

The July 22nd 2011 Terror Attacks in Norway- the Role of the National Archives of Norway in the Process of Healing and Reconciliation

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Background

The 2011 terrorist attacks and the mass popular response.

On July 22nd 2011 Norway was hit by terrorist attacks. There were two sequential attacks one directed against government offices and the civilian population and the other against the political summer camp arranged by the Norwegian Labor Party Youth group..

The first attack came when a car bomb exploded in Oslo very close to buildings where several Norwegian ministries had their offices. The explosion killed eight people and wounded several others. More than 10 people were critically injured.

The second attack occurred less than two hours later at the summer camp organized by the youth division of the Norwegian Labour Party on the island of Utøya. The perpetrator opened fire at the participants. He shot 69 attendees. Most of the victims were teenagers under the age of eighteen. The youngest victim was only 14 years old.

In the two attacks a total of 77 people were killed and 242 badly injured. Norway has not suffered a terrorist attack with so many casualties since World War II.

The perpetrator, a 33 year old Norwegian male, is described to be a far-right militant ideologist, with an ultra nationalistic, islamofobic ideology. The motive for his actions according to his own testimony was to promote his so called manifesto, a compendium of texts where he defends his right to contribute to extinguish multiculturalism as well as the need deport of all Muslims from Europe and in this way cleansing Europe from the danger of Islamic occupation. When the police invaded the Utøya camp he immediately surrendered, confessed his actions and handed himself voluntarily over to the police. The trial against the terrorist started on April 16 2011. The closing arguments by the attorney and the defendants were given on June 22 this summer. The sentence will be announced (at the end of this week), on August 24.

The killings created a mass popular response in Norway. An enormous amount of flowers, candles, letters, postcards, and other words of condolences along with childrens' drawings, teddy bears and other items and tokens were spontaneously laid down on places that became memorial sites in remembrance and sympathy to the victims of the two terrorist attacks. The memorial sites might be seen as the Norwegian people's immediate and quite powerful response to the terror attacks overriding in a surprising way all the hatred and wish for revenge that one could have thought would be the reaction to such horrible deeds.

The National Archives of Norway acknowledged at an early stage the importance of collecting and preserving these memorial tributes for posterity and immediately took upon

itself the leading role in the process of collecting the people's spontaneous material expressions. The numerous tokens of sympathy and regret at this point were found on a number of sites in the capital, in the other cities in Norway as well as in numerous other places all over Norway.

The result of the quick action taken by the National Archives of Norway was that it now keeps a vast collection of memory materials documenting the people's reaction to the gruesome acts that took place. The regional state archives as well as several city archives also hold memorial collections resulting from the July 22 public response of sympathy with the victims.

Part I: Conceptualizing archival appraisal in a situational social context

According to The Society of American Archivists terminology the definition of archival appraisal reads as follows: "In an archival context, appraisal is the process of determining whether records and other materials have permanent (archival) value (...)"¹.

What then determines whether or not records and other materials have such permanent value?

Traditionally, appraisal has been connected to the preservation of archives documenting public, in particular governmental, bodies and activities. In recent appraisal theory, though, we have seen a general turn towards a focus on "integral social documentation" ("*helhetlig samfunnsdokumentasjon*")². This concept refers to an increasing understanding of the *structural interaction* of private and public bodies and practices in a society. This insight leads inevitably to a further understanding of the need for an integration of private as well as governmental archives in the archival collections. In many national archives today "integral social documentation" is an incorporated part of the institutional mission statement.

From the scientific writings of Helen Samuels we are familiar with her recommendation that archivists should take *an active stand* and become documenters with a responsibility to ensure the creation of records as an integrated part of their documentary activities³. Samuels' documentation strategy focuses on "(...) documentation of an ongoing issue, activity or geographic area"⁴. This is also primarily a strategy that comprises documentation of ongoing *institutional, structural, and intended* processes within the public, private and local sphere.

What then can be said to be the basic frame of reference when the National Archives of Norway decided that the materials created spontaneously in a specific situational context in the days after July 22 had permanent archival value? A main purpose in this presentation is to take a closer look at the role the National Archives of Norway played in the societal context described above.

¹ See the official website of the SAA: A glossary of Archival and Records Terminology, <http://www.archivists.org/glossary/>.

² See for instance the anthology *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory. Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* edited by F. X. Blouin Jr. and W. G. Rosenberg (2007). The University of Michigan Press.

³ Helen Willa Samuels, "Who controls the Past" in *American Archivist* 49 (1986), pp.109-124.

⁴ Helen Willa Samuels, "Improving Our Disposition: Documentation Strategy" in *Archivaria* 33 (1991-1992), p. 137.

In order to get an adequate understanding of the approach taken in this situational context, we need to go back to the days immediate after the terror attacks and consider what happened during these days. Furthermore we need to examine how the mass popular response influenced the thinking among the National Archives leadership, the process of decision-making and the course of action taken.

Covering the period July 23 - July 24: Apprehending the establishment of spontaneous memorial sites

The Norwegian sociologist Olaf Aagedal has pointed out two symbolic events that enable us to understand the transformation of the square outside Oslo Cathedral to a national memorial site after July 22.⁵ The following morning on July 23, representatives from the municipal government of Oslo walked together with journalists through the empty streets of Oslo from the City Hall to the Cathedral where they lit candles to commemorate the victims of the Utøya massacre and those who had died in the car bomb explosion in the government square. While (In?) doing so they encouraged the people of Oslo to do the same.

According to Aagedal, this walk to Oslo Cathedral at July 23 might be seen as a symbolic action or a ritual contributing to the reestablishment of social order. Further, this ritual walk disclosed that there was a strong need for ritual answers in the whole Norwegian population. Religious institutions as churches daily carry out rituals i.e. when people die and when catastrophes occur. Accordingly clergy from any denomination represent an important experience and they are by the duties invested in them able to take on adequate roles when facing situations like this.

On July 23 Norway experienced a mobilization of acts of sympathy from representatives from a variety of religious organizations, from the royal family and from representatives from several emergency service units, all gathering at the cathedral, where they laid down flowers and lit candles.

According to Aagedal, events and actions like these, give new functional meaning to a place as a site. Catastrophes and tragedies can change the traditional meaning of a site and a new meaning to the site occurs.

The second symbolic event according to Aagedal was the Sunday Mass on July 24. This mass had broad participation from the Norwegian political leadership, representatives from the Royal family, the Labor party and in particular its youth branch. It became an emotional media event. In a historical perspective the Sunday Mass on July 24 became a media phenomenon in the so-called *live broadcasting of history* genre.

⁵ Sociologist and researcher Olaf Aagedal, lecturing about “The territory of Oslo Cathedral as a National Memorial site” at the conference *The public Grief after July 22* (Den offentlige sorgen etter 22. juli) at the House of Literature in Oslo June 12 2012 arranged by the Norwegian research institute KIFO.

Through these events a moral and social community of common symbols and rituals came into being, and the Oslo Cathedral grounds became transformed into a public site of condolences at a national level.

In two days the memorial site on the Cathedral square expanded enormously and on July 26 discussions began amongst archivists and researchers as well as among the general public whether materials should be taken care of in a long-term perspective or not. If they should be taken care of, quick action was needed.

Covering the period July 26 – July 28. The establishment of a statement of appraisal recommending the preservation of the materials from the memorial sites.

The shaping of what became the National Archives appraisal standpoint was outlined in close cooperation with historians and social researchers connected to the interdisciplinary research program *Memory studies (MemS)* at the University of Stavanger . This research program was established in 2008 with a total number of 30 scientists working in the fields of history, heritage studies, literary studies, philosophy, gender studies, film studies, archaeology and religious history.

The MemS program deals with the importance of collective memory in a society and how a collective memory at a present state connects with the past and the future.

In order for the past to become a real resource for the present and the future, “memory studies direct its interest not toward the shape of the remembered pasts, but rather to the particular presents of the remembering”⁶.

“The particular presents of the remembering” in the context of July 22 has been outlined like this by the MemS program: “When Norwegians decided to remember 22nd of July 2011 with massive collective manifestations, they also chose to challenge the history of the nation *by influencing the meaning and the future perception of their own past and identity*”⁷ (my emphasis).

To ensure that the memory materials were to be preserved for present and future use, representatives from the MemS program contacted the National Archives on July 26.

Reaching out to the public through the mass media turned out to be of crucial importance in the process of establishing an appraisal strategy. With great impact, the National Archives, in cooperation with MemS, approached mass media in order to establish a united understanding in Norway in favor of preserving the materials from the memorial sites.

⁶ See the official website of the research program *Memory studies* at the University of Stavanger, and the citation with reference to professor Astrid Erll at Goethe University, Frankfurt am Maine (2011), <http://www.uis.no/category.php?categoryID=6486>.

⁷ See the official website of the research program *Memory studies* at the University of Stavanger, “What is Memory studies?” <http://www.uis.no/category.php?categoryID=6491>.

A press release on July 26 from the National Archivist (the Director General), titled *The National Archivist urge for the preservation of memories from the tragedy* was picked up by the Norwegian news agency (NTB) and spread out to newspapers as well as Television and Radio stations, leading to several interviews the following days. The importance of collecting memory materials as key elements in a memory study perspective were pointed out in the press release.

The main appraisal argument in favor of preservation in this press release of July 26 was, in my opinion, that the preservation itself, along with the present and future use of these memorial tributes, was to be seen as important parts of a mental healing process in society.

To cope with a national tragedy in a present context was a huge challenge. There was an obvious need for preservation of the memory documentation. The utterances from thousands of people that the memory sites represented could be taken care of. The possibility to do research in a present and future perspective on this material would be ensured. The preservation was a tool for paying respect to victims and their relatives and to all those people that participated in the national process of grief in general. All these considerations favored preservation of the memory materials:

Some citations underline the views held by the National Archives at this stage, views that were shared by the great majority of Norwegians:

“(...) the reactions and statements from both common people and key players in society such as politicians and representatives from the church are of great interest to us. (...).

(...) The capability to process and work with memories tells us a lot about a society. (...).

(...) Preserving peoples memorial tributes to affected individuals and to the Norwegian society for posterity is also a dignifying and respectful contribution to the victims and their relatives. (...).

(...) The maintenance of all the memories from this tragedy is important for those who have shared their grief and showed their support during these days. It is also of importance for future researchers interested in the written memory materials (...)”⁸.

The press release of July 26 also pointed out an acquisition policy framing a local, regional and national level for the memorial collections:

“(...) For the National Archives and the Regional State Archives of Oslo it will be particularly relevant to preserve the written words from the memorial site outside Oslo Cathedral. (...) (...) the National Archivist urges the municipalities to do their best in taking care of the written greetings, words of memories, condolences and memorial items. For permanent preservation and safe storage of memory collections it is recommended to get in contact with the nearest regional state archive. We assume that also city archives and other archival institutions will respond positively to such requests”.⁹

⁸ See the official website of the National Archives of Norway, <http://www.arkivverket.no/arkivverket/Aktuelt/Nyhetsarkiv/Nyhetsarkiv-2011/Riksarkivaren-vil-bevare-minnene-etter-tragedien> (My translation).

⁹ *ibid.*

In the large Norwegian newspapers the daily feature stories (*kronikker*) looks closer into important news. They are normally written by professionals not employed by the paper itself. The feature story is “(...) an open public forum where political and cultural citizens present a longer, reasoned argument on a specific issue.”¹⁰ University academics are known to be productive participants in this open public space. On this sad occasion of the July 22nd tragic events the National Archivist joined them.

On July 28 he and two researchers connected to the MemS program published a feature story in “Aftenposten”, one of the largest newspapers in Norway.¹¹ The story was titled *Our collective pain*. Here the appraisal criteria in favor of preservation were further elaborated on and presented in a conceptual and contextual manner. Many citations testify to this:

“(...) These words represent a lot of pain, love and care, and a feeling of community. Some of the written words are highly personal words of memories to individuals killed in the terror attacks. Other words of memories are written to society, to the community and to all of us. The written words have been placed in the public sphere in order to be shared by all of us. The public community should therefore treat the words of memories with respect.

(...) The National Archives of Norway sees it as a duty to maintain the written memories of our collective pain. This is a task that partly deals with our collective memory, partly with something as difficult as dealing with as a national trauma. (...)

(...) We cannot file and preserve grief and pain. Only the written memories and memorial items as representatives of grief and pain can become collected and preserved. We know however that the words of memories give a strong signal of respect for those who are killed and to those who mourn. We also know that these memories in a long-term perspective will function as emotional keys to apprehend these terrible actions that hit us. The written memories might have a similar function to future descendants. How posterity might use this material is not known to us, but we have a task to fulfill as facilitators by preserving the written memories for posterity (...)¹².

Approaching mass media at the right moment accompanied by a press release and an extensive feature story had great public impact and can truly be considered to have been successful. The argumentation in favor of permanent preservation and the appeal to municipality authorities and to local archives to cooperate in the preservation of memory materials was highly appreciated throughout the country and the preservation initiative was strongly supported.

Over the next few days an army of employees from the National Archives and a few other archival institutions demonstrated their willingness to take part in harvesting the memory items. On August 2nd *the Ministry of Government administration reform and church affairs* in a press release referring to the National Archivist’s public statement, told the regional

¹⁰Kalleberg, Ragnvald 2008. Sociologists as Public Intellectuals During Three Centuries in the Norwegian Project of Enlightenment. In S. Eliaeson and R. Kalleberg. *Academic as Public Intellectuals*. p. 41. Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

¹¹ The two researchers were Associate Professor and Head of the institute for culture and language at the University of Stavanger, Marie Smith-Solbakken, and Professor and Head of Research at Lillehammer Museum, Hans-Jørgen Wallin Weihe.

¹² *Aftenposten* nr. 285 July 28 2011 (My translation).

County Governors to urge the municipalities to start the harvesting of memory collections¹³. The Appraisal statement in favor of permanent preservation had at this point become official policy. The harvesting of memorial collections took place in the period from August 2 to August 8.

Part II: The memory collections one year later: Passing some milestones from the harvesting phase to the phase of digitization and dissemination

Coordination on a national level and the work of standardized guidelines

Between August 2 and September 20 a national policy for the handling of the memory collections was formed and put into practice. A meeting between several archival institutions in the Oslo region took place at the National Archives in Oslo on August 2.¹⁴ After the meeting a manual of recommendations for the collecting process was formed comprehending professional commentaries that aimed to be useful for archivists all over the country being engaged in the harvesting phase, the manual covering issues like the upholding of the provenance, appraisal and conservation and temporary storing of wet and deteriorated materials. A more general challenge was how to properly organize the harvesting on the many sites, the sites ranging from sidewalks to lakes¹⁵.

On September 20th the National Archives hosted a broad national meeting in order to discuss common principles for the handling of the memory collections stored in the national, regional and local archives. Issues of relevance like archival description and digitization were on the agenda. Issues related to access and privacy protection and ethics were also discussed. The representatives from the MemS program and representatives from the Arts Council of Norway were present at this meeting to give their views on questions concerning research and dissemination of the memory collections. The meeting was followed up by the National Archives and an updated general recommendation on how to handle and store the memory collections in a long-term perspective was published¹⁶.

The national guidelines shall ensure that the preservation and the description of the memory collections as well as the digitization and dissemination of them shall be done in the same manner in all archival institutions in Norway. Ethical aspects related to the dissemination of the digitized material and criteria regarding sensitivity and privacy protection taking into consideration the interests of victims, survivors and their relatives have been highlighted and advice on how to deal with such issues are outlined in the manual.

¹³ Press release from the official website of the Ministry of Government administration reform and church affairs. <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/fad/pressecenter/pressemeldinger/2011/klart-for-innsamling-av-hilsener.html?id=652016>.

¹⁴ These were the City Archives of Oslo, The Archives of the Norwegian Parliament (The Storting Archives), The Labour Movement Archive and Library, and the Regional State Archives of Oslo.

¹⁵ The recommendation is published at the official website of the National Archives of Norway, <http://arkivverket.no/arkivverket/Aktuelt/Nyhetsarkiv/Nyhetsarkiv-2011/Innsamling-av-minner>.

¹⁶ This manual is published at the official website of the National Archives of Norway, <http://arkivverket.no/arkivverket/Aktuelt/Nyhetsarkiv/Haandtering-og-oppbevaring-av-minnemateriale>.

The last guideline issued by the National Archivist specifically deals with the criteria for the publicizing and digitizing of memory documents, drawings and physical items. The main criteria as to whether or not digitized documents can be published are as follows.¹⁷

- Documents and items that contain no information about family name and age might be published (anonymous contributors).
- Documents and items that contain information about first name (in combination with age) might be published.
- We do not publish documents and items with information about first name in combination with name of a home destination.
- We do not publish documents and items showing motives of a victim or written words related to a certain victim.
- We do not publish documents and items with offending formulations or motive.

We have experienced that researchers take profound interest in the memory collections. Preliminary criteria that regulate user access to the collections have therefore been outlined. The media have also paid great attention to the memory collections. We can conclude that we have observed a new awareness as to the importance and usefulness of archival institutions and their mission both from the media and the public in general.

A new phase is in its beginning. Relatives of the victims, survivors of the terrorist attacks and representatives from the established support groups after July 22 have been in contact with the National Archives showing an increasing interest in the memory collections. New guidelines will most certainly be outlined to facilitate as best we can for this vulnerable group of visitors. During July 2012 several memory collections have been digitized and published, among them the collection at the City Archives in Bergen¹⁸.

The National Archives in Oslo has published over 1 000 digitized documents, drawings and items. The total amount of items in this collection comprises approximately 100 shelf meters. Only a part of this has been digitized as of to-day.¹⁹

Concluding Remarks

On July 22 this year Norway marked the first anniversary for the terrorist attack that hit us so hard. People once again laid down flowers, candles and written words outside the Oslo Cathedral and on many of the memory sites all over the country. Once again the archival institutions have collected written words in remembrance of those who died in the attacks. We assume that this first anniversary marks a turning point in the sense that we now are likely see a decrease in the creation of memorial sites and that our holdings in content and time for the most part will consist of memories from these past twelve months.

¹⁷ The criteria are published at the official website of the National Archives of Norway, <http://www.arkivverket.no/arkivverket/Arkivbevaring/Arkivmateriale-knyttet-til-22.-juli/Minnemateriale/Kriterier-for-publisering-av-minnemateriale>.

¹⁸ The memory exhibition is published at the official website of The City Archives of Bergen, <https://www.bergen.kommune.no/omkommunen/avdelinger/bergen-byarkiv/9475/9478/article-97571>.

¹⁹ The selection of digitized materials is published at the official website of the National Archives of Norway, <http://www.arkivverket.no/arkivverket/Digitalarkivet/Hjelp/Om-kjeldene/Minnematerialet-22-7>.

Collecting the memory material relating to July 22 has been a positive experience for the National Archives, and, I think, also for the other participating archival institutions. It has opened new perspectives, and made us more aware of the value of collecting material that is closely related to important events for the nation at a present stage. The initiative has given the National Archives a lot of positive attention from the media and the citizens. I think this kind of attention is of great importance for archival institutions. It reminds the people of Norway that we play an important part for the nation's collective memory and its cultural heritage. Also, the event has given us a new role as an institution focusing on the preservation of memories both from the present and from the past.

The terrorist story, however, is not yet at an end. The murderer is confined behind bars awaiting his sentence on Friday. We still do not know if he will face life imprisonment with the possibility of being released or life confinement as mentally disturbed. When we know this time will show if there may be future public reactions by a population that has shown remarkable human and peaceful attitudes during a long and tragic phase of loss and mourning.