When does research data become records?
Theoretical, political, and cultural challenges

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Our agenda for this talk

Aim: to demonstrate and discuss the complex set of factors that shape the archives remaining when academic researchers have pursued their work

Empirical basis: archiving of research records in Sweden

Conceptual ambition: to frame the discussion of records in an ALM research context

The Swedish Case

The concrete legal, political, and organisational contexts of Swedish archiving

Research context:
– the research project *Ethical destruction? Privacy concerns regarding official documents in Sweden, 1900–2015* (Samuel)

– research and teaching in information studies and archival studies (Olle)

The political and legal context:
The official Swedish definition of “records”

Freedom of the Press Act (SFS 1949:105):

A *handling* (≈ record/document) is something on a fixed media-carrier that can be understood in some way.

It is *allmän* (≈ public) if it is created within or received by a public agency.

However, there are exceptions; e.g. *drafts* are not considered public records.

The Archives Act (SFS 1990:728):

Public sector *archives* are developed from *allmänna handlingar*.

Archivisation happens very soon: immediately or after the closure of a case or matter.

A specific legal thing with research records

Documents (*handlingar*) created within cases and matters in Swedish public agencies, are considered public (*allmänna*) only when the cases or matters are finished.

How to interpret ongoing research projects?

Are they “matters” or something else?

Conflicts between researchers and archivists

The 1980s and 1990s: archivists and researchers had differing opinions.

Researchers wanted control on their own research records. They wanted projects to be equated with matters.

The National Archives wanted increased control on research records. Research projects should be equated with “actual action” (in legal discourse), which would make more documents into public records immediately (e.g. field notes and audiovisual recordings)

Privacy and research ethics

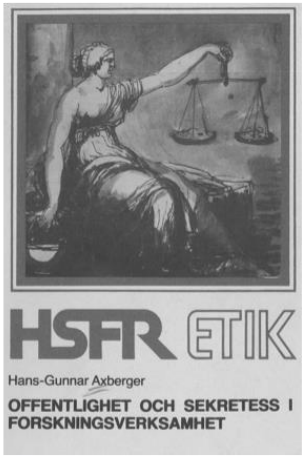
How to handle sensitive personal data in research records?

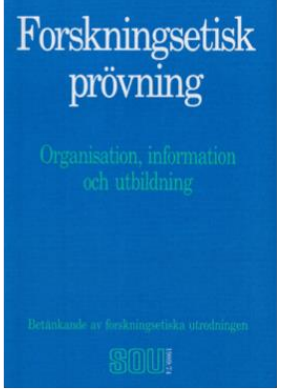
Many representatives of Swedish academia have defended the right to anonymise, or even destroy, research records containing sensitive information.

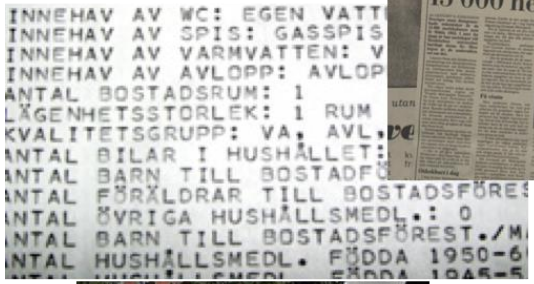
The archival community have generally defended the keeping of sensitive records, strongly opposing demands for “ethical destruction”.

Research records:

the focus of academic–archival conflicts, legal disputes, and media affairs







A resulting compromise in 1999

RA-FS 1999:1 – a general National Archives regulation on the appraisal of research records in all central government agencies

– A decentralised system; in reality, researchers themselves get the right to decide what to keep and what to destroy

– Very general criteria on what to keep: records containing basic information on theory, method and results, as well as records that are “judged” to have importance within academia or of general interest.

However, the organisational and cultural challenges are large:

Academic researchers are seldom aware of the archival legislation.
They do not regard themselves as public officials.
There is a low level of “archival culture”.

The archival units at the universities lack power. They have normally issued regulations on how to appraise and handle research records ...
… but they have almost never had the time and resources to control in what ways research records are actually handled.

Ideals vs. realities

National Archives inspections of government agencies conducting research show:

- Archiving of research records are generally weekly performed
- Research projects are often lacking from archival descriptions.

The initiatives for actually storing and keeping research records have therefore largely been taken by university libraries and specific research data storage institutions.

Different agents, with different aims?

LIBRARIES AND RESEARCH COUNCILS:

Keeping *research data* (*material*), mainly for the benefit of new research

ARCHIVES:

Keeping *research records* – partly for wider purposes?

TWIST:

The legal archival definition of *records* is often narrower than that of *data* or *material*

Why preserve research records?

“Internal” interests:

Controlling academic research results

Helping new academic research by re-using old research data

“External” interests:

Keeping evidence of research activities and results for transcendency and accountability reasons – regarding research as a central function of society as a whole

Conceptual vocabularies & the ALM field

An outlook: teaching and research in the academic ALM field

Hierarchies of terms: information, documentation, objects, and records

Paths ahead: move together or apart?

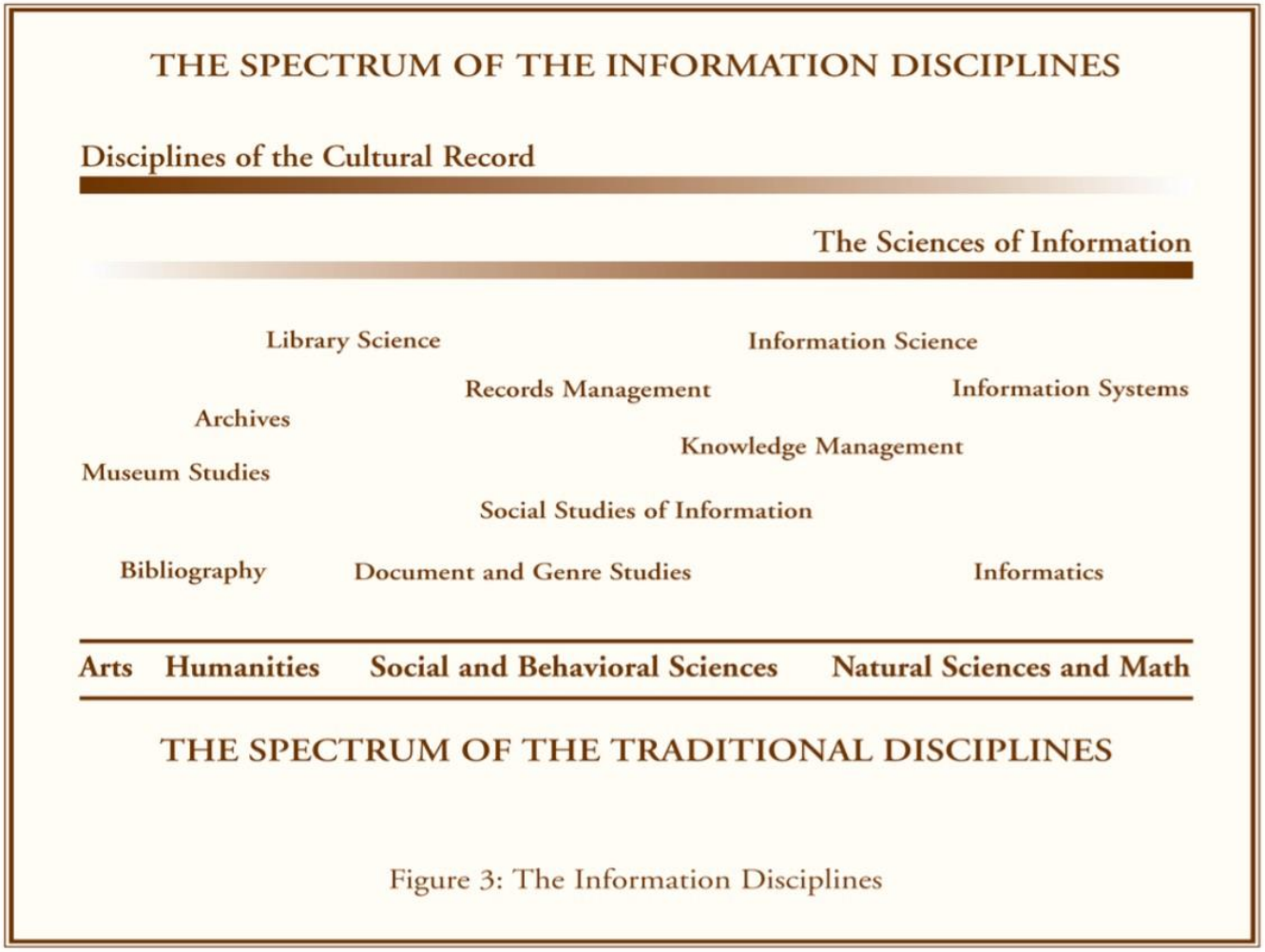


Figure 3: The Information Disciplines

Figure 6: The Universe of Documentation and the Universe of Living

Conclusions

What are the take-home points relating to ALM-research nomenclature?

The interplay between records is defined by:

- Archival theory
- The legal context
- The actual implementation by researchers themselves