

Learning in Archives: Estonian Experience

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ABSTRACT

As a contemporary memory institution, the National Archives of Estonia (NAE) gives much attention to archival education and offers the opportunity to organize archival lessons in schools or in archives. The paper gives an overview of the selection criteria of the archival materials for the learning activities. Teaching with primary documents encourages a varied learning environment for teachers and students alike. Lectures, analysis of documents, independent research and group work become a gateway for research with historical records in ways which improves students' skills and enthusiasm for history and social studies. The NAE is an excellent source for primary documents, but finding what the student is looking for can be challenging because of the vastness and complexity of the holdings. The School of Archives will help him or her navigate through the NAE information system and several databases and figure out how to access information about the records of interest. We have selected hundreds of primary source documents from the millions preserved at the National Archives as classroom teaching tools to bring the past to life.

Imparare in archivio: l'esperienza estone

SINTESI

Come istituzione di memoria contemporanea, l'Archivio Nazionale di Estonia (NAE) pone molta attenzione alla formazione archivistica ed offre la possibilità di organizzare lezioni di archivio nelle scuole o negli archivi. L'articolo fornisce una panoramica dei criteri di selezione dei materiali d'archivio per le attività di apprendimento. Insegnare con i documenti primari incoraggia un ambiente di apprendimento vario per insegnanti e studenti. Conferenze, analisi di documenti, ricerche indipendenti e lavori di gruppo diventano una porta per la ricerca con i documenti storici così da migliorare la capacità e l'entusiasmo degli studenti per la storia e gli studi sociali. Il NAE è una fonte eccellente per documenti primari, ma trovare ciò che lo studente sta cercando può essere impegnativo per la vastità e la complessità di fondi. La Scuola di archivio aiuterà a navigare attraverso il sistema d'informazione NAE e le diverse banche dati ed a capire come accedere alle informazioni sui documenti di interesse. Sono state selezionate centinaia di documenti di fonte primaria dai milioni conservati presso l'Archivio nazionale come strumenti didattici di aula per portare in vita il passato.

Učenje v arhivih: estonske izkušnje

IZVLEČEK

Kot sodobni institucija, ki hrani spomin naroda, posveča Državni arhiv Estonije (NAE) veliko pozornost arhivskemu izobraževanju in ponuja možnosti za organizacijo učnih ur v šolah ali v arhivu. Prispevek podaja pregled meril za izbor arhivskega gradiva, ki se uporablja za učne dejavnosti. Poučevanje s primarnimi dokumenti spodbuja raznoliko učno okolje tako za učitelje kot tudi za učence. Predavanja, analiziranje dokumentov, samostojno raziskovalno delo in skupinsko delo postanejo tako izhodišče za raziskave zgodovinskih virov in izboljšujejo veščine in navdušenje učencev za zgodovino in družbene vede. NAE je odličen vir primarnih dokumentov, vendar lahko zaradi kompleksnosti gradiva, ki se hrani, pomeni najti tisto, kar študent išče, velik izziv. Arhivska šola mu/ji bo pomagal pri iskanju znotraj informacijskega sistema in podatkovnih zbirk NAE ter priti do zelenih informacij. Izmed gradiva, ki ga hrani Državni arhiv, smo izbrali nekaj sto primarnih dokumentov, ki oživljajo preteklost in ki služijo za poučevanje.

Arhiiviope Eesti arhiivides

ÜLEVAADE

Eesti Rahvusarhiiv kui kaasaegne mäluasutus pöörab suurt tähelepanu uute arhiivikasutajate kaasamisele ja nende ettevalmistamisele iseseisvaks tööks allikatega. Põhikooli- ja gümnaasiumiõpilastele pakutakse arhiivitunde nii arhiivis kohapeal kui ka koolis. Artiklis antakse ülevaade põhimõttest, mille alusel valitakse õppetöök sobilikke arhiivimaterjale. Allikate abil ajaloo õppimine ja õpetamine innustab nii õpilasi kui õpetajaid. Loengud, õppepäevad, näitused, dokumendianalüüs ja paleograafiaülesanded, nii individuaalõppe kui grupidõõna arendavad õpilaste teadmise ja oskusi ja tekitavad huvi ajalugu ja sotsiaalteadusi iseseisvalt uurida. Rahvusarhiivis leidub hulganisti suurepäraseid allikaid, mida õppetöös kasutada, kuid alati ei ole lihtne välja selgitada, millised neist pakuvad õpilastele suurimat huvi ja on neile jõukohased. Arhiivikogud on suured ja arhiivifondide ülesehitus keeruline. Arhiivikool aitab õpilasel kasutada arhiivi infosüsteemi AISi ja teisi erandmebaase ning leida üles just tema õppetöõga seonduv allikmaterjal. Oleme välja valinud sadu dokumente miljonite arhiivaalide hulgas, mis võimaldavad teha ajalootunnis õpitu elavamaks ja kõitvamaks.

Similarly to each organisation, making sure that they have prospective clients, in recent decades, the Archives have more and more started to prepare future researchers and archive users. In the Archives, activities aimed at students and teachers have been called in a number of ways - archival education, archival learning, a-learning. At present, archival education is not a very widely used term, whereas it has been a systematically planned area in the Archives for over ten years.

Educating future researchers has been topical since the beginning of the Archives. The Archives have consistently been connected to higher educational institutions which educate historians, where we have carried out archives-related lectures and practical sessions, university students have found temporary employment in the Archives. However, the role of the Archives can be considered to be at that time passive rather than active due to the fact that interest and initiative were shown by the higher educational institutions and lecturers, not so much by the Archives and archivists.

In 1999, the National Archives of Estonia were established and all public archives (except Tallinn and Narva City Archives) were gathered under it, the main aims and missions were formulated, and the first development plan was created. It was already then recognized that archive users must be paid attention to more than previously and information on what is in the Archives and its possible uses must be shared more actively. At that time more and more school classes began to "discover" the Archives. Thus, the beginning of this century was the time of testing the possibilities of archival education. In this time, a few undertakings aimed at the community took place alongside organizing excursions and practical trainings.

As time went by, school children began more and more often to address the Archives with a variety of questions. This encouraged archival educational activities aimed at students and teachers to be undertaken more actively. More and more the Archives paid attention to enhancing future researchers', first and foremost school students', knowledge of archives. In order to develop collaboration with teachers, info days were organized in cooperation with Estonian History Teachers' Association for history teachers. For example, in 2003, archival lessons took place for the students in the 5th grades (history teaching starts in the 5th grade in Estonian schools) and 261 students from 9 schools attended these. This time an 11th grade (humanities-oriented class) in a secondary school in Tartu had a theoretical-practical course on archival system and services. Feedback showed that a 30-hour course crushed students' stereotypical idea of an archive as a dusty, dark and boring place. The students deemed the Archives to be an exciting and modern institution quite capable of developing. Several activities which began at that time are successful to this day, for instance, interviews among basic and secondary school students concerning traditions. For example, memories of the changing of political regimes in the years 1918-1991 have been collected, since 2006 the National Archives collect information on eloquent photos. This way many exciting family, public and cultural-historical photos with memories have been preserved in the Archives.

The Archives have been a partner for higher educational institutions which educate academic historians, mainly for Tartu University, and since 2004, the National Archives have been cooperating with University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy which provides applied higher education. This

collaboration has enabled more than 50 Information and Records Management students to do their practical training in different archives.

In 2005, the National Archives and Estonian Ministry of Culture and the Association of Estonian Manor Schools (Schools in Old Manors Programme) started their cooperation. The main aim of the Programme is to contribute to the valuing of cultural heritage and the raising of awareness concerning manor schools as a unique learning environment. Manor schools are introduced by means of exhibitions, informative materials, study and info days and other activities carried out among the students as well as in the community.

Appointing an Archival Educator



Students studying paleography (1959), EAA R-271-1-1682

By the beginning of the year 2006, several traditions and routine procedures had developed in archival education. The post of an Archival Educator and archival education training plan were established. The latter provided objectives of archival education in written form and specified as its target group, first and foremost, students and history teachers. The training plan gives a brief overview of planned activities, including excursions, sessions on specific subjects, practical work for students, info days for teachers, and the development of the homepage of the School of Archives. Since September, 2006, the webgate to archival education has been accessible - the School of Archives (<http://www.eha.ee/arhiivikool/>).

In the autumn of 2008, the National Archives was the main organizer of the conference “Tangible history – possibilities of cooperation between schools, archives and museums in teaching history” for history teachers and museum educators. In addition to the latter, people connected with archives and Ministry representatives took part in the conference day. During the conference the participants agreed that when education as a priority of our state is to be ensured, the efforts made by the officials in the Ministry of Education and Research, heads of schools and teachers are not sufficient, the public sector must also participate. As a result of the conference, ideas were proposed concerning how to connect better archival and museum education with school programme: excursions and field trips must be included more in history syllabi, possibilities of financial support for visits must be found.

Teachers expect archives and museums not to have only records and museum exhibits which relate to the curriculum, but also methodological solutions for using these.

What does Archival Education Have to Offer Children Today?



Children in archives (2004)

Archival lessons. The objective of the archival lessons aimed at students is to get acquainted with original sources and diversify what they have learned at school. Working with records provides the students with an idea of what historical sources are like, how to use them, and what kind of information these contain. The lessons are structured for specific age groups. The lessons are carried out in the form of group work and require the students' active participation. Here are some examples:

“History - everyone’s story” (for the 5th and 6th grades) - a variety of original sources are introduced to the students and records are explored. The latter contain information on student life in the last few centuries.

“How to research a historical source?” (for 7th to 12th grades) - students get acquainted with different records, learn to ask questions and deal with sources the way historians do it.

Info days for teachers. These are aimed at teachers who wish to enhance their knowledge of archival sources and Estonian history. The digital collections in the Archives, which are constantly being updated, make available abundant sources in Estonian. These can be used by students when writing research papers. Info days are organized for teachers in cooperation with Estonian History Teachers' Association and active history teachers to introduce archival resources and databases. One part of an info day is lectures on historical or archival sources whereas the teachers choose the topic. Lectures are held by archivists as well as specialists invited from outside the Archives. Topics of interest have mostly been genealogy, local history, history of Estonian schools, how Estonian serfs became farmers.

Job shadowing, practical training in the Archives. We welcome as job shadows secondary and basic school leavers who are facing the difficult decision of choosing a profession to have a look at the

Archives as an institution. In 2010, the Archives started their collaboration with Information and Career Counselling Centre of Tartu which introduces institutions to the young people in Tartu.

The organizing of longer courses and practical trainings has gained more ground. While in 2003 the course for the secondary school level was an experimental and challenging project which enabled the employees of the Archives and students to discover the Archives, in the following years work has run smoothly along already-trodden paths. The theoretical part of the course introduces the students to the work of the different departments in the Archives. They get an overview of fundamental archival knowledge (paleography, cartography, genealogy) as well as of, for example, conservation techniques and IT-related developments. The practical part of the course involves participation in making additions to databases and records, putting preservation items in order and the routine of the repository.

Students in vocational training can get acquainted with a variety of professions in the Archives while job shadowing working specialists. Longer practical trainings enable students to participate in different areas: as an assistant to an Archivist one can take part in organizing archives and entering data in the databases; when working in a repository, which requires accuracy and correctness, one can practise casing, labelling and encoding preservation items; in a conservation lab trainees are taught to clean preservation items with small pieces of rubber.

School of Archives on the Internet

School of Archives is for those interested in learning and history, for students at school as well as adults who are fascinated by wandering around in the past.

In the School of Archives one can:

- * get acquainted with the programme offered for schools by the National Archives,
- * study records connected to the learning programme,
- * look at exhibitions based on archival sources,
- * receive information on photo stories competition for students at schools and the National Archives prize for university students,
- * try hand at playing games made based on archival records, etc.

Using archival sources in students' papers and projects and guidelines for teachers

When using archival sources for writing research papers, students acquire the skills of creating knowledge and writing history independently. In order to be successful in using archival sources, the student needs:

- 1) sufficient background knowledge on the subject of the research paper,
- 2) previous contact with and experience of analysing and interpreting source materials,
- 3) knowledge concerning the nature of an archive and archival sources.

Prior to sending a student to the Archives, the teacher is recommended to do some preparatory work which includes going with children to a library and studying the literature published on the relevant subject. Also, it is necessary to emphasize that not all archival sources can be used by students as these are somewhat complicated. Frequently, the main obstacle that arises when working with older records is language. In the School of Archives, archivists have tried to overcome this difficulty by introducing records which are in Estonian, visually attractive and equipped with translations. Several records which are somewhat familiar from school programme have been displayed especially for history teachers, but are fully presented in the School of Archives.

Naturally, due to heavy workload teachers are not always able to do sufficiently thorough preparatory work. Therefore the Archives try to offer subjects themselves as well, also to look for and present sources and make these digitally available. The teacher has to decide whether the records contain enough viewpoints concerning a subject or event, has to be able to assess the level of difficulty of the record, whether it is manageable by the students or are some extra materials, word definitions, explanations required to facilitate understanding.

The Archives have come up with sample subjects, sources and guidelines for working with texts, for example, “Peasants’ freedom of movement. Work with sources.”, “Dividing farmland into plots. Work with maps.” Both tie in with the history syllabus on secondary school level.

Paleography learning environment and games

A large number of the sources in the Historical Archives are written using older written Estonian which requires the researcher to be skilled in reading it. For a novice history enthusiast the Archives offer the opportunity to acquire experiences and become skilful at reading handwritten and printed texts. The paleography learning environment contains a number of records with interesting content which enable one to undertake reading tasks. The texts appear in the order from the easiest to the most difficult ones. On the left-hand side of the screen, one can see the handwritten original record, and on the right, one can see the text field where the text must be typed. If one has understood and typed the words correctly, the background colour will remain yellow, if a word is entered incorrectly, it will turn red.

Several games can be found in the School of Archives for testing one’s knowledge and just as a fun and useful pastime. On the basis of photographs, you can test your knowledge of Estonian athletes who have won the Olympic Games. To do that, you need to drag the correct name of the sport and Olympic city and year and position these under the photo of the correct athlete. In the game of coats of arms, one can acquire knowledge of types of coats of arms in different eras, more widely known noble families and the coats of arms that belonged to them.

Conclusion

Today as the community is being more and more often involved in everything the Archives can make accessible on the internet - adding information to the archival records, describing digitized materials, indexing, transcribing, etc. -, the limits of archival education are expanding significantly. Instructing, guiding and educating users are becoming the professional responsibility of each archivist. Similarly, an Archival Educator’s target group is not only children and students in schools, but every year more and more adult learners join. One advantage of crowdsourcing is the existence of motivated people who are ready to contribute their knowledge and time to do the work which sometimes an archivist unfortunately lacks the resources to do. All these volunteers need and expect support, advice and user training.

SUMMARY

In 1999, the National Archives of Estonia were established, the main aims and missions were formulated, and the first development plan was created. It was already then recognized that archive users must be paid attention to more than previously and information on what is in the Archives and its possible uses must be shared more actively. The beginning of this century was the time of testing the possibilities of archival education, a few undertakings aimed at the community took place alongside organizing excursions and practical trainings. By the beginning of the year 2006, several traditions and routine procedures had developed in archival education. The post of an Archival Educator and archival education training plan were established. The latter provided objectives of archival education in written form and specified as its target group, first and foremost, students and history teachers. The training plan gives a brief overview of planned activities, including excursions, sessions on specific subjects, practical work for students, info days for teachers, and the development of the homepage of the School of Archives. Since September, 2006, the webgate to archival education has been accessible for those interested in learning and history, for students at school as well as adults who are fascinated by wandering around in the past.

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