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### **Benefits of Archives, Libraries and Museums Working Together.**

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#### ***Abstract:***

*Fortunately in many countries, there is a growing interest in cooperation among archives, libraries and museums.*

*It is important to make a crossover strategy for giving people access to our cultural heritage. Our goal must be to give people the opportunity to search archives, libraries and museums simultaneously. Consequently, it is necessary to try and create minimum standards for registration with the starting point in those standards already accepted internationally*

*In Denmark there have been some interesting projects, where you can search for material in several institutions at the same time. NOKS is a project involving 9 institutions, archives, libraries and museums. Their registrations have been put together in one database that can be reached via the Internet [www.noks.dk](http://www.noks.dk). It consists of 115.000 registrations among them 8.000 photos including different types of material, printed material, books, leaflets, newspaper clippings, archives, museum items etc.*

#### **Text:**

My name is Ruth Hedegaard, and I am secretary of the Genealogy and Local History section. In our Standing committee meeting last year, we decided that the theme for this year should be Cooperation among Archives, Libraries and Museums.

We sent out a call for papers and we received 12 answers from a number of different countries including Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Holland, England, Latvia, Slovakia, Turkey, USA, Australia, China and Japan.

After a difficult choice we decided on papers from Denmark, Norway, England and the United States. We hope that these four presentations will give you an idea of what is going on in this field, what projects have been organised and hopefully you will get some ideas and inspiration in your work.

I have had a special interest in this subject and I will explain in a short introduction. For 20 years I have been working as a librarian in the local historical archives in a cultural historical museum located in the northern part of Denmark. We are working with all kinds of local material including all the local material from the library.

So actually I am already working in cooperation with the three sectors, archives, libraries and museums.

In my presentation I want to show you a very successful project for presenting material from these three different institutions at the same time on the Internet.

In the Nordic countries we have an acronym describing this cooperation called the ABM institutions “a” for archives – “b” for biblioteker, which is the Scandinavian word for libraries, and “m” for museums. This discussion of cooperation between archives, libraries and museums is one of the very interesting topics being debated at the moment. In my presentation I will be using the acronym from now on, In Norway for example they have ABM utvikling (development in English), where the libraries and museum authorities have united as one institution from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January.

In Denmark we also try to promote interest for this kind of cooperation, and I think it is very important to have a joint strategy for giving people access to our cultural heritage, which is to be found in archives, libraries and museums.

There is a need for being able to access the material of the three institutions simultaneously and having it presented homogeneously, and I will describe some of the reasons why.

1. Experiences from abroad and the first examinations of the use of NOKS, a project of searching material from 9 institutions at the same time, which I am going to tell you about later on, confirm that there is a demand for this. Most of our users do not care where they find their information, whether it is in a book or a leaflet in the library, from a description of an artefact in the museum, or from an organisation’s protocol in the archives, as long as they do find it.
2. A great part of our cultural heritage is situated in more than one of the three types, artifacts, photos, archival material, printed material, audio visual material etc. etc.
3. The different culture and way of registration makes it difficult for the user to find the relevant information.
4. The lack of standards makes it difficult to search material at the same time in the different institutions and to coordinate communication efforts.

5. The possibilities of the new technology should be utilized.

In clarifying the strategies and the principles of cooperation between the three institutions types there are several conditions to take into account

1. Organizing initiatives must be with equal participation of the three institutions
2. You must be able to use existing electronic registrations from the last 10 – 15 years in the new way of searching material in the institutions at the same time. If you cannot, it will result in an unacceptable backlog.
3. As the ABM databases are to include all sorts of material, it is important to be able to access the material from the different institutions at the same time.
4. It is possible to search information on the basis of both individual words and on the basis of a specific subject system and subject terms.  
As I will show you later on there can be a very big difference in the result if you use a text search instead of using a structured subject field search

It is very important to start on a joint strategy for communication now for two reasons:

1. Most important. We have to create minimum standards for registration, with a starting point in politically decided international standards. This is the conclusive precondition for any sensible simultaneously search in the different institutions.
2. If we want a common presentation of data we must have common principles of communicating our records.

These are some comments on the strategy of the ABM cooperation.

Once more I have to stress the importance of common minimum standards created on the basis of international standards.

We must be able to reuse the electronic registrations already made without having to make any changes to them.

## **DANPA**

In Denmark we have had some projects leading in the directions that I have just described..

DANPA Denmark's national private archives database is one of them.

The database contains search capabilities for descriptive records representing approximately 120,000 private archives in Denmark being available via the Internet [www.danpa.dk](http://www.danpa.dk).

The 120.000 records originate from 190 archive institutions with digital registrations among them the State Archives, The emigration Archives, The Royal Library, the library and archives of the labour movement and a great part of the local historical archives etc.

## **WWW.NOKS.DK**

NOKS is an abbreviation for Nordjyllands Kulturhistoriske Søgebase. Cultural historical database for searching material concerning the North of Jutland.

The purpose of NOKS is to make the collections of archives, libraries and museums accessible on the Internet.

It is to give the users a possibility of seeking material in all three different institutions with one search.

It is to make it possible to search in the digital registrations that have been made in archives, libraries and museums in this northern part of Denmark during the last 10 – 15 years.

The purpose was to collect all material from the area of cultural history, and to achieve that goal without too much “noise”. Only the most obvious collections have been taken into account. From the libraries the records from the local historical collection have been taken, as they are the collections with material containing the wanted subjects.

The creation of this database is naturally a benefit for the web-visitors using it, but it is also an attempt to create standards concerning registration in the cultural institutions.

### **Organisation and participation**

The project took a year, from March 2001 to February 2002, the participants were 3 local historical archives, 3 cultural historical museums, 2 art museums and the central library of the County of Northern Jutland.

These participants gave the project a wide geographical spread

As I mentioned earlier it is important to have equal participation of the three institutions when organizing initiatives. The steering committee of the project had equal representation from the three.

The budget of the project was 1,14 mill. Danish Kroner, or 143.000 EURO, being funded by the State, the municipalities and the participating institutions.

### **Figures in NOKS**

In the database are 115,000 records, 8,000 of these with digital photos from archives and museums attached.

During the first year 60,000 searches were made in the base.

Of the records 70 % come from the archives, 15 % from the library and equally 15 % from the museums.

Explaining the figures of 70 % from the archives I will just make a small digression and tell you about the local historical archives in Denmark.

### **Local historical archives in Denmark**

The local historical archives, which are typical of the Danish archives tradition, trace their origins to the first local historical archive, established in 1937. After rapid growth, there are now way more than 450; which can be compared to the number of municipalities in Denmark, 275. In the local historical archives, as a part of the Scandinavian tradition, much work is being done to collect historical sources for the enrichment of the local community's history. Here they have had great importance for the preservation of sources for local history not

mandated by any law as organisations, associations, commercial enterprises or private persons have no obligation to preserve their archives.

The State archives do not systematically collect private archives in Denmark, so that is really a task for the local historical archives.

They collect not only traditional archives but also information in the form of photographs, maps, tapes, film, newspapers, books and other printed matter, all for the enlightenment of local history.

After collection the material is registered and made available to the interested consumer by, among other things, the use of a standard common computer registration system, called ARKIBAS, which is employed today in 275 archives, large and small.

## **ARKIBAS**

### **The local archives' joint system**

Arkibas was created in 1988 forward in cooperation between archivists and system developers, and is a program especially designed for the needs of the local archives.

The program is able to handle material from the first contact at the point of delivery until the material is completely packaged and registered on the storage shelves.

In the case of pictures it is possible to scan the pictures and thereby see a copy of the photo simultaneously with the registration. The program is able to handle the many different material categories in the most relevant manner, while, at the same time, binding them together into a joint retrieval system.

This joint system has, among other things, made possible the establishment of DANPA and NOKS on the Internet.

## **CREATING THE DATA BASE AND MAKING THE SEARCH SYSTEM**

In NOKS the data have been drawn from each institution and physically moved to one server. Before they can be united on the server the data must be converted to the same format, from the archives system, which I mentioned earlier, from the MARC format of the libraries and from the third system of the museums.

After that they must be sort of fastened together, so that there will be a joint connection to the records from the single institutions.

The subject systems of the original registrations were difficult to convert to a common format.

Instead we chose to collect all the subject terms and headwords, from all the registrations. The list became extremely long and therefore a connection between the records was created, so that one subject term at the same time points to different records from archives, libraries or museums.

The model illustrates the function of that:

From the subject term list you choose one term for example: "care of senior citizens".

This term points to the subject of the library, but also to the other subject terms from the museum "elderly people" and the archives "senior citizens"

The records from all the institutions will then be found no matter which term the institutions have used originally.

In that way it is possible to keep a sort of structured search. It is important not to rely exclusively on free text searching, as I will show in one of the examples from the database.

## **USING THE SEARCH SYSTEM**

[WWW.NOKS.DK](http://WWW.NOKS.DK).

If you make a free text search on: The German occupation of Denmark during World War 2, just called the Occupation, you will get the result of 353 records.

If you make the same search using the subject term occupation you will have 1590 records, rather impressive figures I think, which is really showing how you cannot rely on free text search if you want to have a high quality search.

Furthermore in the system you can combine the text search and the structured subject search.

## **THE FUTURE**

A search database like NOKS does have its justification only by being updated.

The money was given for the project and not as a permanent grant, and we are working hard to try to raise money for an update of the base.

The most fantastic thing for the institutions involved is, that you can just draw your registrations from your own database put them on a CD-Rom, and send them to the programmer, it will take you maybe ten minutes to do so. Of course there is much work in putting the data together in the database, and the programmers probably would not accomplish it so easily, but that is not my business presenting this paper, for the institutions it is no extra work at all.

Another very interesting thing about an update would be to see how many more digital registrations there would be after one year, which will give us a hint of the speed of the digitising of our collections.

Another fantastic thing is that you can increase the number of participating institutions without too much extra trouble as well.

Our goal for NOKS is that all the cultural institutions in North Jutland, containing electronic registrations, will have their collections in NOKS together with all the registrations made since March 2000 in the participating institutions.

There is a co-operation with another county to make a similar database by creating an empty base for them, making it relatively easy to use the principles from NOKS in a new database.

Many of the registrations are only found in the institutions, not online, and that is why part of NOKS has been created drawing the records from the databases.

In the future that will change, and still more material is to be found on-line in the sector-specific databases.

In the future NOKS should be constructed with the capacity to search in these bases at the same time.

But still the principles of searching and the presentation of data will not be changed though you have another technology.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the experiences with NOKS I would like to stress 3 set of principles to be observed to give the users of the Internet a good and useful cultural historical search tool.

1. The example from the search on the Occupation shows how necessary it is to keep the structure of the original registration. This model of subject terms is not the everlasting solution, but it shows that it is possible to make searches in the different institutions at one time, and that is the essential thing about it.
2. The purpose of a database like this must be to make the material in archives, libraries and museums available for the users of the Internet, and by that I mean including and making available all different material, not excluding anything.
3. A third essential point is that the existing registrations must be reused. We must make use of the many good registrations that are already at hand.

## **FUTURE ABM COOPERATION**

The experience from NOKS shows how important it is to work out a strategy for communication of the digital cultural heritage of Denmark.

In NOKS and in DANPA we have started on a voluntary level for cooperation and through this cooperation we have felt the need for standards and understood how important it is, if you want to have things of quality.

We need a common strategy that makes it possible to cross search in the ABM institutions in Denmark.

Thank You.