

Business Archives in Scandinavia

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The Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, have a long tradition for political and cultural co-operation. This includes the archives.

The Scandinavian countries also have a long, common history with roots back to the early Middle Ages. It was not until the 20th Century that their present political structure was finally established. Norway became independent in 1905, Finland in 1918, and, to complete the picture, in 1944 Iceland severed its formal links with Denmark. Since the Middle Ages, Denmark and Sweden had been the leading nations in Northern Europe. This means that two distinct lines of administrative development may be observed in Scandinavia: a west-Nordic, influenced by Danish administrative tradition, and an east-Nordic, influenced by Swedish tradition.

In the present century, however, political development in Scandinavia has followed roughly identical ideological paths, with political dominance by the Labour Parties. This has produced a framework economy, in which the public sector has laid down marked limits for private activity. In many fields, a mixed economy has evolved; characteristically, business associations which are private in principle, have entered into close alliances with public

authorities about the preparation and to a certain extent also about the administration of concrete legislation. This development means that 'public' and 'private' can rarely be seen in isolation, but should be viewed as an ensemble. When it comes to documenting social developments, neither public nor private archives are sufficient, but information has to be gleaned from both sectors.

Business Structure and Company Archives

Scandinavian business life is characterised by its considerable number of small and medium-sized businesses. 'Small' in this context means businesses with between 5 and 25 employees. A very small number of Scandinavian businesses are of such a size as to be termed 'large' in an international context. Shipyards, shipping companies, banks, insurance companies, car manufacturing, air transport and now also petroleum industry belong to the group of large, Scandinavian businesses.

It is characteristic that only very few Scandinavian businesses run their own business archives. There is no statutory demand for these, and the legal requirements for documentation are so modest that they are more or less limited to regulations concerning accounts and records of decisions made at top level. This means that the supporting of an archives department is considered a luxury which - in the contemporary competitive situation - has generally led to this function being modest in the extreme.

In recent years, the record managing function has also begun to be outsourced, and a few private firms have achieved a certain commercial success by offering such services at attractive prices. However, this usually means that only records, which are legally required to be preserved, are paid for. As a rule, other material is destroyed. Only rarely is it handed over to, or deposited in, a public archives institution. In consequence, there are only a small number of archivists in the private sector in Scandinavia who have record management as their primary work function, and the number of "in house" business archives departments with central archival functions may be counted on the fingers of two hands.

Scandinavian Archives Institutions

The growth of the national state created a natural interest in national documentation. Until 1814, Norway had been in a personal union with Denmark, and after a few months of independence was coerced into a personal union with Sweden. As an element of the growing national feelings, a Norwegian national archives office was created in 1817. Finland had a similar institution after it was ceded by Sweden to Russia in 1809; it was opened to the public in 1859. In the "old" Nordic countries, Denmark and

Sweden, the central record managing institutions of the states were overhauled and modernised, in Denmark in the 1890s and -90s, and in Sweden in 1878. In the latter country, an increasing number of regional record offices were established from about 1900; today, there are 10. The result was central institutions, whose responsibilities were the care of records produced by the public administrations, for the purpose of documenting public activities. They were extended with still more regional archives, whose duties were to supervise the management of records created by the local state administrations. These archives institutions were small, however, and their impetus extremely modest. It was characteristic, however, that these new institutions as a rule were headed by active historians, and frequently they developed into small local research centres, where professional and amateur historians alike found a common meeting place.

Since it was obvious that the public sector had neither the capacity nor the intention of solving the problems concerning the collecting and making available of records of private provenance, a large number of local history archives associations were formed in Denmark from about 1930; today, these number about 400. In Sweden, too, the number of such 'popular movements archives' (folkrorelsensarkiver) runs into several hundreds, whilst in Norway, development has taken a different course, towards closer co-operation between archives institutions or the establishing of sensible co-operative relations with the regional state archives. Everywhere, the purpose was to document the violent and constant change of the local communities with local source material.

The result has been the growth of an uncoordinated structure of record offices, which are, however, gathered in nation wide associations with more or less formalised working relations with the state archives.

The demands made by historical research and by society as a whole for increasing amounts of documentation, as well as the introduction of legislation with public administration, have led to an increasing degree of professionalism in the state archives, including the passage of detailed Archives Acts in all of the Scandinavian countries.

In Denmark, there, are four areas of legislation which impose demands for the preservation of records - naturally only in the public sector - not least for the sake of the citizens:

1. Administrative legislation
2. Publicity legislation
3. Legislation governing the administration of justice, and finally
4. Archives legislation, which was passed as late as 1992.

The main intention of the latter is as much openness as possible and free access to records in principle, when the records are 30 years old. In the other Scandinavian countries, legislation follows similar paths.

It was not until 1992 that Denmark had a proper modern archives legislation which defined tasks, competencies etc. A similar development is characteristic of the other Scandinavian countries, where the archives legislation is regularly modernised in these years. 1999 has seen the coming into force of a new Norwegian Archives Act. It regulates conditions for the public as well as the private producer of records, and is the first comprehensive legislation within the archives area. The current Swedish Archives Act is from 1995, and the Finnish one from the previous year.

It is characteristic that the Danish archives legislation is to be revised at very short intervals. It is the explicit wish of the politicians to ensure that the legislation moves with the times, just as the archives administrations are acutely aware of the violent changes that are taking place within the entire world of documentation for which they are responsible. It is further obvious that the legislation everywhere in Scandinavia moves towards putting documentation in focus, rather than the data-bearing medium, such as was the case with the original legislation on the protection of data, which freely produced some extremely awkward working conditions for the archives. In the remarks accompanying the new Finnish bill it is explicitly stated that its purpose is that of preserving the cultural heritage, in whatever technical guise it appears.

It is further characteristic that the archival legislation moves in a direction of giving still wider powers to the archives institutions. They can make demands on the record producers concerning the quality of the data-bearing media, depository formats of electronic records, and determine the intervals at which deposits must be made. Conversely, the archives institutions have been required to prepare plans for preservation and destruction and generally become much more visible in the whole process of record production.

It is finally characteristic that the archives legislation of recent years consciously touches on the relationship with records of non-public provenance. In the current bill for a new Finnish Archives Act, the remarks state that within the private sector records are generated, which are of importance to "the national cultural heritage", and that the archives institutions are endeavouring to secure such material for posterity.

Special Institutions

The largest archives office in Sweden with the explicit purpose of collecting and making available company records is the Association of Stockholm

Business Memories (Föreningen Stockholms Företagsminner) which documents the development of business life from the 18th Century until the present day. After a turbulent existence of a pronounced commercial character, this institution has returned to a more public approach. It continues to offer consultant services, but only records of a long term historical interest are collected and made publicly available. As is implied by its name, this archives office has from the outset concentrated on material from the Stockholm region. On the other hand, new institutions have concentrated on the business history of other regions. Business Archives of Northern Sweden (Näringslivarkiv i Norrland) have naturally specialized in the business life of this area in close co-operation with local boroughs, whose record management it also supervises.

Development in Sweden moves towards the establishment and operation of larger, regional business archives. It is, however, extremely difficult to obtain a financial basis for such archives institutions without a vigorous municipal involvement. Experiments in Southern Sweden, Karlstad and Örebro have clearly demonstrated the difficulties. In Norway, plans are being made for the establishment of "a number of regional business archives" all over the long country.

For many years, the Danish institution Erhyerysarkivet (Business Archives) stood as a pioneer and a distinctive Scandinavian cultural institution. Its purpose was the collection of private records from organizations and private businesses, and the operating costs were covered by state grants from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, to which the institution had direct reference. Through purposeful Nordic co-operation a deliberate attempt was made to inform fellow archivists about the institution, its operation, collections and prospects. There is thus hardly any doubt that in Scandinavia, the Business Archives were seen as a model, just as attention was increasingly drawn to the valuable private records.

To a certain extent the Århus Archives served as a model for the establishment in 1981 of the Central Finnish Business Archives in Eastern Finland, under the name ELKA. Once again, it is businesses and organizations with ties to the business community that can deposit records here. Today, the collections comprise 12,000 metres of shelving. The financial basis comes partly from the National Archives, partly from private businesses and organizations. Like in Sweden, the National Archives of Finland disposes of special funds for the support of the work of collecting business records.

Denmark

In the 1890s, the Danish public archives were restructured. The National Archives of Copenhagen that collected and stored the governmental

archives was now supplemented by three provincial archives, which were to take care of the archives of county and municipal authorities. In 1920 the province of North Schleswig after a referendum was incorporated in Denmark, and it got a provincial archives of its own. The National and the three (from 1926 four) provincial archives solved the problem of the public archives. They were even authorised to collect private archives as well, but it was a minor activity and was not meant to be more.

On local initiative a number of local archives were established. They are not allowed to collect public records, but may collect what private archives they can acquire. They are normally staffed on a voluntary non-professional basis and have formed an association (SLA) to further their interests and co-ordinate their activity. Approximately 400 local archives are members of the SLA.

This institutional structure is probably a common phenomenon throughout the world: a more or less hierarchical structure of public archives, professionally staffed and guided by rules and regulations, and a number of smaller private archives on a local and voluntary basis. What is more unusual is that in Denmark a public archives has been established to collect business archives. The Danish National Business Archives was established in 1948, and it is the story of this institution that has to be told here.

The Danish National Business Archives

The story had its beginning in the 1920s. The Danish politician Dr. P. Munch (Foreign Secretary 1929-40) was a historian and he established an institute of social and economic history in Copenhagen. Young historians were commissioned to undertake studies of the Danish society at the dawning of the industrial age. They soon found out that sources were scarce. The collections of the public archives were of limited relevance to their studies. So they pointed to the need of collecting records for the study of Danish economic and social history. The labour movement quickly responded to that. They established an archives of their own in Copenhagen collecting records from the trade unions and labour politicians. The employers and private enterprise did nothing. A committee of historians was then established to deliberate in the matter. For a number of years they produced nothing but paper.

In 1942 however a young historian, Vagn Dybdahl, engaged himself in this problem and due to his energy and never-give-up-spirit, in 1948 *Erhvervsarkivet*, the Danish National Business Archives was established in the city of Århus. The choice of location was interesting, as nationwide cultural institutions almost without exception are placed in the Danish capital, Copenhagen, and the Danish National Business Archives from

the very beginning were established as a national cultural institution. The situation of it in Aarhus, the second largest town in Denmark, was made possible because, not only the municipal authorities of the City, but also the young University of Aarhus were helpful in promoting the project.

Right from the beginning, research was a prominent part of the activity of the Danish National Business Archives. Acquisition and making inventories of records makes no sense if no-one ever uses them. This is obvious, but to make it not only obvious but actually visible the archives began publishing a yearbook *Erhvervshistorisk Aarbog* (Danish Yearbook of Business history) in 1949. From 1999 it contains English summaries of its articles. The research activity was followed by publishing. In a short time, three historical societies had their offices at our archives. At its peak, five journals and a number of books were edited and published at our archives. The research activity and accomplishments will be illustrated below.

All the while records were collected and inventoried, resulting in a collection that today contains about 50 shelf-kilometres of records. The collection contains business and employers' associations as well as private enterprises and covers all parts of the economy: agriculture, fishing, industry, building, trade, transport, finance and services. The collection has been established on a voluntary basis. There is no obligation to keep or hand over an archive to the Danish National Business Archives. All acquisitions have been negotiated by or directly offered to our archives.

These conditions have formed the policy of acquisition and appraisal. At the initial stage of its life, the Danish National Business Archives were rather liberal in their acquisition because they wanted to build up a reputation of accepting records and archives. It was important to become known as a place where business records would be welcome. In later years acquisition has been more restrictive. The idea of representativity has become more important. We have the task of collecting all kinds of business records and are trying to strike a balance, so that no aspect of Danish business life is neglected, and no aspect too heavily represented in the collections of our archives. *Trying*, we should stress. A strict balance is an unattainable goal.

We have no sharp distinction between acquisition and appraisal. Appraisal mainly is a question of collecting and supplementing. We have elaborated a method of appraisal called the expanded sector method and a more detailed description of it can be found in *The American Archivist*, vol.60,1 pp. 72-86. Here, we shall only mention that it is a guideline for our acquisition as well as a foundation for the routine appraisal carried out as part of the inventorying process.

When the Danish National Business Archives began its activity in 1948 it was a private institution, although sponsored to some degree by public means. In 1962 it was taken over by the state by enactment. It became an independent public institution. This lasted for 30 years, but in 1992 a new act changed the status of our archives from an independent public institution to a subsidiary of a newly established public institution, the Danish State Archives.

The change in 1992 has had a great impact on the daily life of the Danish National Business Archives. The natural focus of the Danish State Archives of course is the public archives, and the handling of private business records is only a minor activity. This creates a lot of problems for our institution, because decisions that are reasonable when applied to public records may be irrelevant or even harmful when applied to private records. But the change in 1992 has not only created problems, but had advantages as well. Probably, the greatest is that in the IT-age it will be possible to integrate our collection of business records with the public archives of the other institutions in the Danish State Archives.

Information technology (IT) of course is the great challenge of the moment and the position as a public private archives gives us a double position. We are part of the public archives of the Danish State Archives and we are colleagues with the small private archives of the SLA. The SLA has established a rather simple IT-base, and the Danish National Business Archives is currently entering information about our collection at the level of the single provenance into this base. We have about 7,000 provenances, but this work can be done rather quickly and will be finished in the autumn of 1999.

The Danish State Archives is constructing a much more sophisticated IT-base. This work has not been finished yet, and it will take quite a time due to the level of ambition and the demand for high professional standard. The Danish National Business Archives is taking part in this work and is particularly occupied with the problem of how to secure that the business records of our collection can be handled in a proper way. Much more detailed information about our collection of records will be entered into this base.

The goal is to make it possible for historians to search for records irrespective of where they are kept, that is irrespective of archival institution and irrespective of provenance. It should be possible to define a field of search individually by choosing for instance a certain period of time, a certain location and a certain subject. If, for instance, you define a field of search as 1) 1875-1892, 2) the peninsula of Jutland and 3) bakery, you will find a list of records from all bakers' shops and bakers' associations in Jutland during these 17 years, that are in the custody of the Danish State Archives, together with records from public authorities regulating the baking trade in Jutland in this period of time. It will probably even be possible to link the

IT-base of SLA to the base of the Danish State Archives, so that the field of search mentioned above as an example will be supplemented by the 400 small local archives of SLA. This is an attainable goal, and it will of course become a very useful tool in the hands of the historians.

Our hope is that it will increase the use of our records. When a field of search (which of course is a field of study) can include all relevant records irrespective of where they are stored and irrespective of their origin as either public or private records, we expect that it will much increase the use of both public and private records because the combination of the two adds value to both.

The stock of records

As mentioned above we try to cover all aspects of Danish business life in a representative way. The result has been this collection of provenances:

Enterprises	5,712
Agriculture	118
Mining	22
Industry/handicrafts	1,314
Public utilities	14
Construction and building	198
Wholesale	645
Retail trade	2,038
Hotels and restaurants	103
Transport/communication	223
Finance/insurance	317
Business service	720
Associations	972
Business associations	719
Cultural, social etc. ass.	253
Individuals	261
Total	6,945

Table 1: Provenances at the Danish National Business Archives

As can be seen from Table 1, two economic sectors stand out: industry/handicrafts and retail trade. This corresponds well to the composition of Danish business. The small private enterprises have been dominant in

numbers, shops and workshops of all kinds. Most of these provenances are rather small containing normally a few ledgers or cash books. The most voluminous provenances belong to the business associations. This also corresponds well to the character of Danish business, where business associations have played an important part in structuring the market and taking part in the "economy of negotiation" of the country.

The very big Danish companies and corporations tend to keep their archives in-house. The Maersk Group, Lego, Carlsberg and Danfoss all keep their own historical archives, and so do the major banks. The Danish National Business Archives have established contacts with these big companies in the hope that they will hand over their historical archives to our institution, if some day they should give up their in-house repositories.

Chronologically we have records dating back to the 17th Century - guild archives - but by far the greater part of our collection is from the hundred years 1875-1975. The chronological composition of the provenances of the iron industry can be used as an example. It can be seen from Table 2.

Before 1850	13
1850-1874	33
1875-1899	79
1900-1924	143
1925-1949	132
1950-1974	100
After 1974	40
Total	236

Table 2: Provenances of the iron industry

The table shows that more than 50 % of the provenances contain records from the years 1900-1949, whereas only 5 % of the provenances contain records older than 1850.

If you look at the different types of records in the archives of the enterprises, accounting is probably the greatest group. The managerial decision-making is definitely less well documented. Minute books from boards of executives or directors are rather rare. But cash books and journals and ledgers can be found in great numbers. The iron foundries can be used as an example. Table 3 shows the number of provenances containing a particular type of record.

Managerial records	7
General administration	12
Financial accounting	23
Cost accounting	15
Statistics	3
Records of employment/industrial relations	5
Sundries	12
Total	27

Table 3: Provenances of iron foundries

As can be seen, 23 of the 27 provenances contain records of financial accounting, whereas only 7 of the 27 contain managerial records. This composition of the type of records is typical, and we have a great job in front of us trying to make the use of accounting records for historical research more common. It has been overly underused if you can say so.

Historical studies at the Danish National Business Archives

Only a year after the establishment of the institution, it began publishing a yearbook. The greatest number of articles has been written by historians outside the Danish National Business Archives, but quite a number have been written by the academic staff of our institution. Research is part of the professional duties of the staff.

The contents of the yearbook have been fairly balanced, as can be seen from Table 4. Social and industrial history have gained importance in comparison with trade history and economics. In the future, accounting, technological and financial history probably will enter the focus as will managerial studies and the economic impact of globalisation.

	1949-72	1973-96
Agriculture	6	1
Industry/handicrafts	13	26
Trade	29	19
Shipping	6	3
Finance	2	2
Service	5	7
Social History	-	12

Associations	14	12
Public authorities	3	5
Economics and economic policy	11	6
Archivistics	9	5
Other subjects	3	3
Total	100	100

Table 4: Contents of the Danish Yearbook of Business History (Percentages)

Internationalisation

Denmark is a member of the European Community. The European Community is part of the world. The impact of these two simple facts on daily life are dramatic. Danish business life is rapidly changing its character. Denmark is a small country and a small market, situated far from the greater sectors of growth of the world economy. If Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union enter a stage of growth, the Baltic might become an economically promising region, but for the moment the number of ifs is alarming. Danish business cannot build its future on the Baltic region. This leaves us in a rather precarious position. Subsidiaries of foreign companies and corporations will become ever more dominant in Danish business in the future. This is a great challenge to Danish society.

It is also a challenge to the Danish National Business Archives, a fact not widely noticed. It is not a simple task to collect records from Danish business, because nobody has the obligation to keep or hand over anything. It is definitely not going to be easier, if Danish business in the future belongs to foreigners and is controlled from Houston or Sydney or Singapore. But we will accept the challenge and do our best, and there is probably not much else to do, other than to establish an international network of business archives, so that the globalisation of business is followed by a global co-operation of the archives.

This article should be seen as a tiny contribution towards that end.

The Archival Legislation in the Scandinavian Countries and Private Records

Today, the archival legislation of all Scandinavian countries comprises sections dealing with private records. The right of initiative on the part of the state archives as regards accession has been formulated in slightly different ways. In Denmark, for instance, it is quite difficult to use the law as a tool for the forced surrender of private records. Even records from limited companies whose shares are one hundred per cent owned by the Danish state fall outside the compass of the archives act and are thus not

liable to mandatory surrender. The Danish archives act operates with an intermediate type of company. These are companies which have been granted concessions to carry out specific duties on behalf of the public authorities: supplies of heat, electricity, transport, telephone services, radio, television etc. The minister is authorised to demand that such companies surrender their records the same as wholly public companies, but no such demand has been made as yet, for fear of the economic consequences. This is not the way in which the new Finnish archives bill is shaped, for it specifically includes such companies. In the Norwegian Archives Act of 1999, the director of the National Archives has the option in such cases of demanding mandatory surrender of records, "if permanent public appropriations for the operations are received". Furthermore, the director of the Norwegian National Archives has the possibility of classifying private records as particularly "worthy of preservation". Such a decision must of course be communicated to the owner of the records. It is also a novelty that the Norwegian director may require private "legal bodies", which receive permanent public appropriations for their operations, to obey instructions from the public archives, wholly or in part.

In the bill for the revision of the Finnish archives legislation it has been suggested that the act encompass "such organizations, which are not part of the public administration, but which have been entrusted with "public duties", just as the bill states that its authors are aware of the fact that private business produces records which are of importance for the national heritage (examples mentioned are the Central Chamber of Commerce and the Finnish Association of Lawyers). The Archives Administration endeavours to ensure that such material is also preserved"

The Swedish Archives Act contains a provision for the State Archives, National and Regional alike, to collect business records. This provision has been variously invoked in different regions. The Swedish National Archives have a department dealing with private records, including business records. This department edits and publishes a survey of the deposited Swedish business records. Perhaps of greater significance is the fact that the department has the specific obligation of providing consultant and counselling services to record producers within the private sector. And finally, it has the obligation - as the only place in Scandinavia explicit - of furthering the process of establishing regional business archives in Sweden. The National Archives thus have a special office for private records. It was created in 1972, and since 1992 it has been in a position to grant state funds to support private archival activities in Sweden. They may take the form of appropriations for regional archives institutions, supplements for the salaries of archivists in local archives, grants for private archives institutions and organizations, and support for the archives departments of private businesses, inter alia to secure the records of the business. They may however also be given as

subsidies towards the preparation of catalogues of privately owned records and finally as subsidies for the fitting up of record storage premises as owners of private records.

It has been a characteristic common development trait that the Scandinavian archival legislations have placed emphasis on the establishing of co-operation across the archival dividing lines state-non-state. Everywhere, there has been a demand for the establishing of common databases of private records, in order that the public be able to search for information about concrete records centrally, to elucidate or document particular sets of problems.

Norway has thus established a Joint Catalogue for Private Archives, which may be consulted via the internet. The most recent Norwegian initiative is the so-called "Arkivnett Norge" (Norwegian Archives Network), which transgresses institutional boundaries, all in order to further the localisation of records in both private and public ownership. Naturally, Arkivnett Norge co-operates with the National Association for Local and Private Archives (Landslaget for Lokal- og Privatarkiv).

In Denmark, a corresponding data base is under construction, and a first version is scheduled for publication on internet in the autumn of 1999. In the next few years it is to be extended considerably. In this way, the collections of the National Business Archives will be presented as the country's most comprehensive collection of records of non-public provenance. A total of nearly 9,000 provenances will be presented here in an interim, summary form.

In Finland also, the Archives Act requires the director of the National Archives to head a nationwide index of private records. It is in a build-up phase, and as yet contains only those private records which have been deposited with the state archives.

In Sweden, a similar joint catalogue has been created too. Today, it is also possible to acquire it on CD-ROM.

In conclusion, it may be stated that all over Scandinavia, an intimate co-operation is in progress between the state archive authorities and archives institutions of semi-public and private character. The purpose is the same everywhere: to create openness and to take advantage of the new technology to ensure that the materials which are collected, are made available and utilized.

The picture is not completely rosy, however, for everywhere in this field the economic means are scarce. That good results are nevertheless obtained is in no small measure due to the fact that considerable zeal has been shown by professional, amateur and local historians alike. It will need continued commitment and initiative to ensure that the records of business life become a natural part of the cultural documentation of society.