DIGITIZING PHOTOGRAPHS – A Project at the Women’s History Collections

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Presented at Gender and Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference
August 20-24, 2003 Lund University, Sweden

The Women’s History Collections at Göteborg University Library are the Swedish National Resource Library for Women’s, Men’s and Gender Studies. They were founded in 1958 and contains books, journals, manuscripts, etc. One of the main tasks is to organize and catalogue manuscript material on women’s history.

The manuscript collections include approximately 180 archives of about 400 metres of handwritten manuscripts and other source material, dating primarily from the first half of the twentieth century. The manuscript collection contains a great amount of photographs that are only partially catalogued. The catalogued (c. 2000) photographs are registered in a card catalogue. Besides these 2000 photographs there is an unknown amount of pictures that are scattered in the various archives and are therefore quite hard to find. In order to enhance the accessibility of the photographs we intend to build up a database. This would also help preserving the photographs, that are often old and fragile.

In Sweden several museums have already digitized their photo collections. As a starting point for our own project we visited a number of institutions in our region in order to learn from their experiences. We have also taken part in some courses on scanning, etc.

Some of the requirements that we have for our database are as follows:
The photographs will be indexed by motive and searchable by using keywords. The keywords will be the same as those that we use in the database KVINNSAM.
The records will contain information about the condition of the pictures, technical data, photographer (when known), year, and a searchable note field is necessary to give a detailed description of the picture.

Having investigated possible solutions we come to the conclusion that there are three main options for storage and presentation of our photo collections:
• Using LIBRIS-KVINNSAM, by creating a record describing the photo, with a link to the photo
• Using SOFIE, the database most used by the Swedish museums
• Creating a database of our own

The latter solution is the one we would prefer, since that would give us the possibility to design the database according to our own needs and wishes.

BIBSAM (the Royal Library’s Department for National Co-ordination and Development) has granted our project with 125 000 SEK for the year 2003. The management of the library has
not yet decided which solution to choose. As a pilot, we have chosen the period around the struggle for women’s vote in our work with the digitization. While waiting for a decision to be taken we have started to scan those pictures.

In November 2001 we wrote a pilot study, Fotodatabas : en förstudie. It is available in Swedish, on the address:  
http://www.ub.gu.se/G/projekt/fotobas.pdf

We have seen several good examples of photo databases. Two of them are the database produced by Västerbottens museum in Umeå, using SOFIE,  
http://sofiewwww.vasterbottensmuseum.se/

and Kulturmiljöbild at Riksantikvarieämbetet,  
http://www.raa.se/kmb/normal.asp

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