This is the submitted version of a paper presented at Sixteenth International Conference on Grey Literature Grey Literature Lobby: Engines and Requesters for Change, December 8-9, 2014, Washington D.C., USA.

Citation for the original published paper:

Börjesson, L. (2015)
An attempt to nuance the understanding of professional reports in archaeology.
In: GL16 Conference Proceedings Amsterdam
GL Conference Proceedings

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-239013
GL16 Full text paper

Title: An attempt to nuance the understanding of professional reports in archaeology

Topic/Theme: Managing change in grey literature

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Abstract

Professional (i.e. extra-academic) contract archaeology is an internationally widespread practice contributing significantly to the archaeological literature. However, professional knowledge production in archaeology, and most notably the professional report genre, is at times described as problematic. The problem descriptions are ambiguous and can be grouped under at least three different topics: concerns for content quality and practical accessibility, concerns for the comparably low degree of analytical and theoretical synthesizing in reports and concerns for lack of mutual knowledge transfer between academic archaeologists and professional archaeologists. Technical issues of access are to an increasing extent being solved. Format standardizations are also developing. Hence the report genre becomes more accessible, and the content more readable and informative. Yet articulations of attitudes toward the genre in archaeology text books and journal articles remain focused on the genre’s problems. The aim of my ongoing dissertation research is to nuance the understanding of the professional report genre in archaeology. I do so by analyzing factors shaping reporting as it takes place in the intersection between academic norms, professional values and market logics. I argue an improved genre understanding is crucial to diminish cultural issues of access to the report literature, and also as a basis for development of reporting practices. In
the dissertation research I analyze (1) perceptions about the report genre in archaeology literature, (2) information policy regulating reporting in archaeology, (3) how report writers and county board professionals interpret the reporting and report auditing work tasks and (4) the frames of reference report writers bring into reporting. The aim of this paper is to explicate the research design consisting of four sub-studies, to briefly report on findings from study no. 4, and to discuss preliminary, partial results from study no. 2.

Keywords: Documentation; Report; Professional report; Grey literature; Archaeology; Cultural heritage; Professional archaeology; Contract archaeology; Public government; Public administration; Cultural heritage management; Information policy; Science and technology studies; Scholarly communication; Sociology of professions; Mixed methods; Idea analysis; Policy analysis; Qualitative document analysis; Bibliometrics; Focus groups interviews

1. Introduction

The rise and development of professional (i.e. non-academic) archaeology during the twentieth century has led to a situation where professional archaeology constitute a substantial part of all archaeological activities (Aitchison 2010; Kristiansen 1998; cf. Ambrosiani 2012). Professional contract archaeology has increasingly contributed to archaeology literature, primarily by producing reports from surveys and excavations undertaken prior to land development (Aitchison 2010; Ersgård 2006). Digital means for report production, dissemination, and archiving have made reports increasingly visible and accessible to users.

The professional report genre’s role as a contribution to archaeological knowledge is subject to scrutiny (e.g. by Bahn 2012; Hodder 1989; cf. Lucas 2001). Discussions about the role of reports can be followed for example in two special issues of research journals around 2010: in
Archaeologies from the viewpoint of archaeology and in The Grey Journal from the viewpoint of information science (both edited by the archaeologist Seymour 2010a; 2009a). These special issues cover topics like professional review (e.g. Harlan 2009), archiving and access (e.g. Kansa et al. 2010; Aitchison 2009), but also expound the relationship between professional archaeology and academic archaeology and the transfer of knowledge between the two (e.g. Aitchison 2010; Roth 2010; Seymour 2009b). Taken together the descriptions allude to a compound of issues where the problem focus at times lies within the genre, and at other times lies with attitudes towards the genre.

My ongoing dissertation research takes these ambiguous problem descriptions as a point of departure and seeks to nuance the description of the archaeology report genre. The nuancing takes on the perspective of contract archaeology as a professional practice, embedded in heritage policy, administrative requirements, market logics, organizational conditions and professional ideals. The aim is, through an exploration of contextual factors shaping reporting to provide more informed grounds for readings and evaluations of reports. This re-contextualisation will serve as a basis to diminish some of the cultural issues of access to the genre, and from which to manage development of the report genre from policy and organizational levels. The overarching dissertation research questions are:

I. Which ideas about the report genre are articulated in discussions of ‘the grey literature problem’ in archaeology?

II. How are professional archaeology reports shaped by contextual factors such as heritage policy, market logics, administrative requirements, organizational conditions and professional ideals?

III. Can insights from studies of reporting contexts be used to address some of the issues articulated in the discussions of ‘the grey literature problem’?
In this paper I lay out my mixed methods dissertation research design and report on findings from two of the four sub-studies. The paper begins by framing archaeological reporting as a genre of scholarly communication. The first section also explains my operationalization of the concept ‘configuring factors’ of documentation. The four sub-studies making up the dissertation research are described subsequently. The paper concludes by a discussion of the methodological approach and related ethical considerations on researching a professional discipline and its activities.

2. A genre and cultural issues of access

Throughout this paper I conceptualize archaeological reports as a genre. The use of the genre concept brings with it a grouping of individual documents. A library and information science (LIS) genre concept can also lead us to focus on the relations between documents, communication, activities and social organization (Andersen 2008, 339). Genres are assumed to not only be created in social settings, but to also create the settings by influencing structures for communication and actions (2008, 350). This view on the genre concept implies that reports shape archaeology, which motivates the dissertation research from an archaeological perspective.

If we begin with the understanding that the archaeology report genre is a boundary genre, dependent on both government heritage management and archaeology, we can assume the report genre is conditioned by multiple factors and therefore hard to describe once and for all (cf. Börjesson under review; Huvila 2011). Heritage management logics and archaeology develop both independently and interrelated and each make claims as to how contract archaeology documentation should be done. Furthermore the market organization of
professional archaeology has brought about a multitude of organizational forms among the actors at the market, affecting the organizational contexts in which documentation is carried out (cf. Aitchison 2010).

Following the assumption that the report genre as a boundary genre is conditioned by multiple factors, it is likely that the multiple problems related to archaeological reporting not will be solved by any one measure. The genre’s problems have been thoroughly problematized and argumentation pro and con the genre has been spelled out (Seymour 2010a; 2009a). The problems described are such as inadequate archiving, instable archives, survey data being disconnected from reports, perceptions about lack of peer-review, lack of interest in and respect of report content from academic archaeologists, and language barriers. I (tentatively) argue several of these problems arise when reports are read and evaluated in relation to academic ideals as a standard. One way forward could be, based on the assumptions that reporting is configured by multiple factors on the boundary between academic, governmental-professional and market logics, to seek further understanding of the non-academic factors shaping the reporting genre in professional archaeology. This approach would offer a model for understanding why reports become what they are and, by doing so, provide report readers with a firmer ground from which to read and interpret report contents. Furthermore a model based on factors shaping professional archaeology reporting will provide a basis for evaluations and management of reporting practices.

The genre concept emphasizes common traits across documents. In order to nuance the understanding of the report genre I hence complement the genre perspective with the concept ‘configuring factors’ (of documentation) borrowed from Bernd Frohmann. Frohmann proposes a four-fold perspective to cover the “the configuring factors” of documents: the
materiality of documents, their histories, the institutions in which they are embedded, and the social discipline shaping practices with them (Frohmann 2004, 405). This dissertation covers the last three mainly social factors, while leaving out the materiality. To explore configuring factors serves as a way to study factors shaping the genre. Variations within the genre are particularly interesting for a nuanced understanding of the genre. In my use of the term ‘configuring factors’ I therefore make the assumption that factors shaping a genre have unequal impacts different parts of the genre, resulting in variations of interest for overall understanding of the genre.

In a larger perspective this study can be placed in the field Science and Technology Studies (STS), particularly in the sub-field focusing on scientific (or ‘scholarly’) communication (Sismondo 2010). Professional archaeology reports are not simply scientific – they balance on the boundary between academia and government. Nevertheless information policy regulating the report genre expresses aspirations for the genre to be scholarly and to contribute to scientific knowledge (Riksantikvarieämbetet 2012). The boundary position is sometimes framed by the term ‘grey literature’ (Darvill 2008). Grey literature is a cross-disciplinary term used to describe literature produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body (Farace and Schöpfel 2009).

3. Do we have a problem? Articulations of ‘the grey literature problem’ in archaeology literature (Study no. 1)

Articulations of the ‘grey literature problem’ in archaeology are ambiguous. They include descriptions of technical access challenges (e.g. reports are stored in regional depositories, Silva 2010), content usability issues (e.g. content is not validated by data, Roth 2010), and
readers’ confused expectations on the genre (e.g. false perceptions about lack of peer-review, Harlan 2010). These articulations point out deficiencies both within the genre and among its readers. A number of the voices also suggest ways to improve reporting and report use. Some of the articulations specify which national or other limitation of context they cover, yet other speaks about the problems in general terms.

This article analyzes general (mainly Anglo-American) articulations of the problems with the report genre in archaeology and how these problem articulations are reflected in Swedish archaeology literature. The aim is to explore nuances in the problem description and related ‘solutions’. The guiding questions are: How are the challenges with grey literature described in the articles in the two special issues on professional archaeology documentation *Archaeologies 2010* and *The Grey Journal 2009*? Are these articulations reflected in contemporary texts in Swedish? If so, what do the Swedish descriptions pick up and what do they leave out? The underlying assumption is that the problem descriptions not only describe a problem, but also foreshadow terms and forms for describing a phenomenon that is not necessarily in itself a problem. Hence the study does not seek to reinforce the problem, but to illuminate a cluster of ideas about the report genre in a reflective manner.

STS has a tradition of addressing problems or controversies. Controversies can be approached as a way to analyze a discipline at a point in history where conflicting perspectives intersect, are articulated and thus form rhetoric about phenomena, facts or artifacts. Another term used as a metaphor for this process is ‘black boxing’. The STS study of controversies focuses at stages when a black box is open, when a phenomenon is about to be defined, or a previous dominating paradigm is being contested. As the controversy is settled the black box closes and the ‘winning’ argument become neutralized as ‘knowledge’. The STS norm is to apply a
symmetrical approach where all sides in conflict are analyzed as reasonable from their own perspective (Sismondo 2010). Important to note is that the ambiguous descriptions of the grey literature problem in archaeology does not necessarily qualify as a controversy in the sense that we see distinct opposite sides openly arguing for their own standpoint and against each other’s. The grey literature problem in archaeology has a less outspoken character, but yet receives attention from a number of researchers and professional archaeologists from different angles (Seymour 2010a; Seymour 2009a).

The material will consist of articulations made by article authors in the two special issues of *Archaeologies* 2010 and *The Grey Journal* 2009, both on the topic grey literature in archaeology. The articulations made by the article authors will be compared to ideas in a selection of Swedish texts concerning the topic professional knowledge production and related challenges. The analysis method will be a qualitative document analysis (QDA) specifically focused on dimensions in the problem descriptions (Bergström and Borèus 2012; Plano Clark et al. 2010). The focus on dimensions in the problem descriptions is a way to encompass both the ‘problems’ and the ‘solutions’ written out or alluded to by the authors in the material.

**4. Negotiating documentation in professional practices - The case of archaeology reporting (Study no. 2)**

Information policy in heritage legislation and guidelines is the primary means by which the government can handle the report genre challenges. Secondary means for the government to use can be supporting academic heritage education and stimulating professional education among archaeologists and county administrative board professionals. Information policy comprises decisions, guidelines, regulations and laws directly involving information creation,
processing, flows and use (Braman 2011). Information policy regarding reporting articulates ideas and norms on what reports should be like, hence how reports shall respond to the needs of all of the stakeholders whose voices have been heard in the policymaking process.

Heritage policy is comprised of both hard law on for example, heritage interests and property rights and on international antiquities trade, and soft law on how surveys should be documented and how documentation subsequently should be handled. The hard law portions of heritage legislation has assigned enforcement institutions such as the property and environment court in the case of property rights and the border police in the case of antiquities trade. Enforcement of soft law is based upon non- legally binding regulations and guidelines by government authorities and non-governmental organizations in a field. There is also a moral responsibility resting on archaeology and heritage management professionals, and on professional associations to act according to regulations.

Preliminary results from an analysis of information policy in Swedish cultural heritage policies show a low level of regulation of archaeology reporting in the heritage legislation. The county administrative boards are assigned the juridical responsibility to ensure adequate documentation and reporting, and also to set standards for what is being seen as ‘adequate’. County administrative boards request reporting in public tenders, but also require archaeology contractors to establish documentation plans. The practical governance model hence distributes the responsibility between the county boards as clients and auditors, and the archaeological contractors as executors (Börjesson, Petersson, and Huvila work in progress). A further analysis will focus on the level of county administrative boards and archaeological contractors. The aim of the analysis is to explore how policies on reporting and professional responsibility play out in negotiations between public procurement tenders and archaeology
contractors’ documentation plans. QDA will be applied to structure the analysis and to pursue a discussion of how the ideas from the national level information policy play out in the interactions between county administrative boards and archaeological organizations in the case of documentation plans (Bergström and Boréus 2012; Nyqvist 2011; Cris Shore and Wright 2011; Plano Clark et al. 2010).

5. Professional interpretations of the reporting and report auditing work tasks – The case of professional archaeology (Study no. 3)

The third study explores archaeology professionals’ interpretations of the reporting work task and government authority professionals’ interpretations of the report auditing work task. While previous studies tracks the articulations of the grey literature problem in archaeology and information policy concerning reporting this study analyzes how reporting archaeologists and those overseeing the reporting practice formulate their view on their respective work task. The aim is to find out how professionals interpret reporting and report auditing as work tasks and responsibilities. The analysis will provide a basis for discussing professionals’ points of view on reporting.

The material for this study will consist of results from previous studies of reporting (primarily government reports) and qualitative focus group interviews with county administrative board professionals and with professional archaeologists (at separate occasions). The two types of professionals will be given a similar set of points of discussion, but slanted toward their practices at ‘opposite ends’ of the reporting process. Results from the previous sub-studies may be incorporated into the material for the interviews.
The interview records will be analyzed in the light of theory of professions (Svensson and Evetts 2010). The key assumption upon which the choice of theory is based is that reporting is made in a primarily professional environment, outside academia and embedded in an organizational setting with more shaping forces like topical training, professional ideals and obligations toward organization and colleagues etcetera, which interacts with the policy regulating reporting. Possible theoretical terms to operationalize in the interpretation are ‘civic epistemologies’, ‘professional (or ‘expert’) knowledge’ and ‘information interests’ (Mosse 2011; Jasanoff 2005; Sundin and Hedman 2005).

6. Grey literature – grey sources? Report writers’ frames of reference (Study no. 4)

In this study I explore report writers’ frames of reference in order to understand more about variations among report writers’ perspectives (Börjesson under review).1 Frames of references are studied by an analysis of source use patterns in bibliographical reports. The source use patterns are analyzed based on a detailed coding of cited sources in 97 Swedish field evaluation reports from 2013. The coding structure was developed iteratively to cover aspects represented in bibliographical lists. The variables catch source age, source type, source format, source language, organizational and spatial relation between source originator and report author.

Information source use in archaeology in general has been studied previously (Huvila 2014a; Huvila 2006). Use of specific types of sources has also received attention, specifically image use (Beaudoin 2014; Moser 2012). Isto Huvila’s study target variations in source use among archaeologists related to work roles. My study focuses specifically on source use in

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1 The dataset will be made available along with the article upon acceptance for publication.
professional reports and explores variations in source use across the variables through a
correspondence analysis. The bibliometric approach provides means to analyze distributions
within the dataset, to test connections between parts of data and to reveal latent patterns
(Denscombe 2009, 327; Tague-Sutcliffe 1992, 1).

The study begins with the assumption that as archaeological reports primarily are written in
extra-academic, professional settings, it is relevant to seek to understand report writers’
frames of references in relation to professional standards colored by organizational affiliations
(Kristiansen 1998). Organizational types are therefore a key aspect in the analysis and
interpretation, aided by sociology of professions influenced LIS research discussing
information cultures and information interests shaped by occupational identities (Widén-
Wulff 2010; Sundin and Hedman 2005).

The findings partly confirm previous studies of information source use, but also show some
notable discrepancies. Reports are a key source for report writers in addition to professional
literature and maps. Notwithstanding maps, non-codex like information sources are rare in the
bibliographical lists. In previous studies both archaeological materials, aggregates of original
materials and images have been described as information sources vital to archaeologists
(Beaudoin, 2014; Huvila, in press a; cf. Moser, 2012). The complete lack of references to
archaeological materials and the very rare references to images suggest that report writers
either do not use these sources or that there are circumstances hindering archaeologists from
representing these materials as sources. The national character of source choices shown in
previous studies is largely confirmed. The source age distribution analysis shows a strong
correlation between source type and source age. The importance of novelty is in this case
related to source type and also possibly to additional contextual issues as accessibility.
References to databases and webpages (not including map databases) are about as common as references to academic literature, like the results in Huvila’s study (2014a). Two notable characteristics of the use of digital sources are the relatively few digital sources, and the very rare occurrences of references to sources other than codex-like sources. Digitization and born-digital information in other forms such as digital dataset, objects in digital collections, 3D models, virtual reality visualizations seem to be rarely or never represented.

The correspondence analysis used as a way to analyze source use patterns reveal one administrative, one professional/academic pattern, and one map pattern. These three clusters show that the main division between source use patterns in the report genre is the division between the administrative source use pattern and the professional/academic source use pattern. This finding implies that report authors primarily relate to two spheres of previous knowledge production: an administrative sphere containing planning documents and reports more closely related to local cultural heritage management and a professional/academic sphere comprising more of the type of sources traditionally recognized as academic, but also a range of non-academic professional publications. These two patterns suggest a variation within the report genre, where the dividing line goes between administrative and professional/academic source use patterns.

This study contributes by an examination of archaeological information use in a specific context, which has been requested in previous research (Huvila, in press a; Moser, 2012; Kansa and Kansa, 2011). The results can be employed to nuance both the understanding of professional archaeologists’ information use, and to refine the understanding of the report genre from an information source use point of view. Awareness of variations between frames
of reference among report writers could alter the perception of reports as “grey literature”, in
the sense being not academic (cf. Seymour 2010b).

7. Researching factors shaping scholarly communication in the
intersection between academia, government and market – A brief
discussion of methodology and research ethics

Above I make the argument that professional reporting in archaeology is influenced by a
range of factors and that these factors, at least to some extent, are overlooked in evaluations of
the report genre. Within the scope of the dissertation research I explore four of these factors;
ideas in articulations of the genre’s problems, policy regulating the genre, report writers’ and
county board administrators’ interpretations of the reporting and report auditing work tasks,
and report writers’ frames of reference. Borrowing an anthropological metaphor, these four
factors can be seen as ‘sites’ at the professional reporting field (cf. Wright 2011). From that
point of view the dissertation research become a ethnography of a professional documentation
practice with the aim to nuance the understanding of the genre produced within the practice.

As for ethnographic research in general the framing of the research problem and the choice of
sites from which to study the problem is pivotal. In the case of my research the frame of the
research problem is the report genre challenges as expressed by archaeologists. The
description of these challenge articulations and how general articulations travel to and reflect
in the Swedish situation will be further detailed by study 1. The choice of sites, apart from the
first case study illuminating the challenge articulations, follows a stylized timeline in the
professional archaeological process: from heritage policy through professionals’ interpretation
of the work task and finally implementation. Moreover the choice of sites cover a macro-
micro dimension; heritage policy regulate all archaeologists, interpretations of the reporting
and report auditing work tasks are influenced by the policy level but mainly take form in local social interactions and finally the report writers’ frames of references reflect the perceptions of previous knowledge individuals bring with them into report writing.

The ethical considerations impacting this research circulate around the notion of professional practice. Professionals at work have reasons for the way they do their work which should be acknowledged in the analysis. However these reasons may not always be flattering, and may collide with strivings for a professional identity (cf. Mosse 2011). Ethnographic researchers must be prepared to balance the goal of ethnographic research with a respect for those studied. Furthermore the stylized timeline on which this dissertation research is based cannot be seen as a mirror of the practice, but more of as a model upon which the public sector is structured (from policy to professional interpretation and through to implementation), and thus from which public sector processes can be analyzed. This type of ethnographic multi-sited research will never explain individual events, but seeks to understand a phenomenon on a higher degree of abstraction. Ethnographic research traditionally attempts to let the studied community have an opportunity to review the research, through some type of public dissemination (Mosse 2011). It is less common that ethnographic research seeks to arrive at suggestions for changing the particular practice studied. This study should plan for a communication with the practice studied, and should in my opinion also consider if there are practical suggestions to make based on the thesis research regarding management of reporting practices.
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