

Guiding the unknown traveler in a land not fully known

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Abstract

In trying to give broad access to heterogeneous resources, cultural heritage institutions face mediation challenges due to their knowledge organisation (KO) systems not always being suited to meet expectations on digital services.

This study is part of a thesis on the histories and inter-institutional character of KO in archaeology. This poster presents initial observations on the mediation strategies used by institutions to bridge the gap between contemporary users and digital services based on KOSs with deep historical roots.



Empirical context

The archive of the Swedish National Heritage Board (NHB). The finding aids available through the National Archive Database and user interface for the e-archive.

The special library at the NHB with its main discovery system and a digitalised legacy sheet catalogue.

The Swedish History museum, its current and legacy version of the service "Search the collections".

Methods and material

60 (so far) textual web resources, length range 100-3000 words.

- service home pages
- about pages
- subject guides
- search instructions

3 (so far) key informant interviews

Data collection and analysis is conducted as an iterative process moving between text collection, analysis and gap-filling interviews.

Some initial observations

The unknown traveler

"The people we think use our archival material are explorers. They want to search with breadth and depth [...] But we also have this other aspect, the ones that want to search for a specific site and only know about that. That is perhaps a person searching in the context of their profession"

"We have not performed any user studies"

- Interview with representatives of the NHB archive (2022-08-29)

The land not fully known

"Changing practice over the years makes it hard to give precise instructions - you will have to experiment."

- About page of the digitalised sheet catalogue Katalog1974 (2023-06-19)

"10 meters next to the train tracks' how do you create coordinates for that?"

- Interviewee at the NHB archive (2022-08-29) on the difficulties of linking their topographical information with the geographical information system of the Historical Environment Record.

Mediation

Qualifying information about the complexities

"Every 20th work in the catalogue is indexed. The work you are looking for may be in between two indexed works." (Katalog1974)

- Linking and crossreferencing
- Instructions on search techniques
- Instructions to specific material e.g. reports:

E-archive*

*definitely if they are more recent than 2019, maybe if they are digitally born after 2013, or of any age if they happen to have been digitised.

Library catalogue**

**if they have been published and are not older than the 1970.

Archive***

***if they are older than 2019 and you know the county, parish and place name of the site.

Initial conclusions

When the navigational experience of librarians and archivists is absent, institutions mediate between KOS and users in a number of ways. These strategies include built in features and work arounds such as direct links between systems and the

gradual introduction of persistent identifiers. Most prominent however, are the presence of accompanying instructions and guides. These include directions on which systems may be searched for particular resources and the scope and peculiarities of specific

systems. These instances of mediation highlight the need for better understanding of the underlying KO histories of modern heritage services. A need felt both when developing new services and when guiding users through existing ones.



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