

Summary of Report:

A Study of the Danish Cultural Heritage Institutions' Documentation of the Coronavirus crisis

by a working group appointed by the Danish Private Archives Committee in 2021 *

As soon as Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen declared "a total lock down of Denmark" on 11 March 2020 many archives and museums started to collect documentation about the coronavirus crisis from local, regional, and national perspectives. The purpose of the report, *A study of the Danish cultural heritage institutions' documentation of the coronavirus crisis* (En undersøgelse af danske kulturarvsinstitutioners dokumentation af coronakrisen), is to document and discuss the coronavirus-related contemporary collection by the Danish cultural heritage institutions. The focus was on the first phase of the pandemic, in spring 2020. It seeks to establish an overview of what was collected and the methods that were used. The report also includes experiences of performing rapid response documentation and collection of sudden events as they happen.

The report is based on information collected through a survey, which was sent out to approx. 770 archives and museums at national, regional, and local level. 306 institutions responded to the survey and among those 43% (131) had collected material. A vast majority of the submissions contained photographs. Reports, interviews, stories, video, audio, posters, notices, data from IT-systems, and various internet data are also examples of the collected documentation.

Digital material was primarily collected. Cultural heritage has become digital, and this poses challenges for a majority of the cultural heritage institutions in relation to GDPR, the General Data Protection Regulation. The frequency of the collection of digitally created photographs, stories, audio, and videos makes it clear that the institutions have shown a strong effort to function in the digital age. The presence of analogue collections is also significant, and here the museums have been particularly proactive in

making agreements to collect objects that reflected the actual coronavirus restrictions. Some institutions have also successfully launched research projects.

The report highlights some concrete successes. The institutions which chose to prioritise documentation of the coronavirus crisis have in general been successful in their work. The answers provided in the survey also demonstrate a wish to prioritise such contemporary documentation.

If we look at the key issues regarding the collection during the coronavirus crisis, they can be divided into four focus areas, which the Danish Private Archives Committee has formulated in a strategy for 2019-2025: Common solutions, visibility, necessary resources, and legal clarification.

Common solutions

When the coronavirus crisis began, there were no formal networks through which archives and museums could share experience and knowledge. Networks were established on an ad hoc basis on social media.** The fact that sharing of knowledge took place informally "from below" added agility, speed, and enthusiasm to the process, which should be maintained, when more established platforms for communication based on existing institutions and organisations exist, as will be recommended below. The approach can take advantage of coordinated initiatives "from above", as represented by a joint press release launched on 30 March 2020 from the National Archives, The Royal Library, the National Museum, ODA (The Organisation of Danish Archives), SLA (The Society of Local Archives), and the Danish Workers Museum. The press release encouraged to contribute documentation about the coronavirus crisis to cultural heritage institutions at all levels, from national to local. ***

At the same time, the absence of commonly available IT solutions for collection and preservation of digitally created material has challenged the cultural heritage institutions' documentation work. In almost all cases, the individual institutions lack the

resources to develop technology independently, which leads to sub-optimal collection practices for digitally created material.

Visibility

The cultural heritage institutions were not invisible during the coronavirus crisis, but a general picture emerges that shows it has been difficult to reach the general public. The joint press release was an attempt to reach out more widely. Contributions to the collections in many cases came from previous contributors, who were already aware of the institutions' existence. The collection has also been made difficult by the fierce competition for the attention of potential contributors, which several institutions have experienced from the established media.

Necessary resources

The survey does not give the impression that additional funds have been provided to assist the collection efforts. Collection is driven in the margins of budgets, and employees have had to find time for the tasks between existing work tasks.

Legal clarification

Many respondents in the survey expressed an uncertainty about whether they are actually allowed to collect and preserve digitally created material which contains personal data. They expressed that there is a need for a common understanding of how the current legislation should be interpreted.

Information that is covered by GPDR can only be transferred to public archives, according to section 14 of the General Data Protection Regulation Act. Collection of, for example, citizens' experience of the coronavirus crisis can be collected by public archives on the basis of the Danish Archives Law, chapter 11 on private archives, and the material can be made available in accordance with the rules in the Archives law. Local archives and museums, on the other hand, do not have legal authority based on the Archives law. At the same time, some institutions believe that they can collect and make information available if specific consent is obtained from the creator and people

involved. This is a difficult road to navigate, as it can involve many people. The institutions perceive this as a challenge for their collection of contemporary documentation – and thus for their future work as cultural heritage institutions.

Recommendations

The issues above indicate that in several areas there is an opportunity to equip the cultural heritage institutions better for similar contemporary documentary tasks in the future. The following is recommended:

- Establishment of networks that can quickly and efficiently reach out to the various cultural heritage institutions and facilitate sharing of knowledge. Networks must work in interaction with the individual cultural heritage institutions' own initiatives.
- Building of a solid resource where cultural heritage institutions can find tools for collection and preservation as well as an ability to communicate with the public in line with other media.
- Creation of dedicated cultural pools with a focus on cultural heritage preservation in times of crisis. Alternatively, work towards funding collaborations with the same purpose.
- Clarification of the legal challenges and opportunities regarding collection of digitally created personal data.
- Identification of specific needs for common technological, user-centric solutions that can facilitate the collection and preservation of digitally created materials. In addition, an assessment of how existing technological infrastructures, such as Netarkivet (The Danish Internet Archives), can be included in a dialogue and coordination effort is recommended.

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** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2649132838652755> Facebook group - Contemporary Documentation - Archives and Museums

*** https://www.mynewsdesk.com/dk/rigsarkivet/pressreleases/historisk-corona-lukning-af-danmark-skal-dokumenteres-og-bevares-2986690?fbclid=IwAR0P_LmFFO5B_65pGJe33-wD4YBXc8Kxgrxy9fHP9oGH6UaYRUDtlnBCT88 Press release, 30 March 2020.