

Industrial documentations – a collaborative way to build knowledge together

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Background

Many of the presentations on this seminar deals with how to physically preserve industrial buildings and large machinery. Our experience are that there is a perspective that needs to complement these ways of preserving and documenting. Factories are built on commercial industrial sites with an economic value. Industrial buildings are therefore often being torn down and replaced by another buildings that better fits the needs of the business in mind. And the heavy machinery also have an economic value and are being sold to factories in, for example Eastern Europe and China. More and more seldom are physical buildings and machinery from our time available for preservation.

These days source material are not preserved in archives as they use to be from industrial companies. In Sweden a lot of industries presented their manufacturing and history in lavish bindings during the first half of the 1900s but not now.

Therefore, we need other ways of documenting our contemporary industry, its processes, infrastructure, work, machinery, systems and buildings. And actually, we know quite well how the mills during the 1700s and 1800s worked and look like, but what are we going to know about manufacturing of today in the future? How can memories and stories of today's industry be preserved to future generations? And how will the cultural heritage from the modern industry look like in the future?

Already in 1982 there was a conference in Sweden with the Nordic countries about conservation issues and the cultural heritage at the mining industry. At that conference there was a suggestion to make a handbook about documentation of mining industries. 30 years later there was a conference concentrated to conservation of heavy machinery and in 2007 again Jernkontoret, The Swedish Steel Producers Association, invited to a conference about the cultural heritage from the mining industry and particularly about knowledge and memories from the modern steel industry. At the end of that conference it was decided that a pilot study would be done, to investigate how a modern industry could be documented in collaboration between cultural heritage organizations and industrial companies. An important task was to try new methods of documentation.

A project committee was created at The Swedish Steel Producers Association with members from the association, National Museum of Science and Technology, The County Museum of Gävleborg and from the Swedish National Heritage Board.

Documenting the Hofors mill

The pilot study was conducted at the Ovako plant in Hofors in 2008-2009. The documenting team was built with members from National Museum of Science and Technology, The County Museum of Gävleborg, The Swedish Steel Producers Association and retired employees from the plant. Two photographers, one from National Museum of Science and Technology and one from Ovako, participated.

The goal of the pilot study was to collect material in a documentation report, and that the pilot study could be a starting point for a manual. The questions formulated for the pilot study were:

What methods can be used to document the modern steel industry?

How can many actors interact around a documentation project?

How can the results be presented in an educational way?

What is specific in terms of engineering and manufacturing for the industrial plant that are documented?

The team were divided in groups of 2-3 persons and appointed different parts of the plant, the steel mill, the cogging roll mill, the pipe mill, the ring mill and the cold working mill. And beside that there was also an archival inventory performed at the historical archive of the plant and at the Municipality archive.

Initially, a review was made of relevant documents to the various selected parts of the plant, such as floor plans and drawings of the production equipment. The documentation methodology used can best be described by the expression “walking-talking” in which the company representative showed the museum staff around and told us about the manufacturing processes. Through this approach, we could start building a skeleton of knowledge about the plant, knowledge focused on manufacturing processes.

All images from the pilot study are stored at National Museum of Science and Technology, which also acquired a number of objects from the production. Other documentation material are archived at National Museum of Science and Technology and The County Museum of Gävleborg.

Apart from that material the pilot study resulted in a book, seminars, an exhibition, a lot of media attention and some new projects.

Collaboration as a method

In the beginning of the pilot study preparations for the documentation was carried out jointly between the actors. The mixed groups proved very good at the documentation. Checklists were developed so that the groups followed the same structure. To the first meetings Ovako had prepared archive material, brochures and compilations. Descriptions of processes and production equipment could be done with this material as a basis and through discussions in the working groups and with employees. Although the days in field only was five, we gathered much more material than we could have predict thanks to the different skills in the team.

The pilot study showed us how important it is to establish and prepare a documentation. In Hofors was the directors of Ovako involved from the beginning, which facilitated the

planning and implementation. Besides the cooperation in the field work and the mixed working groups as a collaboration method it proved fruitful that different actors at local, regional and national levels cooperated.

Participating organizations

The pilot study showed that there are many advantages to cooperate in a documentation project. To document in teams with representatives from the industry and cultural heritage organizations gave many results in a short time during the field-work in Hofors. The knowledge of the business representatives of the production, its processes and equipment were crucial for the documentation. At the place where the industry is located there are often skills and resources to make use of, like historical associations, municipality and schools. In Hofors, we had close contact with several associations, the union and the municipality.

At the regional level, the County Museum was represented. At the national level were involved, besides from National Museum of Science and Technology and The Swedish Steel Producers Association, the Swedish National Heritage Board.

The pilot study showed that the more people involved in a documentation project, the greater distribution and the knowledge built up and collected gets to several to share.

Industrial documentation - How and Why?

What's in it for us?

The experience of the pilot study, not least the benefits of documenting in mixed groups, made The Swedish Steel Producers Association wanted to move forward with a handbook for documentation of manufacturing. After discussions at a workshop on developing a handbook determined that there would be an inspirational and methodological book, not just a book of methods, and that the book would focus on attracting industries that wish to document. One year ago, we published the book *Industrial Documentation – How and Why?* with the two of us as editors.

In the first chapter we highlight the various benefits of documenting activities and what one can do with such a project and documentary material. The most important things we identified for industrial companies was these three:

- 1) **History Marketing:** Using its history in marketing a company can highlight themselves as stable over time and therefore a credible company with a clear identity, go-ahead spirit, ambition and continuity. A documentation material can be a good help and be a tool for history marketing campaigns in the future.
- 2) **Make the contemporary society visible:** In the case of Ovako in Hofors was one of the main insights of the management that there is a more direct value in documenting the processes well and keeping good order in the drawing systems. Anyone who takes the time to define and describe their approach so that they are comprehensible to outsiders will get perspectives on their own business.

The knowledge of what the company does and stands for as a record result has a value both internally, in the organization, and externally, in the meeting with the community at large. Common perceptions about what a particular place of work has been, what it

is and where it is heading creating consensus among employees – a “we-feeling”. It is the foundation of a strong corporate culture and contributes pride in the workplace and their own professional skills. One such company is obviously a resource in periods of prosperity and expansion, but perhaps even more so when the business face challenges. The interaction between business and society is not obvious visible by itself, it needs to be formulated and clarified both for the society and for its own employees. Documentations can play an important role to present the company and its production in a broader context, in a social context.

- 3) Find employees in the future: Through the museums, the industry can reach a young audience that will be future employees. Through collaborations of documentations, a different picture can highlight how it is to work in the industry which may differ a lot from the image that is served by the mass media in Sweden. It may even be tempting to work in the industry.

Industrial documentation - How and Why?

How can you do it?

The second major chapter focuses on how a documentation in a collaborative way can be made. In the manual we describe how:

- 1) The benefits of different forms of cooperation, not only between a cultural institution and an industry, but also with other organizations in the area, such as the municipality, pensioners associations, educational associations, local history societies, schools and trade unions. Participation creates commitment, and also means that the knowledge about the project can be disseminated.
- 2) The importance of preparing the documentation properly and what to consider in this work, such as the issues, the purpose, the perspectives, the limitations and anchoring at the workplace that will be documented.
- 3) The methods of documentation. In this part we go in quite tangible and describes practical methods and tools to make use of during the documentation.
- 4) A documentation material that ends up in the researcher’s bookshelves or basement is often, in the long term, a lost material. Ensure before the documentation that the created and collected material can be preserved and made available at an existing archive with resources to take care of the material in a professional manner. This will ensure that the material will be preserved and can be used in the near or distant future. To make the material really accessible the archive should at least have their archival holdings searchable on the internet. Several archive databases support today even publishing of scanned documents.
- 5) During the documentation you also need to make source-critical reflections and attach these in conjunction with archiving. These are a help and a support for those who may want to make use of the material in the future.

Target groups

This book is aimed primarily to business managements, cultural heritage organizations and local associations. To get more people involved in the cooperation and to distribute the book

to as many people as possible even more organizations and a further branch organization from the manufacturing industry was engaged to write the book.

Like the pilot study, the manual was developed in a broad cooperation with regional and national organizations, and the industrial company who have been involved in the pilot study, plus Swedish Railway Museum, The Museum of Work, Swedish Forest Industries Federation, the Centre for Business History, an industry curator with a private company and a researcher in the history of technology.

Conclusion

Finally, one can say that we with this book wants to create a tool for cultural heritage organizations to develop methods of documenting, to use both to initiate a documentation of an industrial plant and then perform this documentation.

We want to highlight the benefits that documentations can have both for the cultural heritage, for the society and for the industry and thereby hopefully creating incentives so that more people wants to document industrial activities in Sweden.

We want to encourage and facilitate cooperation between industries and museums.

And hopefully contribute to a new paradigm for industrial documentations and actually highlight the industrial activities as something to be pride of, at least at a local level. There are plenty of places around Sweden where it is carried out industrial activities and developments at the international cutting-edge level, but very seldom anyone pay attention to this. Work in the industry has received a bad connotation so that the activity does not create the pride that often would be warranted. The industry in the future depend on that people want to work there, want to settle down in the small industrial towns far from everything that can attract in big cities.

Biography

Peter Du Rietz is a curator at the National Museum of Science and Technology in Sweden where he works with documentation and collecting issues.

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