

Preserving the Eurovision Song Contest

Right now the internet harvesters are working overtime at the Danish Netarchive gathering websites, Facebook pages and tweets about the international Eurovision Song Contest. All this information will be saved in an extensive database for the benefit of future historical research.

Eurovision Song Contest is the largest media event in Denmark in 2014. Not merely a spectacular music show with 170 million viewers throughout Europe, the event also generates vast amounts of information on the internet. Particularly on social media sites such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, where users tweet, like, share and upload fan videos. The Royal Library of Copenhagen and The State Library in Aarhus have set out to preserve all relevant internet information surrounding the event.

The internet is cultural heritage

The media landscape has changed, and the material published and shared on the internet has become an essential source to understanding the political and social developments of our time. Modern information vanishes fast, and if it is not preserved it will be lost, leaving future researchers to rely on printed material only.

‘As a cultural heritage institution we are obliged to ensure that there is source material available to researchers who wish to investigate certain time periods. Essentially the writing of history can be no better than the available sources. Without sufficient handed down material only the contemporary time is open to us. And the experience of historiography demonstrates that we are often not able to spot the really significant developments in our own time,’ says Eurovision expert and Research Librarian at The Royal Library Henrik Smith Sivertsen.

Eurovision has gone viral

The scale and pace of the unofficial information about the event on the internet is breathtaking. So far around one million Eurovision videos have been uploaded to YouTube, and on Twitter the term ‘Eurovision’ is mentioned almost every second. Eurovision has indeed ‘gone viral’, and the social media in some cases directly influence the participants’ chances to win.

Henrik Smith Sivertsen mentions the case of the Armenian participant Aram Mp3. ‘Everything pointed to Armenia as this year’s winner, the number of YouTube views and tweets on Twitter as well as the bookmakers’ odds. That is until Aram Mp3 with reference to the Austrian participant Conchita Wurst – she names herself a drag artist – in an interview called homosexuality ‘unnatural’. This resulted in intensive debates on the social media, and Aram Mp3’s odds went from 1.73 to 3.

The new media is a challenge to net archives

Curators and researchers work hard all year round to preserve the Danish part of the internet in the Danish Netarchive through the quarterly snapshot harvestings. As the Eurovision Song Contest 2014 takes place in Denmark, it is considered a part of the Danish cultural heritage, and the harvesting of the event is a special project. It is, however, also a test of how far the Netarchive can go in harvesting social media. And there are several challenges to this: Apart from the sheer amount of material, the harvesting application is struggling with technical limitations since it dates from a time when information did not come as fast, in so many forms and from so many sources as today.

Read more about The Danish Netarchive at www.netarkivet.dk/in-english