
Introduction

All participants in the ADI-workshop have the same goal: to make archive materials as accessible as possible to those who want to use them. Today computer science provides a new tool to this end. Researchers are offered digitised archival material. Computer programs are able to handle enormous amount of material, make calculations and draw graphs and charts at a speed we never dreamed about 20 or 40 years ago. Although archival material is being increasingly digitised it is unlikely that this will happen to the majority of it and much will remain in non-electronic form and thus unsearchable that way. This situation gives rise to a number of questions:

- Who decides what is to be digitised and what not?
- Who has control over the material, the programmer or the user/researcher?
- Can the researcher rely on digitised archive materials? Can it still be considered source material in the traditional sense of the word, when it has been edited by someone else in some way or another?
- Do the programmers understand the needs of the researchers and do the researchers understand the limitations and the potential of digitisation? Do they "speak the same language"?
- How compatible are the various systems on an international level?
- Will an increasing amount of digitised archive materials have a negative impact on the accessibility to non-digitised material? Digitising costs money but so does a skilled archivist.
- With reference to costs: who will pay for the digitisation?

These are only some of the questions that lie in the minds of scholars. Some of them will probably be answered, more or less automatically, in due time. They might be questions mainly for today’s generation for whom all this is new. But some of the questions raise the need for an ongoing dialogue between those who digitise and those who use the digitised material. There is a great need for dialogue and co-operation. I am sure there are dialogues going on, but how much of the information from these dialogues reaches both the researchers and the digitiser respectively?

Remarks

The purpose of the ADI-project was to further contacts between Hungary and Sweden within the field of humanistic studies parallelly investigating and giving information about the digital infrastructure of the archives and the scholars’ points of view in that
The ADI-project has been an interdisciplinary forum, where scholars from different disciplines have met with archivists and computer experts. Each group tried to learn from the others. In their papers the scholars told how they have used the archives – sometimes digitised, sometimes not. The digitisers on their part described the infrastructure of the computer systems used in their archives and the possibilities they could offer.

The ADI-workshop in May 2000 was an open one with call for papers. In this workshop scholars from Sweden, Hungary and Estonia took part. One computer expert from the National Archives of Hungary also visited the National Archives of Sweden (both Stockholm and SVAR/Sandslån) for two weeks to study the computer systems and the equipment used by the Swedes. The ADI-project also arranged a workshop in Budapest 23-30 October 2000. This workshop was by invitation. Meetings and discussions between Hungarian and Swedish scholars, archivists, librarians and computer experts about potential co-operation in both the archive field and in research were held.

The questions listed in the Introduction above opened the ADI-workshop in Umeå and Sandslån (Kramfors), 15-19 May 2000. The Demographic Data Base (DDB) at Umeå University has successfully been providing the researchers digitised material for many years now and the Research Archives at the same university is a centre for all sorts of archival material. The majority of the material in the Research Archives is on microfiche (from SVAR/Ramsele), and can be transformed into digitised material for scholars, who use the material in their research. The DDB normally works very closely with the researcher that needs digitised material and it often delivers tailored material.

The questions above are all very familiar to everyone in the field. In November 1999 the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, for example, arranged an international conference at the Royal Library in Stockholm which focused on questions similar to the once asked above.1

At the ADI-workshop in May 2000 the dialogue about the advantages and disadvantages of digitised material concentrated on direct and concrete questions that arose in connection with the papers. We had planned a summing-up discussion at the very end but due to travel problems some of the foreign guests unfortunately had to leave a few hours earlier than expected and the summing-up session lost some of its key participants. Below I will try to give a very short glimpse of some of the opinions that were expressed.

The question about who decides what is to be digitised and what not seemed to be an easy one to answer, at least for the digitisers. The digitisers said that they would help researchers create the data banks and/or computer programmes they needed for their research, but the researchers were the ones to decide what material to choose. This way research foundations and/or faculty research budgets will pay the expenses for

---

digitisation. When researchers apply for project money, they have to take the expenses for the digitisation into consideration. It sounds easy but is it? The researchers still have to get acquainted with what they can find in the archives, they still need to apply for the cost of archive visits and they still need skilled archivists to assist them. Will the world we live in be able to afford both computerised search systems in archives, libraries and museums as well as staff in those institutions, that know their collections when it comes to not already computerised documents? And what happens to the “archipelago” of isolated islands = tailored data banks out there? Due to legal regulations some of them will probably stay isolated for ever, but the rest of them? Who is responsible for overseeing them? Will digitised material financed by university money “belong” to the researcher or research group that first created and used it or is it a material that other researchers should also have access to? The purely technical questions of compatibility and durability also belong to this sphere of questions. Technical standards are continuously discussed. The users have seen some of the results in recent years, but it seems as if there is still a long way to go, above all on the international level.

Who has the control of the material, the programmer or the user? Can the researcher rely on digitised archival material? Is it still to be considered source material in the original sense of the word, when someone has edited it in some way or another? Researchers always make some sort of choice, either directly by setting up thoroughly described criteria for the material they choose to use in their research or indirectly by the methods they use. According to academic practice the researchers themselves are responsible for the validity of their sources. If you overlook something of value for the result of your research and that “something” can be found in the archives, but was missed by the computer programme that was created to find or sort out your material, who is responsible for that, the programmer or the user? Do researchers have to become computer specialists or do computer specialists have to be researchers and would that solve this problem? Partly it is a question of language; researchers and digitisers do not always understand each other. Researchers often have an exaggerated belief in how it is possible or impossible to handle digitised material and digitisers often lack the pedagogical qualities to explain the digital infrastructure of the archives in an understandable language. More discussions, more meetings, more education on both sides might help to solve this problem. Or will time do so? Partly – at least in my opinion – it is a question of when to use only digitised material, when to use a mixed material (both digitised material and material controlled the old-fashioned way) and when to leave the computer outside in the cold. Even if we are fascinated by the great potential of computer programmes, we must also realise that there still are analyses that can only be made by a human brain.

The development in the field of computers is very rapid. The majority of the articles in this report were delivered in the year 2001 and they were all sent for a linguistic revision before they were sent back to the authors for approval. A couple of those who had written papers containing technical issues commented their own articles when they got them back with the words “this is already history”. All history needs documentation and I am glad the ADI-project was able to seize a tiny bit of the rapidly developing computer history.