

How collaboration and sharing has made OAIS compliant archiving at (very) small archives possible

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ABSTRACT

Can small archives with limited budgets and only a handful of employees do professional OAIS compliant digital archiving? In Denmark 26 small public archives have joined forces and found a way to do it. This poster describes how it is made possible through close collaboration and sharing within a network organization.

KEYWORDS

Digital Archives, infrastructure, small archives, collaboration, network organization, digital preservation, community, institutional challenges

1 INTRODUCTION

Not only does Denmark have a large public sector, but its archival legislation is also one of the most extensive of its kind. The legislation specifies in detail what, how and when to archive and it gives far-reaching powers to the archives. This is particularly true for born-digital material [1].

Danish Public archives carry out thorough appraisal of all born-digital material created by administrative bodies from the public sector. Sometimes appraisal is done as early as when an IT-system is commissioned. For materials that should be archived, producers are obliged by law to submit data to a public archive in a format decided by the archive, with a deadline set by the archive. All this is done at the cost of the producers. With regular submissions approximately every five years and a national archival strategy based on normalization before submission, it is evident that the archival responsibility enforced by law on producers is significant in terms of both extent and resources needed. This is in many ways an ideal situation for the archives as it gives them the power to enforce archival interests and ensure that material of value is transferred to archives for long-term preservation.

The empowerment of archives combined with the large public sector results in large quantities of data to archive and a functioning archiving process that ensures regular submissions of data. Submissions are made to public archives, which in a Danish Context covers all archives operating under the Danish Archival Act.[2] The largest archive is The Danish National Archives[3],

but the landscape of public archives in Denmark also covers small public archives at municipality level. These are run independently by each municipality and often with a limited budget, and only a couple of employees.

2 CHALLENGE

Archival legislation empowers public archives and gives them authority to place demands on producers. At the same time this places demands on the archives themselves. It requires the archives to do their part of the archiving, which is no small task. Public archives are obliged to do appraisals, specify how each information package should be created and transferred, validate transferred information packages and ingest them into archival storage, do preservation planning, manage collections, provide access etc.. In short they have to run an OAIS compliant archive.

This responsibility lies on all public archives that act under the Danish Archives Act. Being a public archive they per se commit to run an OAIS compliant archive. This is no insignificant task. It requires volume, expertise and resources and is challenging for all archives and even more so for small public archives with limited budget and size.

3 THE SOLUTION: COLLABORATION AND SHARING

3.1 Facing The Challenge Together

Small public archives all face the same challenge of being obligated to run a full scale OAIS, but lacking the volume, expertise and budget to do so. To this end, seven small public archives joined forces in 2007 and created a network organization, in which the small archives collaborate closely and take advantage of economies of scale. The network, named NEA (Network Electronic Archiving)[4] is located at Copenhagen City Archives, which is the largest member archive in NEA. The Network has grown steadily since 2007 and now comprises 26 small public archives.

3.2 The NEA Concept

NEA is based on close collaboration and sharing. The basic idea is that specialized knowledge, expertise and facilities are shared.

Instead of each archive employing specialized staff and building its own infrastructure for preservation, archives share this via NEA.

Member archives of NEA are run individually and each archive is responsible for its own business. However, the day-to-day operations are supported by NEA to the extent needed by each archive.

At the heart of NEA is a shared group of experts that have the experience, skills and expertise needed to do OAIS Compliant archiving. Members can draw on the expertise and knowledge of the shared staff as needed on a consultancy basis. NEA staff support member archives in all aspects of their day-to-day operations including appraisals, negotiations with producers, ingest and access. Each member has one primary consultant but can draw on all experts as needed.

NEA also provides a shared archival infrastructure, which means that each archive avoid having to make their own set-up. Management, archival storage and preservation planning are handled centrally in NEA, but data is clearly separated. Each archive only has access to its own data. Handling of data is contractually agreed on between NEA and each member archive in separate data processing agreements.

In addition to the services and support offered via NEA, member archives have a strong community where archives benefit and learn from each other. Because all member archives are using the same infrastructure collaboration is easy and often successful. Member archives can directly implement or build on experiences from other member archives.

3.3 The NEA Business Model

Because member archives are run individually it is essential that the solution is flexible and adaptable. NEA offers different “service packages” with varying levels of support. Member archives can tailor the support from NEA to their own individual situations based on their needs, their ambitions and their own level of expertise. By buying into service packages, member archives can get the expertise and facilities they need to create and complete their own OAIS compliant archive.

4 PROOF OF CONCEPT

In 2017 NEA celebrates its 10th anniversary. Looking back at the past 10 years NEA has proved its worth, having more than tripled in size. TBs of born-digital material have been archived and the small archives are doing professional digital archiving. This is only possible because of the network organization and the extensive collaboration and sharing.

In the 10 years NEA has existed, similar network organizations for small public archives have been formed in Denmark. This means NEA is no longer the only network of its kind in the country. However, it is the first of its kind and it is by far the largest.

The emergence of other networks only adds to the success of NEA. It shows that the basic concept of collaboration, sharing and economies of scale is attractive and viable. The different network

organizations all have slightly different business models, but they all build on the same basic concept.

5 CONCLUSION

Through NEA, small public archives in Denmark are able to do full scale OAIS-compliant digital archiving and meet the legal requirements in spite of limited budgets, volumes and expertise. This is possible because of extensive collaboration and sharing. Instead of employing specialized staff and building infrastructure for preservation at each archive, this is shared via NEA. This exploits economies of scale and allows small public archives to run full scale OAISs using significantly fewer resources.

REFERENCES

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