinyl) records on the web within the next 20 years
- Instead of selection, we should plan to include **everything** (including records missing today from public sound archives)
- Access to complete collections will make new types of research possible. We can follow in detail changes on musical styles, etc
- The search for missing records will reveal valuable new sources
- New technical and legal solutions will be found within this period

Conclusions -2

- To avoid confusion and waste, long-term planning, cooperation and portals like Europeana Sounds will be needed

- Discography (metadata) and digitization must go hand in hand

- Cooperation (or at least a division of work) with existing commercial service providers

- Twenty years sounds like a long time, but we started planning the YLE digital sound archive in 1998. Today it is almost ready, with more than a million items…

Thank you!

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