

Archives are a selective memory and material from the public sector has a very dominant position, so to speak practically independent of archival value. Røsjø gives examples of the differences in documentation of immigrant organizations in public and private archives. She argues that the focus of our selection policy radically has to change and more resources must be allocated to private archives and documentation work. We should establish a research agenda to improve the profession's ability to document society on the basis of coherent documentation plans for the various sectors of society, as Helen Samuels has argued. Only then will we lay the groundwork for an integrated societal memory that will provide relevant societal documentation.

Majority and minority perspectives in archives selection and preservation

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Archives are a selective memory. The law in Norway demands automatic preservation of public archives. On the other hand, private archives are more randomly preserved. This leads to a distorted societal memory. Within a legal and resource framework, institutional archives and archivists decide what to preserve. They decide which voices from the past that future generations will be able to listen to.

Oslo was and is an immigrant city. Today, 29.6 % of the population is immigrants, according to the official statistical definition¹. Oslo has witnessed and is still witnessing the highest number of immigrants of all of Norway's cities. A third of the country's diverse immigrant population resides in Oslo.

Yet, in 2004, Oslo City Archives (a municipal archive also holding private archives) held little material that reflected the fact that Oslo had become a multicultural society. In this situation we argued that what we held reflected in a one-sided manner the individual public servant's encounters with the immigrant population, whether the material was folders in the records of refugee and immigrant services or health, education and social service records. The impression given was that the new minorities were overrepresented as social welfare clients because of the selection methods of appraisal² and that they were underrepresented in societal memory in general. This part of the population had not taken initiatives to secure that they were "setting traces" by transferring archives from their associations, congregations, and so on. A central reason for this was that they were poorly represented in society's positions of power at a level where they would automatically leave traces (Røsjø 2007 p 5-6).

This gave us a distorted picture of society. We argued therefore that we should invite the immigrant population so as to become part of our collective memory. Only then can the current and future populations find material that represents their identity, material in which they can recognize themselves. This is essential for school children and young people with differing cultural backgrounds who make up nearly 40% of the pupils in Oslo. This perspective

1 Immigrants and persons born in Norway with immigrant parents.

2 Immigrants and refugees who cannot document their exact birth date are given the 1st of the month as a birth date; and the selection of folders from social clients born on the 1st, 11th and 21st gave an overrepresentation. In Oslo, we have now changed this appraisal method. We now select the folders of all social clients every 10th year.

is also important for the majority population and for society's knowledge in general.

Such records had not been collected to any extent in Norway before. The material was in the process of disappearing, especially from the first new immigrants in the late 1960s and the 1970s. We wanted to collect material covering a wide spectrum, be it organizational archives, business archives, religious archives or personal papers, but our main focus was on organizational archives.

Oslo City Archives therefore conducted a project called *Oslo Multicultural Archives* in 2004 - 2007. The purpose of the project was to collect, preserve and make available a number of key archives from new minorities in Oslo. The institution would then get a richer and more pluralistic/polyphonic societal documentation. (Motto: Everyone has the right to a past, Edvard Bull, Norwegian historian.) (Røsjø 2007 p 5).) During the project we collected about twenty archives, made four interviews, produced a booklet and an exhibition called [Our traces](#). As a follow-up we established a project with MiRA Resource Centre for Black, Immigrant and Refugee Women, interviewing nine leading women in immigrant communities called [Multiple voices - minority women in organizational life](#). These projects were realized with external public funding from Arts Council Norway and the Fritt Ord Foundation.

In 2011 and 2012 I carried out a small research project based on this material called *Majority and minority perspectives in archives selection and preservation*, also funded by Arts Council Norway (Røsjø 2012). I examined the content of public agencies' records that dealt with immigrant organizations and compared these public records with the private records we had collected. Key questions were: What do public and private archives, respectively, document? Which voices can be found in these public records from new minorities? Which perspective does the government have on minorities? What do private archives document about minorities? What kind of image do we create if we only collect and preserve the public archives? Which conclusions can we draw concerning the archive's outreach work and will the users of the archives be able to search for information relevant to their own identity?

My hypothesis, which was also the basis for the documentation project *Oslo multicultural archives*, was that the public archives expressed the government's vision and a top-down perspective towards minority populations. I assumed that we would find these people's own perspective and voices in their own archives.

Theoretical background on archives selection and preservation

Knowledge of the past depends on access to authentic sources. Archival documents that have been preserved and described, appear to be authentic documentation. Public archives are also formed in line with archival theory and methodology. As for private archives the formation is dependent on the individual business. It's therefore more accidental whether private archives are formed in accordance with archival theory. The Archive is a selective memory. The archival documents that have been preserved represent only a

tiny part of all the records created. For private archives, the proportion is only a fraction compared to public archives.

A Latin proverb illustrates this: "Quod non est in actis, non est in mundo". If you're not in the archives, you don't exist. When powers at war delete, for instance, Property Registers in Palestine or the former republic of Yugoslavia, this still has a major impact on those concerned. In the Western tradition public records are in a unique position. Preservation is regulated. The Norwegian Archives Act states in the mission statement that the purpose of the Act is "to secure archives of considerable cultural or research value or that hold legal or important administrative documentation, so that these can be preserved and made accessible for posterity." To serve this purpose the law establishes a system in which public agencies have archival requirements imposed upon them and the National Archivist is given specific authority to ensure that these records are preserved. The general rule of law is that public archives should be preserved unless the National Archivist has given permission for the disposal of certain types of documents. This system has a major weakness: The relationship between purpose and measures only applies to public records. The mission statement reviews archives in general, regardless of whether they are created by public or private bodies. However, because the National Archivist is not given real powers for the preservation of private archives, in practice, the policy instruments only apply for public records. This demarcation also applies largely to international appraisal and selection theory and methodology, influenced by archivists in public archives to handle public archives. Traditionally, selection has not been based on an analysis of society in general including both private and public sectors. Private archives have been neglected.

Theoretical analyses have generally based their approach within the framework of the institutions' societal mission, mostly understood as to preserve public archives, as in the Norwegian Archives Act. Classical archival theory does not discuss the archival value of records. "The Dutch Manual" - Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives - was the first modern manual concerning the nature and treatment of archives. It was published in 1898 and treats only public archives. It leaves private archives to the libraries. Later archival theorists have had different general approaches to the question of why we should preserve archives. For Jenkinson the preservation of authentic documentation of the administrative body's activities was most important. Schellenberg put more emphasis on the archives' secondary value, their use to subsequent researchers, and he considered their future research value as crucial. A more societal approach, based on archives reflecting the society that creates them, was addressed for the first time by Hans Booms in the 1970s. His approach was that the records should reflect values through the societal functions of the records creator and to preserve a diverse societal documentation on society's own terms. This is also the orientation of the function-based archival appraisal methodology that was developed in Canada in the late 1980s, inspired by Booms. The archival value of public records is here made dependent on the value of the societal and institutional functions that archives document and can be applied to describe and appraise both public and private archives.

Booms points out the responsibility archivists have in shaping the documentary heritage and the dilemmas:

(...) the archivist will unavoidably appraise records according to those subjective opinions and ideas which have been acquired as part of the mindset of one's own time. But the records which archivists appraise are older, originating from a time which placed emphasis on different values. (...) My proposal had been to build the documentary heritage according to an established documentation plan, accountable to the public and critically verified by the historical method of scholarly research. (Booms 1991-92, pp. 27-28)

This method was never applied in Western Europe. Critics objected that complex human value concepts can hardly be harmonized to reflect the whole of society. But Booms' thought was:

My documentation plan was supposed to establish references to real events which had become history, and not to attempt to construe complex value concepts, as ideologues and armchair philosophers are wont to do. But on another point I agree with Büttner completely: it is not possible for us, as archivists, to secure public sanction for a documentation plan. (Booms 1991-92, p. 29)

Helen W. Samuels is the only archivist I know of who has tried to develop a model that includes in the selection process both public and private archives:

An objective of the analysis in Varsity Letters is to demonstrate that both official and non-official materials are required to achieve an adequate documentation of an institution. The work tries to merge these perceived disparate approaches by demonstrating how and when both types of records are needed, how they support and complement each other, and therefore why they must be examined in an integrated approach. With the emphasis placed first on what is to be documented - the function - the location of the record (which office or individual actually holds the material) becomes a secondary issue. (Samuels 1991-92 p. 133)

If archives have been lost or are just created on a small scale, she calls for collecting other types of documentation (published, visual and artifactual materials). Samuels also points out that the process of selection and appraisal would benefit from a broader approach. We can do little to predict future research trends that change the questions asked or the use of the documentation:

Did archivists anticipate quantitative history, social history, women's history? No, these all represented new ways of thinking, both for historical researchers and for archivists. (Samuels 1991-92, p. 133).

She therefore calls for a functional approach in the selection process. No analysis or selection can be objective. It will always be filtered through the present-day mental lenses. We need other documentation techniques:

Such documentation techniques as oral history and photography are used occasionally by archivists, historians and others, who recognize that the written record is incomplete. Although archivists acknowledge the deficiencies of modern records, they have not systematically included the analysis of these deficiencies among their tasks, nor initiated activities to fill in these gaps. (Samuels 1991-92, pp. 134-135)

Further on Samuels says:

Archivists acknowledge the desirability of using records management techniques to control aspects of the creation and retention of records. Electronic records have also forced the profession to face the necessity of intervening at the creation of these records to ensure that they will exist and continue to be useful. Archivists are more ambivalent about their appropriate role in creating documentation when otherwise it would not exist. (...)

While archivists have come to acknowledge and participate in such documentary activities, a similar professional consensus has not emerged about the legitimacy and even necessity of these activities as a regular part of the responsibility of any institutional archivist. As archival practice focuses primarily on activities that produce records, the documentation of activities that do not normally create or leave records is not an integrated and accepted activity. (Samuels 1991-92, p. 137)

Therefore, Samuels advocates that archivists as an integral part of their documentation activities must intervene to create or ensure the creation of records. But archivists do not necessarily have to do so. Their main role is to create awareness of the documentation problems and the need for oral history, photography, video or other documentary activities. To achieve this, archivists must do archival research sufficient to articulate a coherent documentary plan, and to influence society on the need to create various forms of records.

Samuel's definition of the weaknesses of the system and methods of archives selection hasn't been given enough attention by the profession, at least in Norway. But recently this way of thinking about archives selection and documentation has been propounded at the Oslo City Archives and the Oppland County Private Records Archives³. To improve the documentation of contemporary immigration and new minorities these institutions have seen the importance of collecting private archives, oral records and various types of material which are not a defined archive, but fragments.

The contents of the public and private records in this research project

- Were the public records a one-sided expression of the government's perspective?

The Oslo Refugee and Immigrant Agency managed the funding that the immigrant organizations applied for. My review of this municipal Agency's records on the organizations that applied for funding confirms the thesis, but is nuanced by the archive holding documents from many organizations. The Local Government and Labour Ministry's material first and foremost provides the ministry's perspective. Focus is often on controversies between the authorities and the organizations or on controversies within the organisations. The archive also holds material from the Foreign Worker's Association which is not preserved elsewhere as their records were not systematically kept.

Public offices have their own interests and needs and create archives in accordance with these. It is the municipality's and the state's need for documentation of how the granted money is spent that decides the contents of the archive. These records stay on a general level, they only hold the organizations' correspondence with the authorities. They don't contain their complete minutes of meetings or correspondence. For basic funding, organizations have to meet certain criteria, such as providing information about the organization's aims, annual reports, General Assembly minutes, audited accounts and membership lists. Members living in Oslo provide the basis for the basic funding the organization is entitled to. All this is useful

³ Oppland is a county in Norway. The county administration is in Lillehammer.

information, although it can also give a huge amount of detailed correspondence about delays, criteria for funding etc. We find sometimes full annual reports from organizations telling a lot about their activities, in other cases very brief annual reports. However, many aspects of political, social and cultural activities are rarely present in the records of a municipal agency or ministry that manages applications.

When conflict arises between groups the Ministry is often the contact point and has the power to intervene. Sometimes this is requested. Applications for activity funding often give more detailed information about organizations' desires to establish specific activities or conduct meetings. We also find which activities the authorities rejected to fund.

An important part of the Refugee and Immigrant Agency's records is that the records contain lists of all registered organizations in immigrant communities. The processing of the applications reveals a variety of associations, which of these were successful in obtaining funds, and which activities the Agency supported or rejected. Thus, the Agency's funding policy influenced the financial solidity of the organizations. This effect was primarily through activity funding. General funding was solely based on the number of approved members. This is the general funding system in Norway. The funding system has naturally enough led to immigrant communities organizing themselves in what we can perceive as traditional Norwegian organizations and the standard procedures that these follow.

In this sense, public records are narratives of power and powerlessness as Kaisa Maliniemi summarized in her research project *What did the archives hide. An examination of Kven and Sami in the public records in Kistrand (Porsanger) and Nordreisa 1865 to 1948*, (ABM media, 2010). This meant that she had to read the documents "against the grain" in Laura Stoler's terminology. Majority and minority perspective is important - the central focus is the majority's view of the minority and its expectations and assessments of the minority. We do not know whether minorities would have organized themselves formally to the same extent without the government's system for funding, or if this would have come later as a result of integration. The minority meets in a way the majority's desire to form an organized society that mainstream society can relate to.

- What is found in the organizations' and individuals' own archives? Do we see more traces of "direct voices" in accordance with my hypothesis? We find their correspondence, reports, posters, magazines, minutes, photos and newspaper clips. We trace their voices and often a far more multifaceted material that spans a much longer period of time in the organization's own records material than in the public archives. A feature of immigrant organizations' records is that they hold some material in their own language, in our examples Urdu, when this is the common language, or English or German.

Thus, we can observe their own thoughts about their status. Moreover, we can follow the shift in mentality as time goes by. Their ideas change after

having children. Foreign workers became first generation immigrants, and they felt compelled to stay longer than initially planned. In the records of the Pakistani organizations, we found that classes in Urdu were an important measure. Schools with minority children began to search for literature in Urdu. Also the first generation wanted to be updated on the situation in the home country and searched for books and papers. Mohammad Anwar Soofi's records show that he began importing books in Urdu to Norway in 1981, and shortly after papers and magazines. He supplied schools in several parts of the country and the Library in Oslo. The organizations also started celebrating Independence Days, the Norwegian Constitution Day and religious or cultural festivals to strengthen cohesion and include the younger generation.

The archives of the organizations display cooperation and positive measures, issues the groups are still concerned about. They also show that a central activity was provision of aid in translating, attestation of documents, legal assistance, guidance in completing forms regarding family reunification and applications to the Housing agency in Oslo. The documents can also show signs of intrigues, controversy, division, discontent and power struggles between the leaders. Nevertheless, argues Ayesha Khan, an immigrant from Pakistan and an assistant in the project who speaks urdu:

The documents provide insight into hopes, dreams, visions and efforts. Insight into the joy of having gained something longed for, yet the grief of having lost something valuable. It is about fulfilled dreams and crushed hopes. What makes the documents unique is that they are the product of the foreign workers themselves. You find their thoughts and perspectives, their position and their opinions. (Khan 2007)

Private archives may consist only of fragments, of course. There may be lacunae or only some fragments are preserved. The administrative records we collected from a dance group, Damini House of Culture, and a theatre company, Nordic Black Theatre, don't reflect their artistic activity although both records contain photographs. But this can be supplemented by other documentation as Samuels has pointed out. Interview documentation can shed light on a phenomenon in an archive. Several forms of documentation can provide valuable descriptions of an environment, a workplace etc. But private archives can also be so much richer and give a more complete picture than any traces you may find of the same phenomenon scattered in different public archives, as in the archive of Nasih Raof Ahmed in Oppland who came to Norway in 1999 as an asylum seeker and lived with temporary residence permits without the right to family reunification. Ahmed was finally granted a permanent residence permit in Norway after 10 years and two months.

In short, in private archives you can find their own voices and perspectives that are not in the public records. How unique is the material, archivists often ask, when they consider whether records have archival value. But its uniqueness, according to James O'Toole, revolves around different factors: the uniqueness of the records themselves, the uniqueness of information in the record, the uniqueness of processes that produce records and the uniqueness of aggregations of records (O'Toole 2008, pp. 344-345).

The uniqueness of the content may involve that one can track changes in attitudes - for instance, from the immigrants' perception of being here

temporarily as foreign workers to the creation of a new minority. Private archival material indicates individual group activities, efforts, self-understanding, needs and problems. This is unique and it's essential that the material is in fact created by these people, based on needs that they recognized. And it's unique because it's material that was compiled in a very special way. From this material we will be able to track partners of correspondence and thereby identify other archives, both public and private, where we may find more material. But even if all documents were to be found scattered in public records, the private archives still have their unique value due to their special aggregation of the documents.

Descendants and others will, through this preservation, be conveyed unknown perspectives about their ancestors, and the community will be able to increase its knowledge and understanding of how Oslo and Norway has been formed to become as it is today. In addition archives can, for example, help create identities for school children and help to bridge the gap between past and present.

- What are the consequences for the archives' outreach work and the users' ability to seek information relevant to their own identity if we only preserve the public records?

We create a fairly distorted picture of the new minorities if we just preserve the public archives, which largely exclude their own voices from our collective memory. This will have consequences for the archives' outreach work and for the users' opportunity to search information of relevance to their own identity.

Private archives are still largely disposed of through a kind of organic process of relocations, closures etc. They are preserved today much after the principle of coincidence, dependent on legislation, resources and traditions. This helps to determine the societal documentation and the documentary heritage posterity will be left with, and decides which stories will be told for future generations. It is a question of democracy, power and powerlessness.

Conclusion

How can we proceed in order to make informed choices of strategies to obtain a better societal documentation?

Samuels points out the need for documentation strategies and sector documentation plans. She addresses the issue of how we, as archival institutions, can fulfill our mission as societal institutions. And Booms' points out that his documentation plan should be the result of a division of labor, cooperation and criticism, which must be preserved as documentation along with the documentary heritage. Booms' and Samuels' stressing of system and methodological weaknesses of archival selection and preservation have not been given enough attention by the profession.

Acknowledging that the archives that have been selected and preserved in our institutions are deficient, we need to supplement them with other documentation, such as interviews, photos and videos. Archival institutions do not have to produce this, but they should feel a responsibility to ensure that initiatives are taken and to secure that documentation for preservation. The importance of creating or ensuring the creation of other types of

documentation, when the quality of records is poor, is pointed out by Samuels. She argues that we must engage in archival research so we can make coherent documentation plans. We may add that there must be an awareness of, and a division of, responsibility between the various archival institutions. Archival institutions should probably have a clear overall responsibility for preserving such documentation material. The mission statement of the Norwegian Archives Act provides support for this, since on a general level, it deals with archives of considerable cultural or research value. Furthermore, archival institutions have procedures for handling access to any closed files and an infrastructure of reading cells for the public adapted to closed files.

However, documentation plans are no guarantee for success. In order to collect private archives, experience shows the necessity of cooperation and contact with these organizations, institutions and individuals. We should therefore guide private records creators we want documentation from, in records management if needed, make appointments in an early phase of an organization's lifespan and be ready in the event of closures. Our encounter with those who have created the archives will affect the outcome of an archival institution's selection and outreach work. It will also have an impact on those with whom we are cooperating. Continual contact gives mutual benefit and better results. We experienced this in connection with our multicultural project and the exhibition and catalogue *Traces of us*. We received a lot of positive feedback for saying 'welcome to being a part of our City's collective memory'. In collaboration with Nordic Black Theatre we set up a play for school children that was held between the shelving in our repository about immigration to Oslo a century ago. This was part of a government sponsored programme for elementary and secondary schools, called the Cultural Rucksack, that lasted for three years. The same goes for our collaboration with the Mira Centre where we documented immigrant women's experiences and produced the publication *Multiple voices - minority women in organizational life*. The Oppland project has received similar feedback when documenting and doing outreach work on recent immigration to Oppland.

Eric Ketelaar has pointed out that archival institutions which have started using Web 2.0 have begun stimulating forms of user interaction. The user becomes more and more a co-creator (Ketelaar 2008 pp. 9-27). With this Ketelaar illustrates clearly how outreach activities can result in the preservation of new archives and vice versa. New archives can result in new forms of activities as the above projects in Oslo City Archives and Oppland County Private Records Archives illustrate. Digitizing records to make them more accessible and letting the public upload their own stories and documents can facilitate democratization. It may facilitate use, sharing, qualifying and improving information and allow people to offer original material to add to the collection that we can choose to preserve.

Unless private archives of the minorities' own organizations, institutions and individuals are preserved as part of our collective memory, the descendants and other interested parties will not be able to find distinct traces of these people's own perspectives and voices. Then our society at best will end up

with a distorted picture in which posterity will have to read what is recorded in the public archives "against the grain" to find some traces, such as Kaisa Maliniemi has shown with the national minority, Kven. The examples I have brought up relate to the documentation of new minorities. But there is reason to believe that these archives can be seen as representative of the general situation for the preservation of private archives and documentation of societal sectors. Material from the public sector has a very dominant position, so to speak, practically independent of archival value.

If we are to overcome this situation, the focus of our selection and preservation policies radically has to change and more resources must be allocated to private archives and documentation activities. Active outreach work from the institutions and interaction with the private records creators will be necessary to be able to preserve a larger share of private archives. But we should also establish a research agenda to improve the profession's ability to document society on the basis of coherent documentation plans for the various sectors of society, as Helen Samuels has argued. Only then will we lay the groundwork for an integrated societal memory that will provide relevant societal documentation as a basis for rights, research, historical analysis, visibility, identity formation, experiences and entertainment. We will also obtain a better relationship between the Norwegian Archives Act's mission statement and the policy instruments for the preservation of private archives.

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