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**Archives as Partners in Identity Shaping Processes through User Involvement and Dialogues -
From a Scandinavian Point of View**

The presentation outlines the archives' experience in applying a dialogue based method in relation to the users through web 2.0 platforms combined with analogy meetings in a strategic combination. Interactivity, user involvement, and crowd sourcing are keywords in the process, which takes place in the archives building as workshops, discussion groups, classes, city walks? and on web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, and Twitter. The method supports e.g. democratic procedures in the planning of the city and the landscape through the use of archives. Emphasis has especially been made to reach young people through segmented platforms. The presentation also intends to discuss potential pitfalls of the work method, which could be an attack on professionalism and on context. Cases are from archives in Scandinavia.

During the recent years the relation between archives and users has changed profoundly from a monolog to several simultaneous dialogues, or quoting Elizabeth Yakel¹: developed from mediation to collaboration. This presentation explores the changing relation as a part of a process where the archives have an opportunity to take an active part in the creation of identity and maintenance of democracy. It draws on cases from Aalborg City Archives (Denmark) put into perspective of other Scandinavian examples. Aalborg City Archives is located in the north of Denmark. It is a municipal archive but also holds private archives - among those 6.000.000 photographs and a large number of films. The city archives work within the framework of the regional and local cultural policy and act at the same time as the archive authority of the municipality. These are two different roles that both connect the city archives closely to the development of the local identity and to act as a democratic resource. In the same house and as a part of the organization is the Danish Emigration Archives which also has a national function.

As a point of the departure I will give a brief overview of the general situation in Scandinavia concerning the relation between the archives, the archivist, and the user: To act as an active partner and to participate in a relation in identity and democracy processes has been a part of the strategy of more Scandinavian archives for the last 10 years somewhat inspired by the program of the former Re:Source, archives, library, museum council from 2000 in England². The inspiration was most clearly formulated in the manifest of the Norwegian Archives Library and Museum Council, ABM Utvikling in the early 2000ies³. An initial point of departure of this strategy is that the archives are for everybody (no matter gender, age, class, and ethnicity) not only as a democratic and identity shaping resource but also as a basis for learning, new experiences, and social inclusion based on the presumption that archives are also for the people who didn't know about archives and their need for them; the

non-users which in this context should be offered the opportunity to be converted to users through information and communication. That means the archives have to go beyond from just describing the records and make them searchable in the reading room or on the internet (to mediate) to use other methods. Archives have to develop outreach and communications strategies to be partners in a conversation about the holdings – and find new ways of listening to the user – what quite a lot of archives in Scandinavia do. Focus has gone from the holdings to the users. And the character of the relation has changed from an asymmetric relation to the ideal of an equal relation

Archives on a local level in the Scandinavian countries and elsewhere: Local archives, community archives, and city archives, as Aalborg City Archives, have been working interactive user orientated for decades. The expectation expressed in the municipal politics and by the local politicians and not at least as a consequence of the nature of the local archive institution itself are that the archives should take an active part in the local cultural life and to be worth the financial support, attract a fair number of users and visitors just like their colleagues in the museums and libraries.

Even technology is only a tool⁴, it determines ways to perform; and in this case web 2.0 has supported development of digital interactive communication and in many ways it has become easier and less expensive to become an “Archive 2.0” using the American archivist and blogger Kate Theiler’s concept⁵. A concept lent from web.2.0 – which refers to interactive social media, as Facebook, Twitter, and Wikies etc. In a Scandinavian context Charlotte S. H. Jensen and I made a similar typology in 2006 dividing archives into traditional and “for everybody” types⁶. But what are the characteristic of an archive 2.0? According to Theimer it is it is an open, transparent, user-centered, technology savvy, innovative, and flexible, outreaching archive with iterating products and archivists as facilitators⁷. Focus has been on digital communication but the characteristics and principles can be transferred to the relation between the users, the archives, and the archivist in an analog world too.

The way the two platforms used in a strategic combination can support each other and led to the archives become an even more competent partner in more dialogues. The digital services create new possibilities in real life just as activities in the real life create new possibilities for increased use on line through the digital media – that is dialectical thinking and synergy. At the same time there is no doubt that the two different communication platforms more fundamentally mutually affect each other both when it comes to structure and content and have an effect on the role of the archivist and the archives in that process. Furthermore a new relation has become increasingly important: The user/user relation who leaves out the archivist and sometimes even the archives. The web users can easily construct their own archives and make their own platforms of outreach on the net, where the archivist have to consider his or hers new role⁸.

After these general reflections, I will discuss some general principles from analog meetings with the users using Aalborg City Archives as an example and Scandinavian archives as a perspective. Then I will proceed towards principles behind the digital meetings again using the Aalborg City Archives as an example with Scandinavian perspectives.

Identity in Analog Dialogues

Analog meetings are not in fashion. A number of archival institutions in Scandinavia have decided to close their reading rooms and are going entirely digitally for a combination of strategic and economic reasons. With communication on two platforms, a digital and an analog, it seems to be about time to reconsiderate the physical user related rooms of the archives as room for communication – as they hitherto have been one of the only arenas for the archives' involvement with the user. In the periodical: *Nordisk Arkivnyt (Nordic Archival News)* I conducted a survey in 2010 investigating the situation in the Nordic reading rooms under the polemic headline: Has the traditional reading room a future?⁹ The conclusion was not surprisingly that the traditional analog reading room was dying, strongly supported by the statistics that showed dramatically declining user numbers in all the Nordic countries.

The general conclusion is though that the reading rooms now are visited by users who are more far more competent compared to earlier, as basic searches in the holdings can be conducted online. At the same time the user numbers are not declining in archives where the (reading) rooms are refunctionalized and developed into centres of knowledge, experience, and learning with communication and user involvement as a principle. In these archives the number of users grows - the regional archives in Østersund and Gotland in Sweden, and other places are examples of that, where e.g. program and learning activities are carried out in the reading rooms.

The situation at the City Archives in Aalborg is also positive. From 2000 the City Archives have continuously been developing the reading room as a flexible resource for the users in dialogue with the users in focus groups. In 2004 the reading room function was renamed to a room of knowledge, not as an empty brand but to give a signal where information was the focus. With the knowledge space concept, the intention was to signal that the single quiet scientist was dead, or he should not live alone, we wanted to invite other learning and experiential forms around the collections by dividing the room into zones, which was intended to reflect different needs to support learning. The rooms signalized several individual flexible ways of working with the holdings and gave room for communication with the archivist as well as user to user. The reading room at the regional archives in Trondheim, Norway was later designed after the same principle – the Aalborg model. Since 2004 the analog user patterns have changed radically and the rooms are now used in new ways. The frequent user stays for a short time, focus is on bits of information and documentation and the need for experiences in relation to the collections, education and communication are markedly increased. Not necessarily by itself, but because the archive prioritized it.

The City Archives works with a segmentation of users not based in theory, but on observation and statistics, even the classification follows the principles of the museum theoretic, John Falk, who operates with identity related motivation. Like in Falk's work the user of the archives can be motivated by more purposes at a time and over time¹⁰. The classification shows what gives meaning for the user of the archives and what motivates the visit:

| Purpose | Theme | Type of user (examples): |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. The user has a problem or question which can (or cannot) be solved by use of the holdings | Research or search for information | Researchers, citizens, local historians, tourist guides, city planners, architects |
| 2. The user visits the archives as a part of a study or school curriculum – a formal learning setting | Learning | Students, school pupils, participants in courses and evening class, pre-school. |
| 3. The user wishes to see mediated material: Exhibitions films, photographs, lectures, or just look around (the archives as an attraction) | Entertainment, experience | Everybody including tourists |
| 4. The user searches for information about personal and juridical relations (pensions, exam papers, registers, census, social records, criminal records e.g.) | Democratic right, documentation | All citizens with relation to the municipality (in the case of the city archives) |
| 5. The user uses the archives as a resource for memory telling and search for identity | Self-realization | Genealogists, family historians, authors |

With a profoundly changed user patterns and new expectations from the users the reading room became even more user orientated in 2009. The archives enrolled itself in a new development trend, a user-oriented LMA approach and the reading room is now an archive, library, and museum room with the relation between the content and the collection and the user in focus not the institution. The LMA reading room is a result of a process based on development of a network model for the work with local history. The model project was

funded by the Danish Heritage Agency and the Library Board and conducted over three years¹¹. The project has been thoroughly prepared and models are developed not at least because three cultures meet from the three heritage institutions. The name of the room is now HistoryAalborg and Aalborg City Archives were inscribed a trend of history or literature houses with an emphasis on the user, who do not care where the information is held, but want a fast and competent answer.

A wide range of activities where process based dialogue is the focus have been developed. It is a complex kind of communication that not even digital media are able to handle. The archive is an ideal area for lifelong learning and the design of the programs are all characterized by a learning style based on dialogue. It is a form which already is a strong tradition in Aalborg, where the university is based on the PFL model: Problem based learning and project work in groups. The analog program supports the digital, because the use of several archival Web services actually requires courses: Learn to use databases, learn to use and be part of the web 2.0. Duff, Johnson and Tucker have among others problematized the consequence of the lack of contact with archives on the net in the early 2000ies¹². Just as R. Jimerson advocates for the “the continuing need for parallel systems” in Theimers anthology from 2011 and remind us of the digital divide. In everyday life in the reading room in Aalborg we meet users of all ages who give up or make wrong conclusions even in the web 2.0 ages. Examples of analog learning to support community contribution on resources on the internet have been described by Michelle Fogett and Angèle Alain in relation to the web projects Moving Here¹³. They examine how analog support was needed to widen the user groups and to make participation more democratic in the web based projects.

The many interest associations in Scandinavia are obvious partners in the development of competence-building services, so are teaching institutions at all levels. In Sweden and Norway there is emphasis on that the most efficient place to start to establish archives as dialogue partner is in the school as a part of the general socialization. Use of archives is now a part of the Swedish curriculum and in Norway archives are a part of the cultural school “backpack” program – a digital resource for children¹⁴

In the Scandinavian countries only one other city beside Aalborg has followed the LMA analog strategy for the reading room: Eskilstuna in Sweden – here three archives, the library, and the museum, in 2011 opened Eskildskällan (the Eskilds Source) a common room for users (former ABM) following the same principles as HistorieAalborg. Eskildskällan has a twin on the internet as HistorieAalborg will open a web resource in autumn 2012: called Aalborg Leksikon (the Aalborg encyclopaedia – a wiki). It does not mean that more archives especially in Norway and Sweden doesn’t share reading room facilities – but usually it is archives/archives cooperation as in Trondheim (N), Karlstad (S) to mention a few examples. But the principle is the same: one analog user interface.

Mastery of Lives in the Archives

The role of the archivist has changed in the new analog rooms of the archives— from mediator of the holdings to partner of communication – or a consult who can be contacted if necessary. An example again from Aalborg is some very successful workshops. The aim is to support people researching their family story and ancestors and through that find their own identity. The concrete workshops and the archives' relations to the genealogists in general have just been the subject of a master thesis¹⁵, which is a replica study of Yakel's study from 2004¹⁶. The conclusion of the Danish study is that the respondents found the social dimension of being a memory worker important; another motivation was the wish to share information with each other. The archives support these needs by facilitating with rooms for dialogues and expertise which might explain the success of the workshops. As in the case of Yakel's study the genealogist didn't trust the archives and libraries. In the Aalborg study, the respondents relied more on their own societies than the archivist, but the same time the City archives have turned the relation to trust and cooperation. The archives' agenda behind the workshops is to teach the family historians to use the holdings in their search of identity, to add context to their studies, and create a gateway to the resources on the internet teaching the participants about navigation and source criticism to support self-identification and realization, a mastery of life.

Not only in Aalborg is the relation between archives and family historians close: in Sweden the genealogists nominate "the best archive" (seen from their point of view) every year – and in Malmö City Archives also in Sweden the researchers' find of the month is published on the internet. Crowdsourcing projects are another platform where dialogues between genealogists and archives are performed: A recent example: Copenhagen City Archives work together with the genealogical organizations in Denmark with a project, called "Politiets Registerblade", which is a database with the registration by the police of inhabitants in Copenhagen 1890-1923. A recent survey shows that the motivation of the genealogists is to transcribe the archival material is be a part of a virtual community. The survey also shows that the prime motivation is to help other users with their genealogical research (77,7%) and to do something funny and challenging in the spare time (69,1%)¹⁷. In this project Copenhagen City Archives facilitate user to user dialogues.

Moving Identities in the Archives

Focus in the Scandinavian countries has been to secure people of another culture background a place in the archives within the last 15 years. Inspired by the Moving Here project in England, Aalborg City Archives and the Danish Emigration archives conducted the project "Foreigners in Denmark – Danes Abroad" in 2001¹⁸. Interviews were performed with Vietnamese, Palestines, and Somalian immigrants in Aalborg. The groups represent three waves of immigration in the 1970ies, 1980ies and 1990ies. At the same time interviews were conducted with Danish emigrants in Spain. The groups were asked identical questions about their meeting with a new culture. Focus was on documenting the alterations of the Danish identity in the meeting with a foreign culture, and the alterations and changes in the immigrants' identities in the meeting with Danish culture. At the

same time the process and the outreach of the project in the archives and on the internet became a cultural meeting place and the voice of the migrants and their archives became a part of the archives. The aim of the project was also to show the immigrants that archives was a safe place to trust for everybody - a part of the democracy where information could be found. The limit of a project is that it runs for limited time – but even today immigrants use the archives as a consequence of the “old project”.

Especially in Norway quite a lot of mapping and similar projects followed in the 2000ies. Their results can be found on the website of Norwegian Arts Council. A brand new project in Denmark is at the Danish Emigration Archives where the whole collection will be presented in digital form on the internet with the same implicit aim: to share information and resources about Danes as newcomers to new countries establishing a new identity¹⁹. In these projects the archives form a platform for meetings and dialogues– and the archivist is a facilitator.

Identity in a Digital Carousel

The archives’ various digital services can be seen as a flow or a media carousel that together forms a strategy of communication. I will again use the Aalborg City Archives as an example as a start to illustrate the development. The City Archives use “a media carousel” to communicate services and offers to the digital user community. The services are connected with real life activities and are intended to support each other. The digital carousel consists of the archive's website and social media. In Denmark Facebook is “King”, 2/3 of the population has a profile. As one of the first Danish archives, Aalborg City Archives created page 3 years ago - today with approximately 850 "friends". In the beginning Facebook was a way to meet and communicate with a digital strong segment, young people! The development, however, is that as Facebook now is used by all ages, the demography of the page follows the pattern of analog reading room.

Aalborg City Archives are far from the only Scandinavian archive on Facebook. Charlotte S.H. Jensen's study shows Nordic participation in social media in June 2010²⁰. Since then e.g. several national archives has started using social media. As an experiment, Aalborg City Archives also have an account on the Twitter micro-blog page, which affects a different audience - very much an international audience, thus tweeted in both English and Danish. Another part of the carousel is exhibitions on Flickr, a film page: www.moviscop.dk. Profiles on Pinterest and Instagram are now experiments to test the kind of segments who are going to join the conversation through these media. Experiment is a part of the agenda – and the media invites to that²¹.

In most archives in Scandinavia today it is not a question wherever the archives should facilitate dialogues on a Facebook or Flickr profile, but how these platforms are used as a part of general strategy of communication and for which purpose. Again a local example: When young people became a smaller part of the “friends” of the Aalborg City Archives Facebook page, we subsequently created another Facebook page especially for young people – which is content (archives and history) orientated and a part of informal learning about the town history and development. The page is based on recommendations and ideas of a focus group of the users aged

between 16 -25 years. It is called: “You can only call himself a true person from Aalborg when you know that...”²² The page has 1115 members – but is passive for the time – which shows the archives have to be in very active to keep the dialogue going. The page entered in a long row of user-initiated very active Facebook theme pages that share and discuss histories and memories of the Aalborg area. The City Archives have considered their role at those pages and are trying different strategies out: Should we take part or not? As an archivist with a face or as an institution? We take care not to be present just to correct facts– but do often refer to the archives as a resource and possibility for search of information and sources on concrete topics discussed.

Another example: Aalborg City Archives performed together with the local museum and library in 2009/2010 a project in which the archives was supposed to collect photographs of young Greenlanders meeting with Aalborg. Facebook was used as a platform following the recommendation of the user group itself. The archives had suggested photo-sharing application Flickr because of copyright issues in Facebook, but as "Convenience is King," we accepted. The project was a failure anyway as no photos were uploaded despite conscious media use and analog meetings with the young Greenlanders. New media do not guarantee success, but the archive gained new experience in the use of social media.

The last example is Aalborg City Archives’ participation in municipal landscape and city planning processes. On analog and digital platforms the archives secure that records of the past is used when discussing and planning the present and the future in the town. In analog ways through city walks, outdoor exhibition using QRcodes and workshops in the reading room – in digital media through the participation on Facebook pages where the planning projects are discussed with the citizens on line²³. In these media the municipality draws on the experience of the City Archives using social media. Problems as the digital divide and democracy have been discussed but the conclusion is that the municipality together with the archives should be where the citizens are.

Most Facebook pages and profiles in the social media are institution related, they are like a website in a social media format. Changing focus to the content, the user, or user segment and not the archives can have the effect that it is easier and more relevant to get into a dialogue with the users about themes related to e.g. identity and democracy according to the experience of Aalborg City Archives.

Archivist to User or User to User

The Archives in general has extensive experience handling the traditional service and personal service in the reading room. We are used to manage the user community with user sessions and user surveys. Now we handle the relation to digital users too. Here the new web 2.0 technologies can to help us, even though the users own communities (genealogical and local history societies, small interest groups: train, car, and post card enthusiasts e.g.) often are far ahead of archives when it comes to communicating each with other about content on the internet as mentioned above in the Facebook cases.

According to Yakel the archivist is a distinct, omniscient, and controlling authority rather than a member of the community working towards shared goals in almost all cases of archives 2.0²⁴. Following that assumption the question is: Is it possible for the archivists to act as equal partners in a dialogue with the users? The archives cannot answer the question on their own, we have to ask the users; meanwhile we have to look at the statistics and numbers and initiate research of the new relations as Yakel also points out.

Web 2.0 technology offers a room for a dialogue, but research and statistic also show that only 24 % take actively part: produce content, upload, comment²⁵. Most people ask: What is in it for me? before they participate in the analog world and on the web. As a consequence journalistic methods as relevance, open questions, and actuality become interesting as work methods for the archives. It is also important to ask: What is the purpose of the dialogue? Is it to agree with each other or to provoke a discussion of the content (education) or to create experiences?

The conclusion is that despite of the pitfalls there is no return if the archives shall act as an active resource in the identity shaping and meet the users' expectation of dialogue and efficient communication. It is necessary to establish and maintain dialogues with a wide range of users. If the archives do not facilitate the dialogue or take actively part, the users will create platforms, holdings, and dialogues on their own without the archives and without the use of the holdings of the institutions and the archives will not be a part of the dialogue at all.

¹ Yakel, Elizabeth: Who represents the past? Archives, Records, and the Social Web, p. 257 in: Controlling the Past, Documenting Society and Institutions, Essays in Honor of Helen Willa Samuels, SAA, Chicago, 2011

² Re:Source: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, later MLA council, UK until 2012 and ABM Utvikling, Norway now Norsk Kulturråd, Arts Council, Norway.

³ ABM Utvikling's vision: ABM-utvikling should strengthen archives, libraries, and museums as active and contemporary institutions in Society based on values as dialogue, diversity, freedom of expression, and tolerance.

⁴ Jimerson, Randall, Archives 101 in a 2.0 World: the Continuing Need for Parallel Systems p 304 in A different kind of web, new connections between archives and their users, SAA, 2011.

⁵ Theimer, Kate: Conclusion Archivists and Audiences: New Connections and Changing roles in Archives 2.0 p 334 in Theimer, op. cit. 2011, and the blog: Archives Next <http://www.archivesnext.com/>

⁶ Jensen, Bente and Jensen, Charlotte, S. H.: Arkivformidling, mål, begreber og metode (Archives and Outreach, Aims, Concepts and Method, in: Arkiv, Samhälle och Forskning, 2006, 2

⁷ Theimer, 2011, op. cit., p. 335

⁸ Jensen, Bente: Kommunikation, kreativitet og kulturudveksling - "Arkiver for alle" på vej ind i et nyt decennium (Communication, Creativity and Cultural Exchange: "Archives for Everybody" on the way into a new decade) s. 41-55: Kreativitet och mångfald. Kulturarvspedagogik för ett nytt decennium. Konferensrapport från NCK:s 6:e årliga konferens. Nordiskt centrum för kulturarvspedagogik, Östersund 2011

⁹ Jensen, Bente: Har den traditionelle læsesal en fremtid? Indtryk fra nordiske arkiver s. 36- 41. Nordisk Arkivnyt 2010:1

¹⁰ Falk, John: Den museumsbesøgendes oplevelse: Hvem kommer, hvorfor og med hvilke følger (The Museum Visitor's experience, Who Visits, Why and to What Affect ?) in: Det interaktive Museum, Samfundslitteratur, 2011, p. 36-37 – Jensen, Bente and Jensen, Charlotte S. H. have earlier used Falk's theory as inspiration in: Jensen & Jensen 2006 op.cit.

¹¹ Frandsen, Bodil and Jensen, Bente: www.aalborgkommune.dk/Borger/Kultur-natur-og-fritid/lokalhistorie/Aalborg-Stadsarkiv/Sider/Webudgivelser.aspx with an English summary.

¹² Duff, 2002, p. 331; Duff & Johnson, 2003, p. 92-93 Tucker, 2007, p.129 Duff, W. (2002). Understanding the information-seeking behaviour of archival researchers in a digital age: paths, processes and preferences in:

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- ¹⁴ www.denkulturelleskolesekken.no and aargang0.dk
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- ²² www.facebook.com/pages/Man-kan-kun-kalde-sig-en-%C3%A6gte-aalborgenser-n%C3%A5r-man-ved-at/120102034679274
- ²³ Facebook pages with discussions about city planning in Aalborg Municipality: Ny Karolinelund: www.facebook.com/nykarolinelund and Ny Budolfi www.facebook.com/nybudolfiplads
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- ²⁵ From Simon, Nina: Principles of Participation, the Participatory Museum, 2010 p. 129 in Det interaktive museum, , Samfundslitteratur, 2011