

# Challenges in safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage through digitization of audio-visual, archival material

Sjur Viken

Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance

Online archives:



<https://www.youtube.com/user/Rffsentret>



[www.folkedansporten.no](http://www.folkedansporten.no)

This paper will describe current work and challenges concerning safeguarding archival material through digitization of analogue audio-visual formats at the Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance. Digitized material, which is cleared for publishing, is uploaded to the Centre's YouTube channel<sup>1</sup>. However, most of the archival material cannot be published in this way due to intellectual property laws and ethical issues. The archive is therefore accessible to researchers and the public who are visiting the Centre, as well as via an online, on-request streaming solution called *Folkedansporten*.<sup>2</sup>

There has been absence of an authorized national body with responsibility for coordinating audio-visual archives in Norway. In addition, no national protection plan exists, and a governmental white paper describing the challenges of archives does not even mention audio-visual material (St.m. 7 2012/13).<sup>3</sup> Reorganizations, put in motion by the government, have given the *National Archives of Norway*<sup>4</sup> the responsibility for private archives,<sup>5</sup> whereas *The Arts Council Norway*, a funding and advisory agency under the Ministry of Culture, still is responsible for museums, which in many cases include private archives. This has resulted in a fragmentation of the private archives, as well as a reduction of already

limited funding options to which are available for archives seeking development projects. In addition, the *National Archives of Norway* argues to not have responsibility for the traditional music archives. Such archives, which mainly contain unpublished private recordings and collections, are fragmented regarding their organization. *National Archives of Norway's* strategy for private archives does not include audio-visual archives, but focuses mainly on paper-based archives. The National Library of Norway has taken in audio-visual material through the Legal Deposit Act ever since it came into being in 1990.<sup>6</sup> This institution represents leading competence regarding digitization as well as expertise on depot facilities.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/user/Rffsentret> (retrieved 24th of April 2017).

<sup>2</sup> [www.folkedansporten.no](http://www.folkedansporten.no) (retrieved 25th of April 2017).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld-st-7-20122013/id707323/sec1> (retrieved 23rd of April 2017).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.arkivverket.no/eng/The-National-Archives> (retrieved 24th of April 2017).

<sup>5</sup> refers to a rather heterogeneous group of archives with significant internal differences, both in terms of origin, extent and structure (<http://www.arkivverket.no/eng/Private-Sector/Privatarkiv-i-Arkivverket/What-Are-Private-Archives>) (retrieved 24th of April 2017).

<sup>6</sup> <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1989-06-09-32?q=Pliktavleveringsloven> (retrieved 26th of April 2017).

The Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance<sup>7</sup> conducts archival work, research and dissemination. The foundation, which is situated in Trondheim, Norway, is an accredited NGO<sup>8</sup> of UNESCO as an adviser with work regarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was ratified by Norway in 2007 and the purpose was to create a better balance between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO defines the term "safeguarding" as follows:

*Measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage* (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention>).

Working close in collaboration with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), the Centre has been completing teaching and research projects since the 1970s. The archive, which is incorporated within the Centre, contains the largest collection of traditional dance in Norway. The film and video archive is also arguably one of the largest in Northern Europe. In addition, the Centre holds a traditional music collection which is among the richest in Norway. The unpublished content of the archive is attached to a wide variety of formats. Roughly calculated, the film and video collection consists of approximately 600-700 units of 8mm films, 1000 units of 16mm films, 2000 units of U-matic, Betamax and Hi-8 videocassettes and 2000 units of DV videocassettes. The approximate numbers of the sound collection are: 3000 reel-to-reel tapes, 400-500 DAT tapes, 300 Compact Cassettes and 100 Mini Discs. In addition, there are published recordings attached to LPs, CDs, MCs, VHSs and DVDs, to which are incorporated the collection. The archive also holds a significant paper-based collection which consists of books,<sup>9</sup> journals and

magazines, as well as fieldwork notes, transcriptions of dance and music and photography. The Centre conducts all documentation nowadays by digital video cameras and save the material on memory cards and hard drives until the material is prepared for server storing. From the original files that are being stored, staff edit and convert material to more user-friendly formats, such as mp4 audio and video files. These files are used for streaming, dissemination and research.

In many ways, except for the collection's size and distinctive content, the Centre's archival branch represents a typical Norwegian archive for traditional music and dance. Since the early 1970s, from the time when the Centre was founded by Professor emeritus Egil Bakka (Bakka, 1999, Fiskvik & Strandén, 2014), the staff have been represented by traditional music and dance performers with broad knowledge about their intangible heritage. The archival content, which is substantially based on Bakka's audio-visual fieldwork collection, has been subject to research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement and transmission carried out by a continuously growing number of staff with backgrounds from performing music and dance. In fact, most Norwegian folk archivists are performers (Aksdal *et al.*, 2013). This is also the case for the author of this text, who has completed an MA in traditional music with main emphasis on fiddle performance.

The audio-visual archival material has essential value for the existence of the Norwegian traditional music and dance. Such material has been documented in Norway ever since the first recorders were switched on in the beginning of the 1900's. In 1934, when the national broadcasting channel NRK purchased their first shellac recorders, there were already published more than hundred 78 rpm gramophone records with traditional music from Norway (Solberg, 1995). Regarding the content of the Centre's collection,

<sup>7</sup> *Stiftelsen for folkemusikk og folkedans* is an independent institution which is organised as a foundation. The main goals of the foundation are to promote, safeguard and carry on traditional Norwegian music and dance as an expression of cultural identity. The foundation is led by a *Board*, and in addition to a board, the foundation comprises a coordinating body for the field of Norwegian traditional music and dance: *The Council*, and an executive body or enterprise called *Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance*, from now on titled as the *Centre* in the text.

<sup>8</sup> Non-Governmental Organisation.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.folkemusikkogfolkedans.no/index.php/2015-07-31-09-06-08/boksamling-book-collection> (retrieved 23 April 2017).

traces go back to when Egil Bakka commenced fieldwork in 1966, via work made by various employees over the years, until today (Bakka, 1999; Mogstad, 2014). The collection also includes contributions made by external collectors. Most of the material is regularly used by communities in collaboration with archivists to safeguard variations or to revitalize traditions. At courses taught by the Centre, the archival material has been used as basis for studying dances and applying methods of how to learn specific dances from moving visual media sources (Stranden & Roland, 2014). Methods to safeguard and transmit different elements, for instance variation, are continuously under development, the purpose being to disseminate tacit knowledge through creating traditional situations of learning, also called “oral transmission” (Viken, 2014). The importance of being able to deep-dive into archival material is essential for performing musicians and dancers who want to add additional expressions to their repertoire. Through analysing audio-visual recordings, they can extract extra information regarding playing techniques, rhythmical understanding and other expressions that, at present can be found only in the archives (Mogstad, 2014; Viken, 2014). The archivists’ contributions in these situations are crucial. They can help the users with information about the material: supplying context and metadata, as well as informing about methods for how to interpret the content. In addition, one gains the very emphasis of having an archivist bringing life to the content of which she/he has broad and deep knowledge (Mogstad, 2014; Nilsson, 2016).

Many archives conduct research, and the archival material is an important source that enables the study of different phenomena within the field of traditional music and dance (Aksdal *et al.*, 2013). For instance, research on development, change and variation of microtonal and micro-rhythmical aspects in traditional music and dance are tasks crucially dependent of professional archival insight and access (e.g. Johansson, 2010; Stranden *et al.*, 2013; Stranden *et al.*, 2015). Regular documentation of the field is a necessity to perform such research, and this is another

task that archivists usually fulfil through different forms of fieldwork (Viken, 2014).

Substantial parts of the collection at the Centre have already been digitized by staff, as well as by external experts who have mostly been supervised by the staff. However, there are still years of digitization left. Permanent employed staff at the Centre have, throughout the years, earned specific expertise in digitizing, analysing and editing the material. Well-trained eyes, as well as ears, are essential qualities needed to be able to provide the best possible results regarding a digitization process. Lots of material are stored on formats which were applied with consumer apparatuses, for instance 4-track reel-to-reel recorders with recording speed down to 1-7/8 inches per second. Such tapes have often been used several times for recording, and to gain the best results, tests with several different players must be conducted. In addition, there are circumstances in which there have been done recordings with 2-track recorders using the same tapes as were applied with 4-track recorders. In such cases, there are often traces from the previous recording still attached to the tape. Anyone who has encountered this phenomenon knows how frustrating it may be; while enjoying a musical treasure, you suddenly find yourself interrupted by an “anomaly” of a recording, simultaneously played back reversed and in a different speed. It is an unpleasant feeling; the material seems to be corrupted, but then you start testing other players, and with some luck you can playback the tracks without infection from the “anomalies”. However, when the method of testing a variety of players does not work, you must make a bigger effort to extract material from the different parts of the tape, such as adjusting the position of the playback head, and this is time consuming, to put it mildly.

A recurring topic for discussion is whether digitization tasks should be given to external professionals instead of being handled by the internal staff at the Centre. The hours, which would be released to be able to work with other assignments, is frequently brought in as a strong and valid point. One could also argue that the

result of the digitization would be more satisfying; after all, staff working professionally with digitization must have education, experience and equipment to which are specialised for these specific tasks. There are, however, variables concerning the very process of digitization that not only legitimise, but even make the use of staff advisable, since they still hold the deep knowledge about the content of the material. My colleague, Ivar Mogstad, does not just advice this, he is critical to engaging technicians: “*I have become very critical towards leaving such work to sound technicians alone*” (Mogstad 77, 2014).

Synchronisation is one example of technical work, in which the use of staff holding specific competence on traditional music and dance is necessary for a reliable result. Through countless hours of music and dance analysis from videos and films, the staff at the Centre have gained skills for spotting synchronisation issues, in which sound and picture are out of step. These skills are priceless competences for restoring audio-visual material. Large parts of the collection have separated film and sound recordings, and to be able to sync them together, the staff must find reference points where the sound corresponds with the picture. In most cases, fieldworkers used clapperboards, which makes the task a whole lot easier. However, when the clapperboard for some reason is missing, the task becomes much more challenging. In such cases, the staff must understand the material with which they are working. Staff with background from dancing can look at the movements of the dancers and relate them to sounds of the dancefloor, while the musicians, for instance will look at fiddlers’ bowing gestures when the fiddler is visible within the frame. Quite often, however, archivists have knowledge and competence from both fields and they can do the task alone. This combination of knowledge provides more accurate results of the synchronisation tasks, even compared to using clapperboards as reference, when this option is present.

In the process of digitization, the metadata is crucially important for storage and categorisation. When metadata is missing, the material regarding

identification is close to worthless, given that no-one can recognise the content or context. Most archivists have routines for writing metadata while in the field, as well as typing it systematically into a catalogue system afterwards. Such systems for registering this specific material are often developed in close relation to archivists who are experts on content of which are collected. The main reason for this involvement from the archivists is, first and foremost, that the archivists are the main users, and that typology and other requirements must make sense in the daily archival work. The traditional music and dance archivists are also in many cases working as scholars (Aksdal *et al.*, 2013), and in archival research projects one would need to be able to do searches based on statistics and typology.

For about twenty years, the Centre has been using a relational database called *FIOL* for categorisation and registration of the material. This catalogue system was developed already in the 1980s by archivists from several institutions, including the Centre, and system developers situated at the traditional music archive at the university of Oslo. Throughout the 1990s the Nordic Association for Folk Dance Research developed and published a typology of all published Nordic folk dances. At the same time a typology for traditional music were discussed, and work was done to coordinate the two. They were integrated into the catalogue system, which at that time went by the name *NORFIOL*. In 2002, the responsibility for maintenance and development was taken over by the Swedish folk music archive *Folkmusikens hus*. Since then, one staff member at *Folkmusikens hus* has been responsible for support, upgrades, development and general maintenance; an issue that has caused insecurity among the users because of the factor of vulnerability. In addition, no-one has showed interest for continuing the legacy that is *FIOL* (Aksdal *et al.*, 2013; Viken, 2014).

Apart from the Centre, about twenty traditional music and dance archives are using *FIOL*, and many of those are situated in Norway. However, far from all such Norwegian archives are using the software; presently,

at least four different systems are in use. As stated earlier in the text, there exists no responsible or common organisation for tradition archives in Norway.<sup>10</sup> The reason for the missing organisation lies in the inconsistencies in affiliation and funding of the archives (Aksdal *et al.*, 2013). Two archives are attached to universities, nine are incorporated with museums, three are affiliated with county administrations, three are part of standalone institutions and one is attached to a private foundation (Aksdal *et al.*, 2013; Viken, 2014). This chaotic picture has been the main problem regarding cooperation, strategy, applying common standards and a division of labour to handle the many complex tasks. The very connection between the archives, is that they are all occupied with tasks concerning identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement and transmission of the Norwegian intangible cultural heritage that is music and dance. The archives safeguard unique and irreplaceable collections of the nation's music and dance heritage of Norway.

The challenges mentioned in the introduction, regarding private archives being ignored by official authorities, have generated increased attention the past few years. A safeguarding plan for Norwegian audio recordings was published in 1997<sup>11</sup> without much follow-up, and if nothing will happen, Norway will be in severe danger of losing essential memory of its national heritage. However, *The Official Norwegian Report on Culture* in 2014<sup>12</sup> brought the topic up for discussion, and Audun Kjus<sup>13</sup> and Ole Aastad Braaten<sup>14</sup> recently wrote newspaper chronicles which challenged the national responsibility for safeguarding this fragile ICH that is audio-visual archival material.<sup>15</sup> Opposition parties to the last two governments have

argued the need for the Ministry of Culture to decide which body to be given the national responsibility for private and audio-visual archives. During a national archive conference,<sup>16</sup> organized by the National Archives of Norway, the Director General of the Ministry of Culture, Ingrid Vad Nilsen, argued that the national responsibility shall be delegated and decided (Nilsen, 2017).

*The Ministry of Culture initiates a process in May 2017 to give a white paper for the official culture plan, as an answer to a demand for an update of the outdated white paper from 2003. The 2003 UNESCO Convention should be a natural part of this white paper, which should include important safeguarding measures for both practices in use and safeguarding of archive material (Stranden, in press).*

Nilsen suggested further to distinguish between the administrative archives and the cultural heritage archives, as being different areas (Nilsen, 2017). In 2017, the membership organization for local and private archives, *The Norwegian Association of Archives*,<sup>17</sup> emphasized focus on audio-visual archives in their working plan. A national body, coordinating the variety of different tasks among different organizations, as well as providing safe depots for storing the analogue and digital material, would be a much-needed solution for the private and audio-visual archives. The challenges concerning a common and certain solution for catalogue system also seems to be headed in the right direction. The National Library and the Norwegian Public Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) have recently started a pilot project on migrating FIOI databases from the collection of the National Library into a semantic web solution developed by NRK. The plan is to integrate all audio-visual material, from both archives of the National Library and NRK. The representatives for this project have argued at several

<sup>10</sup> Archive meetings, initiated by the Centre, had taken place much earlier before a network was founded in 2008. The "archive network" primarily organizes an annual seminar held at the Centre in Trondheim.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.nb.no/nbsok/nb/8e8e281ccd33a9989c2a952840c23d8f.nbdigital?lang=no#0> (retrieved 27th of April 2017).

<sup>12</sup> NOU 2013:4, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/nou-2013-4/id715404/> (retrieved 24th of April 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Senior Curator at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History.

<sup>14</sup> Chair of the Norwegian Council for Traditional Music and Dance.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.museumsnytt.no/nyheter/lyden-av-norge> (retrieved 24th of April 2017). <http://www.dagsavisen.no/nyemeninger/kulturarv-til-a-rødme-av-1.912110> (retrieved 26th of April 2017).

<sup>16</sup> <https://samdokdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/samdok-konferansen-2017-program-web-endig.pdf> (retrieved 21th of April 2017).

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.arkivforbundet.no/om/in-english/> (retrieved 26th of April 2017).

conferences and seminars<sup>18</sup>, that this solution also will be available for other archives at a later stage. The prospects are positive for finding solutions to challenges regarding organization of archives with audio-visual material, as well as a common solution for a system managing such archival content. Hopefully, the national responsible body is soon to be appointed, enhancing archive policy with measures for safeguarding the Norwegian national audio-visual memory.

### Acknowledgements

I thank Marit Stranden, Siri Mæland, Ivar Mogstad and Egil Bakka, who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted me writing this paper. I am also immensely grateful to Avery Charles Hugh Hall for his English correction.

### References

- AKSDAL, Bjørn; Lønnestad, Kari; Thedens, Hans-Hinrich. (2013). *Situasjonen for de norske folkemusikkarkivene*. Trondheim: NTNU-trykk.
- BAKKA, Egil. (1999). "Or Shortly They would be Lost Forever: Documenting for Revival and Research" In *Dance in the Field: Theory, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography*, edited by Theresa J. Buckland. New York: St. Martin's Press. 78-88.
- FISKVIK, Anne Margrete, Marit Stranden. (2014). *(Re)Searching the field: festschrift in honour of Egil Bakka*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- JOHANSSON, Mats. (2010). *Rhythm into Style: Studying Asymmetrical Grooves in Norwegian Folk Music*. PhD Dissertation. The University of Oslo.
- MOGSTAD, Ivar. (2014). "Dansemusikken i arkivet", In Fiskvik, Anne Margrete, Marit Stranden (ed.) *(Re)Searching the Field. Festschrift in Honour of Egil Bakka*. Bergen Fagbokforlaget. 67-80
- NILSEN, Ingrid Vad. (2017). *Arkivpolitikk i en sømløs forvaltning*. (presentation at the conference, SAMDOK, Scandic Oslo Airport, Gardermoen, February 1). Retrieved 24 April 2017.  
<https://samdokdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/i-vad-nilsen-arkivpolitikk-i-en-sc3b8mlc3b8s-forvaltning-tale-foredrag2.pdf>
- NILSSON, Mats. (2016). *Dokument dansar inte – om dans, arkivering, traditioner och kulturarv*. Stockholm: Arkitektkopia AB
- SOLBERG, Leiv. (1995). *Norwegian Folk Music Early Years on the Radio*. Grappa GRCD4061.
- Proposition No. 73 to the Storting (2005–2006) *Om samtykke til ratifikasjon av UNESCOs konvensjon av 17. oktober 2003 om vern av den immaterielle kulturarven*. Recommendation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 June 2006.  
<https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/stprp-nr-73-2005-2006-/id212715/>(retrieved 10 March 2017).
- STRANDEN, Marit. (2017). "Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Norway", in Laurier Turgeon (ed.) *Intangible Cultural Heritage in Motion: The First Ten Years of the ICH UNESCO Convention (2006-2016)*, Quebec City: Laval University Press, in press.
- STRANDEN, Marit, Roland, Stian. (2014). "Analyse og kroppsliggjøring av dansematerialet fra arkivet", In Fiskvik, Anne, Stranden, Marit (ed.) *(Re)Searching the Field - Festschrift in Honour of Egil Bakka*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget. 81-90
- STRANDEN, Marit, Siri Mæland, Sjur Viken and Ivar Mogstad. (2013). "Challenges in the revival process of Norwegian traditional dance and music from archive films". In *Dance ACTions 2013 - Traditions and Transformations*; Trondheim, Norway 8-11 June.
- STRANDEN, Marit, Sjur Viken and Ivar Mogstad. (2015). "Challenges in safeguarding variations in the Norwegian traditional dance and music". In Elsie Ivanich Dunin (Ed.), Kendra Stepputat, Sonja Zdravkova-Djeparoska, Ivana Katarinčić (Copy-editors). *28<sup>th</sup> Symposium of the ICTM study group on Ethnochoreology*. Korčula, Croatia, 7-17 July 2014.
- VIKEN, Sjur. (2014). *Fremtidens folkemusikkarkiv – digitale utfordringer*. Trondheim: NTNU-Trykk.
- UNESCO. (2003). *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Vol. 32nd Session)*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

<sup>18</sup> <http://lydarkiv.no/program-i-kortform/> (retrieved 26th of April 2017).

<http://www.folkemusikkogfolkedans.no/index.php/stiftinga-2/pressemeldingar/390-innholdsrikt-arkivseminar-og-representantskapsmote> (retrieved 26th of April 2017).