

Clash of cultures - Gains and drawbacks of archival collaboration

I work in a folk music archive in a small regional institution in Rättvik, Sweden. Our region, Dalarna, has a rich tradition of folk music and dance, and our institution grew out of a desire from many actors to promote and disseminate that tradition. I will discuss a case of collaboration we now have with another institution in our region, and what impact our respective expectations and backgrounds has had on the collaboration so far.

Who are involved, and what do they do?

Folkrörelsearkivet i Dalarna - Social Movements archive in Dalarna

<http://dalarnasfolkrörelsearkiv.se/wp/>

This is an archive of archives. Their holdings are deposited by many different social movements (often called popular movements, or activism), all from the region of Dalarna, and mostly on a **regional** level. They also “own” the archive. The **local** associations seldom put anything in this archive, chiefly since they seldom keep an archive of their own.

The movements include the main early movements for temperance, labor, and religion, as well as later associations such as merchant’s associations in different branches, political parties’ local groups, education groups and night schools, scouts and other youth organizations, economic associations, sports associations, handicap associations, and a few choirs and orchestras.

The archives of the organizations are mostly comprised of paper: policy documents, meeting minutes, agendas, membership rosters, but also artefacts such as flags and banners, posters and other related materials. Media includes sound recordings, films, still photos and videos. The sound recordings consist of speeches, annual meetings, labor memories etc. There are, however, very few recordings of music, and those that are, are often there by chance, because it was part of an annual meeting, or part of a religious service, or other “functional” music. They are a total of 6 employees.

Folkmusikens hus - The Folk Music Centre

<http://www.folkmusikenshus.se>

The organization where I work has activities in mainly three areas: concerts, education and the media archive. We organize concerts in-house in Rättvik as well as concert tours in the Dalarna region, with artists in folk and world music, both from Sweden and from abroad. We are responsible for the folk music education at the Falun music conservatory, and we administrate night classes in folk music related subjects such as playing and dancing. We are also the main organizer of the annual Ethno youth camp, and part organizer of the annual Bingsjöstämman, a folk music gathering. The archive has focused on folk music from our region, with recordings “borrowed” from both regional and national archives. We have digitized most of the Dalarna recordings in the Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research (Svenskt visarkiv), as well as those in the Dalarna regional museum and a host of institutional and private recording collections. The most important recordings are field recordings, but many of the private collections also contain a lot of recordings off the radio. The Swedish Broadcasting Company has made field recordings since the late 1940’s and we have managed to get copies of the Dalarna recordings. We also develop, maintain and sell a database, named FIOL, specifically written for folk music recordings, with the ability to listen to and view sound and video recordings, and view images such as scanned music notation. In total we are 10 people, the equivalent of about 6 ½ full-time positions, of which about 2 positions work in the archive.

Making an overview and inventory

For the digitizing we have built up a work-station with professional equipment for playback of 1/4" tapes in almost all configurations, as well as recordings on cassette. This capacity to take care of reel-to-reel tape we are able to use for sundry other projects, such as taking on local, private digitizing on a small scale. We have begun to contact city archives in our region that may have audio recordings that need digitizing. Therefore it was logical to offer our services to the Social Movements archive, who are totally lacking facilities to digitize, and who felt they had an obligation towards their owners to take care of all their holdings. This lack of facility is of course due to that they are not centered on time-based media, but on paper. The new director realized this and made efforts to save their media holdings in a modern way.



We were contacted about a year ago, and I first went there to try and make some kind of inventory of the holdings. It turned out that all “non-paper” holdings had been put in four steel cabinets in the center of the archive, in accession order, i.e. the oldest holdings in cabinet one, and so forth. Each donor had their own cardboard box or boxes filled with their material, be it reel-to-reel tapes, video or audio cassettes, still photographs or film. Some boxes had glass-plate photos, and there were some film cans with 8 and 16 mm films. Some donors had bequeathed several times and were spread out over the cabinets. Some time in the past someone at the Social Movements Archive had numbered the reels of tapes, but a list of the tapes could not be found now. Same for the audio-cassettes. In later times the numbering had been done based on the accession number and a running number within

the accession.

I spent a day there, trying to go through every cardboard box and count its holdings. It took longer than anticipated and I made an estimate of the content in cabinet four, based on what was in cabinets one to three.

It was decided that we should take delivery of all the magnetic audiotapes. Coming there we had to spend a considerable time moving tapes from the individual boxes, and making sure



that they were properly marked with accession numbers. It was apparent that they had wanted us to take all the material in the cabinets with us. Finally we got it moved and up on shelves at Folkmusikens hus. I now tried to put the tapes in numerical order, to be able to note any gaps or duplicates, of which there proved to be plenty. It also turned out that I had underestimated the number of cassettes, and overestimated the number of reel tapes. Also included were a few steel wire recordings from the early 1950's and some DAT cassettes that I hadn't noticed.

In order to start digitizing, I have made a simple database catalog of the recordings, based on the inventories I've made. I am still not sure if each tape has a record in the database, but the records now number 931 items, from some 70 different associations.

Based on my earlier inventory, I calculated that the holdings comprised some 1,191 hours. This amount of hours was well above the Social Movement Archive's earlier estimate, which they had used to search for funding. So we agreed that I would start digitizing and continue until the funds dried up, and that they would meanwhile apply for more funds. This points to the importance of making a good assessment of the scope of materials. To this end I can offer some figures.

Total time of a tape reel

Maximum time is a function of several parameters:

- L = Length of tape
- N = no. of tracks
- D = diameter of reel
- A = area between the rim and the hub of the reel
- t = thickness of tape
- v = speed of tape
- d = diameter of reel hub

$$\text{Time} = \frac{L \cdot N}{v} \qquad A = \frac{(D^2 - d^2) \cdot \pi}{4} = L \cdot t$$

thus the time can be calculated as $\text{Time} = \frac{N \cdot A \cdot 0.90}{v \cdot t}$ with a fill factor of 90%

It is possible to fairly accurately calculate the time of one reel of tape, but this requires knowing many parameters that are time consuming to find out. If they are clearly spelled out on the tape it might be a little easier, but for most practical purposes it takes too long. Therefore I will not dwell any longer on this formula, but instead offer a table of average times, based on empirical evidence.

| | Average time of a recording (amateur media) |
|----------|---|
| 7" | 2.9 h (professional use c. 0.26 h) |
| 6" | 2.6 h |
| 5" | 1.2 h |
| 4" | 0.4 h |
| 3" | 0.3 h |
| Cassette | 0.7 h |
| Wire | 0.6 h |

Starting to digitize; some content

I decided to try and take care of the oldest recordings first, irrespective of when they arrived in the archive, and irrespective of the owner. Thus, some big holdings I have just nibbled at the beginning of, and left the newer recordings for later. Instead I have tried to search out old recordings, particularly from smaller organizations. I also tried to do “mystery” recordings, where information was evidently lacking.

1. One of the first mystery tapes I digitized contained a recording of the founding meeting of the Social Movements Archive, in September 1959. It includes an interesting speech by a then well-known author from Stockholm (Dr. Paul Lindblom, 1916-2002).
2. Another unidentified tape contained board meetings of the Archive, at the unusually low speed of 15/16 ips!
3. An interesting recording is by the Dalarna Orchestra Association, from a concert in 1971 in Falun. The recordings were done by Robert von Bahr, two years before he founded the now-famous BIS record label.



4. Of particular interest were the steel wire recordings. From the boxes I noted that they contained memories of early labor union people, memories from around the year 1900, as told in the early 1950's. I also found tape copies of some of the wires, but I still decided to play the wires and digitize them directly. As I found out, not all the wires had been copied, and the copies that existed turned out to be inferior to my direct transfers.

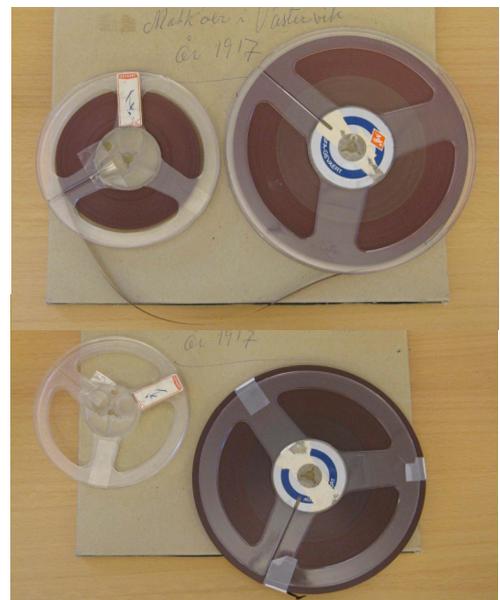
5. One of the wire recordings is from the labor union, done in 1952, with members of the club board (I assume). It was done as an exercise for members to speak in public, introduce guests, lead a meeting, etc., and features only short snippets on made-up topics by different speakers.



I have also found that not all organizations seem to recognize the archival needs to keep things for posterity, and don't actually seem to think that the sound recordings will ever

need to be played in the future.

Some tapes actually are marked “Not for archive”, but we still have them! For the most part, documentation of what is on the tapes is minimal, often being limited to



something like “Annual meeting 19xx in XX”, sometimes with the organization’s abbreviation, but often without. An interesting quirk is that oftentimes the microphone at these meetings were put next to the chairman, and therefore forcefully captures his handling of the gavel. This also points to the subordinate nature of the recording, and of the low awareness of a microphone being present. I must assume that these recordings do have some documentation in other parts of the holdings, separate from the tapes themselves.

Possible gains and drawbacks

We have the opinion that we, Folkmusikens hus, could make a difference for other archives’ holdings by helping to digitize them and make them accessible. With today’s difficulties in getting funding for archives, it is almost always necessary to have a plan for access to the holdings. This requires an infrastructure that many traditional archives are lacking, i.e. listening stations, or a web presence. We believe that our capability and capacity could be of help to others and thereby to ourselves, as we would get recognition from the archive sector as a collaborative partner, as well as from authorities that awards money to archives, including us. We might also come across material that would be of immediate interest to us. This, then, would be our specialty, in addition to being a dedicated folk music archive for our region (and maybe nearby regions).

A drawback that we can immediately see, is that work in our own archive will be restricted, since our resources are limited, and our work station only has room for one chain of digitizing at any one time. This can be overcome, but at a price which we may have to consider if it is worthwhile to us.

Questions that arise from this include, but are not limited to:

- How deep should we go in detailing content information, i.e. what I find on the tapes?
- Should we try to sell customers our archival database system?
- Will we provide a storage solution, or storage capacity?
- Will we provide access, i.e. shall we offer web publication?

Conclusion

It is interesting to ponder what these digitized recordings will be used for at the Social Movements Archive. For many, I can’t see that anyone will ever want to listen to them - for a few others, people may stand in line to access them. There does not seem to be a clear policy about what to do with the digital files, and how they will be made accessible, or that they were intended to be accessed at all.

Also, for their other holdings, film and glass plates in particular, there is a need for instant activity to safeguard them for the future. Their videos are mostly VHS and a few older types. Unfortunately we don’t deal with these media.

It is evident that there is a lack of understanding for the special treatment necessary for magnetic, time-based media, particularly regarding storage and playback. These media were treated like artefacts, without much intrinsic value, beyond the fact that an event had been recorded. Their storage was also unnecessarily spacious, when it could have been stored much more space efficiently, and would have been better off in a climate-controlled environment. Documentation of content, and identification of individual tapes were almost non-existent, but might exist elsewhere. The upside of this is that the recordings might be totally unknown to the owners and may contain highly interesting items for them.