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What's Next for Digital Outreach and Archives: A Swedish Perspective

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Introduction

As the sole archivist at a small organization, I—like many of us—wear the proverbial "many hats." I conduct traditional arrangement and description tasks along with outreach efforts. I also work to increase the amount of collection material available online, through both collection description and digitization. I had long believed that simply putting more collection material online would increase discovery of our resources. That recently changed.

After a few years of diligently adding records to our online database, I became skeptical that outreach efforts were meeting our goals. More collection materials were available online, yet our reference requests remained the same. To find out why this was happening, I began using Google Analytics on our website and monitoring user data supplied by PastPerfect, our online database tool.[1]

The results were disheartening. Visitors were not interacting with our digital records the way I thought they would. Interestingly, the most popular search in our PastPerfect database was not a keyword indicative of our collection, but instead a random image search. I had thoroughly added detailed descriptions for each image, object, and collection, yet users were not searching by these terms. Instead, they opted to click a button and see a sampling of the items in our database. What did this mean? Were our visitors deficient at searching? Did we not have what they were looking for? Was our model of digital outreach broken?

To explore these questions, I decided to look to digital initiatives from Swedish libraries, archives, and museums. Why Sweden? It is a country that has many innovative and collaborative online projects, and one that I am familiar with because of the nature of my organization—a research center focusing on the Swedish-American experience. To undertake this study, I received funding from the Bicentennial Swedish-American Exchange Fund of the Swedish Institute to travel to Sweden and visit with various museums, libraries, and archives professionals. I was hoping to gain practical tips for digital project implementation and assessment, but instead I spent my time exploring the topic of digital outreach at a much more fundamental level.

Let me take you on the journey of my trip to see what we can learn from the digital projects of Swedish libraries, archives, and museums. But first, let us look briefly at the background of digital outreach for archives.

Background

The phenomenon of "Web 2.0" rocked the internet world in the early 2000s. As a brief definition, Web 2.0 is distinct from the implied, and retroactively named, Web 1.0 by its shift from static webpages to websites that allow for user participation and interaction—editing, tagging, uploading, sharing, commenting, blogging (think Wikipedia, Flickr, Blogger, Facebook

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[1] Google Analytics is a tracking tool you can add to webpages you manage that provides insights into how users are interacting with your website. PastPerfect is collection management software used by many museums. The Swenson Center uses PastPerfect to manage an online database of archival collection descriptions and photographs.

and the ever-growing number of social media sites).[2] Discussions of the impact of Web 2.0 on archives began in earnest in the late 2000s. In 2006, Richard Pearce-Moses gave his Society of American Archivists presidential address on the topic of archives in the digital era, arguing that as archivists we must have "one eye to the past" as well as "an eye to the future."[3] He stressed the idea that we must be committed to thinking about what is coming next at the intersection of archives and the digital world; we must be forward thinking and react to changes brought to us by the digital revolution, including changes in records creation, access to records, and how users interact with records.

Kate Theimer, of the much-heralded ArchivesNext blog, makes an important distinction between "Web 2.0" and "Archives 2.0."[4] She argues that Archives 2.0 goes beyond incorporating social media tools into archival outreach, and instead represents a new "version" of archives as a concept.[5] This concept reflects the "openness," "flexibility," and "user centered" nature of archives in the digital era.[6] With Archives 2.0, archivists must be more engaged with assisting users in interpreting collections (rather than simply finding materials) and must be cognizant of the new ways users are finding and using information.[7] It is these core ideas of an Archives 2.0 revolution that guided my thinking about the ways archives present materials digitally. When we adopt the principles of Archives 2.0, it is not enough to just put records into an online database and hope that users find them. Instead, we need to provide ways for users to interact with and use these on the web. Yes, we can utilize social media platforms, but we need to go beyond these platforms as well as.

Theimer's recent book, *A Different Kind of Web: New Connections between Archives and Our Users*, further highlights the tools we can use for engaging audiences on the web. This book stresses the important point that we need to listen to our users, understand their expectations, and learn from them.[8] Many of the case studies in the book focus on specific platforms and tools archives have employed to some success. Beyond these specific tools though, the major lesson of this book is that user interaction is what is shaping the next wave of archival interaction. Importantly, this book also looks at the changing nature of archives and the web from the perspective of the users themselves. How often are users' voices included in the archival literature? Listening to our users is as critical as any other aspect of archival outreach.

Some other important aspects of archival outreach include involve "distribution" and "openness."[9] In John Overholt's paper on the future of special collections, he argues that distribution through digitization is changing the landscape for special collections librarianship and the users librarians serve. Today, users are not physically coming to us in the numbers they

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[2] Many definitions of Web 2.0 exist. I follow the one that Tim O'Reilly gives in "What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software," September 30, 2005, http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html#mememap.

[3] Richard Pearce-Moses, "Janus in Cyberspace: Archives on the Threshold of the Digital Era," *The American Archivist* 70, (Spring/Summer 2007): 13.

[4] Kate Theimer, *ArchivesNext*, accessed January 5, 2015, http://www.archivesnext.com.

[5] Kate Theimer, "What Is the Meaning of Archives 2.0?" *The American Archivist* 74 (Spring/Summer 2011): 59.

[6] Ibid, 60.

[7] Ibid, 60.

[8] Kate Theimer, ed., *A Different Kind of Web: New Connections Between Archives and Our Users*, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011) and David S. Ferriero's foreword, x.

[9] John H. Overholt, "Five theses on the future of special Collections," RBM: *A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 14(1 2013): 15-20, http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:10601790.

once did. He argues that we should see this as a chance to reach new audiences "on their own turf" (on the web).[10] Additionally, archives should focus on providing open access to our materials to meet the missions of our organizations and our profession. Many archives, he recognizes, limit access to collections by not digitizing or freely disseminating digitized materials because of what he calls an "understandable excess of caution."[11] However, we need to take advantage of the benefits of Web 2.0/Archives 2.0 and provide unrestricted access to materials because "the easier we make it to use our collections, the more we visibly demonstrate their value."[12]

Robert Darnton also believes strongly in this idea of the "democracy of access" to archival collections on the web.[13] Darnton lobbied hard for a collaborative digital public library in the United States with several publications in the New York Review of Books in 2010 and 2011 touting the Google Books project as a step in the right direction and our country's need for a national public library.[14] His vision was democratic; emphasizing that by digitizing our nation's books, we can bring knowledge to anyone with an internet connection, breaking free from the traditional barriers to our cultural resources. His vision was for a digital public library to be the "digital equivalent of the Library of Congress," without having to travel to Capitol Hill.[15]

Indeed, Darnton's vision was realized by the launch of the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) in 2013.[16] The site acts as an aggregator of digital content from libraries, archives, and museums across the country and is constantly growing with new contributions. The DPLA's vision is somewhat utopian, harking back to the vision of our country's forefathers that "knowledge is the common property of mankind" and the DPLA seeks to provide equal access to that knowledge.[17] The initiative has been successful in reaching this goal by pulling together digitized content from various institutions across the nation and making them freely available in one open-access, online hub. Indeed, anyone with an internet connection has access to these cultural resources. Additionally, the DPLA employs powerful tools that allow users to browse exhibits, see collections by location, and explore a timeline. The DPLA is moving toward greater access and interpretation by fully embracing Web 2.0 tools and insights.

Europeana, much like the DPLA, is also embracing these tools and methods of access. Europeana is a collective source for providing access to Europe's digital cultural resources through a web portal and also utilizes exhibits, maps, and other tools for exploring. Its mission is to "create new ways for people to engage with their cultural history, whether it's for work,

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[10] Ibid, 15.
[11] Ibid, 16.
[12] Ibid, 16.
[13] Kate Theimer, *A Different Kind of Web,* 310.
[14] Including, but not limited to Robert Darnton, "A Library Without Walls" NYR blog, October 4, 2010, http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/oct/04/library-without-walls/;
Robert Darnton, "How Google Can Save America's Books," NYR blog, November 23, 2010, http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/nov/23/how-google-can-save-americas-books/.
[15]Robert Darnton, "A Library Without Walls."
[16] Robert Darnton, "The National Digital Public Library is Launched!" *The New York Review of Books,* April 25, 2013, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/apr/25/national-digital-public-library-launched/.
[17] Robert Darnton, quoting Thomas Jefferson in "A Library Without Walls."

learning or pleasure."[18] It is important to note that this mission emphasizes engagement, collective ownership ("their cultural history") and access to content regardless of purpose (you do not have to be a scholar).

Additionally, the DPLA and Europeana have succeeded in moving beyond the traditional archive's approach of the nice, white, search box. Frequently, an archives' presence on the web has meant entering keywords into a search box to search finding aids or a database of digital records. Like my organization's experience with our PastPerfect database, users frequently want more options for browsing materials, rather than searching for them.

This problem is explained in greater detail by Pelle Snickars, a professor and researcher in digital humanities at Umeå University in Sweden (and someone I had the opportunity to speak with on my trip). In his article "Against Search," Snickars argues that archivists need to move away from the idea of "search" as the answer to providing archival access.[19] Instead, he says, we need to follow the medium to provide greater options for users to browse and interact more organically with our collections, rather than assuming that users already know what they are looking for when they come to our website or digital platform. The DPLA and Europeana are already making strides in this way, and other archival organizations should take note of their methods.

Now, let me point out what this paper is not. This paper is not about incorporating social media tools, does not address specific technicalities of building and managing digital content, and is not about the use of metric tools to measure success of digital projects. Instead, this paper is more of a call to action for the need to look to what is coming next in the digital sphere for archives and related organizations. It is about listening to audiences, foreseeing needs, and getting in front of coming trends. It is about being bold in trying new ideas and not be afraid of failing or not doing "enough." It looks at these ideas through the lens of one country's recent projects.

The Trip

During the summer of 2014, I traveled by train around Sweden—from Göteborg to Umeå—and visited with 20 individuals in the cultural heritage sector. I spoke with librarians, archivists, educators, technical staff, and academic researchers about their ideas of what is next for digital collections access and outreach initiatives. I spent at least an hour at each facility, often times a full day, and spoke with at least one employee.

I will not attempt to outline all of the projects and activities discussed at the organizations I visited. Instead, I have picked a few standout projects that can shape the conversation of where we, as archival organizations, are currently in the sphere of digital outreach, and where we might be going next.

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[18] "About Us," Europeana Professional, http://pro.europeana.eu/about?utm_source=portalmenu&utm_medium=portal&utm_campaign=Portal%2Bmenu.

[19] Pelle Snickars, "Against Search—Toward A New Computational Logic of Media Accessibility," 2011, 3. http://pellesnickars.se/2011/10/against-search-towards-a-new-computational-logic-of-media-accessibility/. (Also available in print in *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*, eds. John Hartley, Jean Burgess, Axel Bruns. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

A Fairly Traditional Approach

My first stop was Stockholm, Sweden. The capital and largest city in Sweden is home to innumerable cultural organizations. I went first to Kungliga Biblioteket, the National Library of Sweden. The National Library is faced with a challenging legal mandate to collect all printed material in Sweden. This includes books, newspapers, maps, catalogs, advertisements, and has also expanded to music, TV, film, radio, and now electronic records.[20] This means that every day, an extraordinary amount of material is received by the National Library, including every single printed newspaper in the country.

Currently, a major project for the library involves digitizing their newspaper collections, a project called Digidaily.[21] In addition to the copy of the newspapers that the National Library receives, publishers also send a copy of the newspapers to a center in Northern Sweden for digitization.[22] At the time of my visit, the library had digitized about 6 million newspaper pages and was just about to reveal the Digidaily searchable database. Unfortunately, I was not able to view the final database as they were still finalizing the technical details and setting up the computer access stations. These stations would not have internet access nor USB drives, to limit a researcher's ability to copy large amounts of information. Digidaily represents a fairly traditional digital project: the library identified the collection for digitization and created all aspects of the project in-house, including the resulting searchable hub.

Unfortunately, there is limited access to this digital project. The searchable hub is only available in-house, due to the library's cautious (some would say, overly cautious)[23] approach to copyright issues. As with the physical newspapers, researchers must make their way to the National Library in person in order to view the digitized newspapers. The project seems to be missing one of the main values of digitization—increased access through the web.

Many countries, including Norway, France, and the Netherlands, are digitizing their cultural heritage and making these resources available widely on the internet, without in-house limitations on access.[24] The difference here is that these countries have large government support for their digital projects. These governments pursued agreements with publishers and copyright holders to ensure that as much content as possible can be made available digitally.[25] For example, the Bibliothèque nationale de France (National Library of France) has hundreds of partnerships with publishers to make contemporary works, still under copyright, available through their digital public library.[26]

Regrettably, Sweden does not have the same government support for their digitization projects at this time. When I spoke with Torsten Johansson, the head of the newspapers, radio and television division of the National Library, he was optimistic that the restrictions governing

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[20] "Legal Deposits," National Library of Sweden, last modified March 28, 2013, http://www.kb.se/english/services/deposits/.

[21] Learn more about the project at the Digidaily blog, http://digidaily.blogg.kb.se/.

[22] Torsten Johansson, interview with the author, June 2, 2014, Kungliga Biblioteket (National Library of Sweden), Stockholm, Sweden.

[23] Per Wirtén, "In i dimman," *Expressen*, June 12, 2013, http://www.expressen.se/kultur/in-i-dimman/.

[24] Per Wirtén "In i dimman."

[25] "Digitizing Policy," National Library of Norway, http://www.nb.no/English/The-Digital-Library/Digitizing-policy.

[26] "Legal Issues in Mass Digitization" "Legal Issues in Mass Digitization: A Preliminary Analysis and Discussion Document," United States Copyright Office, Office of the Register of Copyrights, October 2011, http://copyright.gov/docs/massdigitization/USCOMassDigitization_October2011.pdf, Appendix F, page 2.

access to their digital collections might change in a few years.[27] I do hope that the library and its users can successfully advocate for support from the government and publishers in order to increase access to these digital collections. For now, the digitization quality is phenomenal, but the access is lacking.

Giving Users What They Want

In contrast, the Umeå University Library is engaged in a digital project that is a stellar example of providing access to users. This initiative is called eBooks On Demand (EOD), and it available through a partnership of libraries, including several other Swedish libraries.[28] I spoke with Christer Karlsson, a librarian with the Special Collections of the Umeå University Library, about this initiative. When I visited, Umeå University Library was one of about 40 participating libraries. EOD users can order a book for digitization by paying a nominal set-up fee, and then a specified rate per page. At the time of my visit, the rate was about 100 SEK (approximately $15) to set up the project and then 1.5 SEK (approximately $0.23) a page.[29] Users are able to place orders for an eBook directly through Libris, the online library catalog. Importantly, only the first person to request the digitization pays this fee. Then, the book is made available free online for anyone else to download.

Of course, this service is only available for books outside of copyright, but it has been very successful thus far. The Umeå University Library receives about 1-2 requests per week, which they can fulfill in about three days. The most accessed book from the project had 21,000 downloads at the time of my visit, and that number is likely higher now. What I found most interesting about this initiative is an observation Karlsson made about the selection of books for digitization. He noted that the books users had chosen for digitization were ones the librarians would never have chosen to digitize themselves.[30]

This project embodies the ideas of the Archives 2.0 revolution (albeit in a library setting) by focusing "openness" and being "user centered."[31] Instead of following a build-it-and-they-will-come approach to digitizing collection materials, users are telling the library/archive what materials they would like to see digitized. Archives could learn from this model of letting users direct, or at least influence, digitization decisions (while also keeping users grounded in the realities of time and cost constraints, of course). Here, libraries involved in EOD have flipped the question from "what do we have that people want to see?" to "what do people like to see, and how can we make that more accessible to them?"

What if Users Don't Know What They Want?

The digital projects I have discussed thus far, and likely many of the digital projects underway at libraries and archives today, rely on the fundamental assumption that users will search the collections. The Digidaily project centers around a search function and EOD assumes

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[27] Torsten Johansson, interview with the author, June 2, 2014, Kungliga Biblioteket (National Library of Sweden), Stockholm, Sweden.

[28] Other Swedish libraries include the National Library of Sweden and the Uppsala University Library. Find all participating libraries here: http://books2ebooks.eu/en/content/european-network-libraries.

[29] Christer Karlsson, interview with the author, June 5, 2014, Umeå University Library, Special Collections, Umeå, Sweden. At the time of my visit, the exchange rate from Swedish kronor to U.S. dollars was about 1 SEK ≈ .15 USD.

[30] Christer Karlsson, interview with the author.

[31] Kate Theimer, "What Is the Meaning of Archives 2.0?" 60.

people will request digitization of searched-for books. Importantly, though, eBooks on Demand also has an option to browse and download already digitized books.[32]

As Pelle Snickars notes, "Search the Collections" has become the default method for interacting with archival collections online.[33] Unfortunately, search relies on the underlying assumption that users already know what they are looking for when they encounter the collection. There are not many options for browsing or stumbling upon sources in digital archival collections currently, though this is increasingly changing. Undoubtedly, a researcher engaged in browsing would find some source they could not have searched for by wandering the stacks reading spines of books and boxes or flipping through finding aids. It is important to think about how we can allow users to have this same experience digitally.

When I spoke with Pelle Snickars, he argued that libraries and archives need to move beyond this notion of search and rethink our archival interfaces. Snickars has written widely on these topics of search studies, digital humanities, and new media.[34] In our conversation, we discussed the Digidaily project at the National Library of Sweden. His stance is that the National Library is not taking enough risks to make the digitized collection available online. While recognizing copyright concerns, he believes the library/archives community, along with researchers, could put more pressure on governing bodies to allow for greater access.[35] Issues involving advocacy are common for libraries and archives, but are even more important now as we strive to make an impact in the digital sphere.

Snickars also stressed the need for libraries and archives to direct our projects to the public from the onset, instead of taking what looks and feels like an internal portal and making it available to the public.[36] Europeana and the DPLA are successful examples of this. These web portals are user friendly and offer several browse options along with search.[37]

Karin Nilsson, head of the Digital Unit of the Royal Armory Museum, also deplores this idea of "search." When we spoke, she argued that users should be able to "surf, not search" collections to really understand collections.[38] She has noticed that people are interested in navigating information through a variety of ways. Interestingly, Nilsson touched on the very thing I had noticed with our own collection database. At her museum, she noticed people were searching for the letter "A." This told her that people just wanted to see something, an example of what was available, not a specific image or object. This is similar to my experience with users using the "random image search option" in our PastPerfect database. This further illustrates that browsing options are important and "search" may not always be the best method.

At the Royal Armory Museum, Nilsson's department has created a massive database of open-access high-resolution images of their collection materials.[39] At the time of our conversation, the museum had about 90,000 museum objects photographed in their database and

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[32] EOD eBooks browse options, accessed January 6, 2015, https://search.books2ebooks.eu/Browse/Home/.

[33] Pelle Snickars, "Against Search," 1.

[34] See various articles and books at http://pellesnickars.se.

[35] Pelle Snickars, interview with the author, June 5, 2014, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden.

[36] Ibid.

[37] "Exploring Europeana," Europeana, http://www.europeana.eu/portal/usingeuropeana_explore.html.

[38] Karin Nilsson, interview with the author, June 4, 2014, Livrustkammaren och Skoklosters slot med Stiftelsen Hallwylska Museet (Royal Armory, Skokloster Castle and The Hallwyl Museum), Stockholm, Sweden.

[39] Search the museum's collection at http://emuseumplus.lsh.se/.

had recently won the American Alliance of Museum's MUSE award for "Open" in 2014.[40] Nilsson stressed the importance of this "openness" to their collections as a basic mission of the organization. The Royal Armory Museum charges admission, which makes digital access to these cultural objects even more important. They have also put these images into Wikimedia Commons, allowing for greater access and re-use of the images.

Nilsson's view of the future for archives is similar to that of John Overholt's. She thinks that archives need to move in the direction of greater distribution and access to our collections through open digital projects. As archivists and collections managers, we are seeing a shift in how users look for, access, and interact with our materials. It is important to respond to this digital shift and make our collections as available as possible for our users and potential new users. As Nilsson simply put it: "Why keep things if they are not accessible? If no one knows they exist, they won't use them."[41]

Conclusion

After two weeks, and many more conversations than I have discussed here, I left Sweden without tips and tricks for digital project implementation and assessment. Instead, I left with the feeling that my organization was missing the mark for creating a truly engaging web platform for our users. I had many more questions about how to engage audiences and facilitate their interpretation of collections, instead of just increasing access to these materials. My organization had been following the fairly traditional "build-it-and-they-will-come" method for designing digital projects. However, after my conversations at the Umeå University library, the Royal Armory Museum, and others, I recognized the need to give users an avenue to provide input on what digital projects to undertake. We need to provide a method to allow users to provide feedback and input in our digital initiatives.

Additionally, we need to provide a space for users to interact with our materials to make sense of our content. We need to provide methods for our users to see collection materials, even if they do not know exactly what it is they want to see. We need more browsing options, perhaps like Europeana or the DPLA options of maps, timelines, and exhibitions.[42] We need methods for our users to interact, manipulate, and make sense of our materials beyond just keyword searching for them.

Importantly, though, we should not be overwhelmed by all the options available to us, or by the idea that we are not doing enough. Richard Pearce-Moses iterates this point well, quoting his friend Fynnette Eaton as saying, "Whatever we do, we may fail; but if we do nothing, failure is guaranteed." Archivists need to recognize the tools available to us and think creatively about their potential. We need to not be afraid of failure, but instead be willing to try something new to reach our goals.

As Karin Nilsson said in our interview, we need to make certain we are working in the same direction. The standards may change, but our efforts will be together.43 Cooperation, among other archivists, and between archivists and users, is certainly one aspect of what is coming next.

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[40] MUSE awards are given to galleries, libraries, archives, or museums who demonstrate achievement in digital media, particularly in engaging audiences.
[41] Karin Nilsson, interview with the author.
[42] "Digital Public Library of America," accessed January 10, 2015, http://dp.la.
[43] Karin Nilsson, interview with the author.

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Appendix 1: Individuals Interviewed
Torsten Johansson, Kungliga Biblioteket (National Library of Sweden), Stockholm, Sweden
Krister Östlund, Uppsala University Library, Uppsala, Sweden
Dag Blanck, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden
Elisabet Sandström, Riksarkivet (National Archives), Stockholm, Sweden
Karin Borgkvist Ljung, Riksarkivet (National Archives), Stockholm, Sweden
Katarina Ahlberg, Riksarkivet (National Archives), Stockholm, Sweden
Karin Nilsson, Livrustkammaren och Skoklosters slot med Stiftelsen Hallwylska Museet ([Royal Armory, Skokloster Castle and The Hallwyl Museum](#)), Stockholm, Sweden
Agneta Stenberg, Umeå University Library, The Research Archives, Umeå, Sweden
Göran Larsson, Umeå University Library, The Research Archives, Umeå, Sweden
Christer Karlsson, Umeå University Library, Special Collections, Umeå, Sweden
Pelle Snickars, Umeå University and HUMlab, Umeå, Sweden
Mathias Nilsson, The Swedish Migration Center, Karlstad, Sweden
Kristin Mikalsen, The Swedish Migration Center, Karlstad, Sweden
Eva Hedencrona, Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt, Gothenburg, Sweden
Lars Bergman, Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt, Gothenburg, Sweden
Daniel Sjöberg, Landsarkivet i Göteborg, Gothenburg, Sweden

Appendix 2: Interview Questions
These were used to spur conversation at the Swedish cultural heritage institutions. Not every question was asked of every institution. Many times, one of these questions prompted a conversation to move in an entirely different, but equally useful, direction and the remainder of the questions were not explored.

- What are your current digital goals? How are you working toward these goals?
- How does your organization work to increase access, use, and discoverability of resources?
- What are your past, current, and future digital outreach and digitization plans?
- How have you succeeded with implementing new and innovative digital projects?
- How do you address implementation? Access and control?
- What are some barriers you face to these projects? How do you overcome these barriers?
- How do you deal with copyright issues?
- How do you feel about open access?
- Does your online access differ from your in-house access?
- How do you utilize new methods to engage audiences?
- Do you feel increased access to digital collections changes the research process? What has been your experience with researchers and digital collections?