

Archival Cooperation and Community Building. BAAC 10

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This year we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Baltic Audiovisual Archival Council. BAAC is a professional organization assuring the maintenance of historically valuable audiovisual collections in the Baltic region and diaspora. BAAC is also a great example of community building. The organization connects a diverse selection of institutions, professions and personalities. In my presentation I would like to share some thoughts and reflections from these past 10 years.

It takes a whole village to raise a child, as an African proverb says. It takes a community to preserve the history. Although mass media businesses mainly produce audiovisual material, the responsibility to create and preserve large quantities of such material is increasingly being placed on state memory institutions (archives, museums and libraries). For this reason, state regulation in this field is necessary in order to preserve these valuable materials and make them accessible to the public.

Still, it is not only the responsibility of state memory institutions but that of the whole society. Shared memory provides a community with a sense of unity and belonging. To maintain its integrity, a community needs memory. But memory also needs a community. History can be preserved only through communal effort.

This is why it is necessary to improve awareness of historical heritage in all social groups. Heritage education needs to be developed in schools and through informal education. Stories should be preserved and shared in the private sphere as every family has their own history. As a result of knowing one's personal heritage, the effort to preserve a community's historical heritage may be more readily cultivated. The caring attitude of a whole society towards preserving its heritage can only grow out of such historical consciousness. From the perspective of the world's future, this is an existential question.

As Eastern Europeans and Baltic people, we know this. The war did not end for us in the spring of 1945. The voice of truth was suppressed by Soviet terror and continuous brainwashing, thus forcing it into silence for decades. But not only for us.

As Sofi Oksanen confessed in her lecture at the VEMU conference in Toronto this past March: “This is true although I had grown up between two countries, Finland and Estonia, and between two realities, between the West and the Soviet Union. Everything pertaining to Estonia had felt like non-literary subject matter. Simply for the reason that Estonia was literally missing from the map until it gained independence anew.”

Sofi Oksanen only learned to publicly discuss the occupation of Estonia and the deportations after the restoration of Estonia's independence using the following fitting words. “But I also had to get acquainted with the visual memory. The Soviet Union destroyed that as well. Changing or replacing the pictorial material of the entire society was an important part of Sovietization. And Stalin, an ardent admirer of American films, understood the powerful effect of pictures very well. /---/ At the same time as the imagery of Nazi concentration camps was etched in the eyes of my generation and at the same time as my generation was dealing with memories of Finland’s Winter War, no visual material of deportations was available. /---/ Countries which have not experienced occupation have great difficulties comprehending how a nation’s most essential sufferings in recent history can be completely deleted from the visual repository and from official memory.”

The Estonian literary scholar, Hasso Krull, began using the term “the *culture of disruption*” 19 years ago to describe a characteristically Estonian culture- a culture with both positive and negative disruptions reaching deep into our history. These disruptions can be found in recent history: “The restoration of Estonia's independence including the nation's distancing itself from the past (at the end of the 1980s and start of the 1990s) could be considered a positive disruption, while the Russian occupation during the Second World War could be considered a negative disruption. All current cultural discourses are based on these disruptions.”

How complete was the cultural disruption caused by the Soviet occupation? How disrupted was/is our historical memory? Each one of us, fellow companions of this era, probably have our own experiences. How much we knew of what we officially should not have known, was dependent on one's birth year, family, social circle, work place and profession. However, following the gusts of the winds of freedom across Estonia, the impossibility to speak of national history was replaced by both a national and

personal interest in all the stories that had remained untold. Some examples of efforts to restore the nation's historical memory during the restoration of Estonia's independence are the founding of the Estonian Heritage Society, the Pirgu Memory Sector, the Estonian Life Stories Association, and the publishing of *The White Book: Estonian Casualties During the Occupations 1940-1991*. Oral and written memories, in addition to films and photos were collected to fill in the blank spaces.

This was also the time when the archives established by our compatriots living abroad were made accessible. To this day we are still only discovering the richness they hold and the number of opportunities we have to make it accessible to the community. These community-based and volunteer-run memory institutions have preserved and continue to preserve those parts of our history that memory institutions in the homeland were unable to attend to during the Soviet era. I am currently working in one of these memory institutions abroad, Estonian Studies Centre/VEMU, The Museum of Estonians Abroad. It is full of personal memories (both written and audio/film recorded), diaries, letters, documents and photos of fellow Estonians who fled to the West in the wake of the occupation.

Jay Winter has emphasized the importance of civil society's input to memory work: "A huge amount of this memory work is being done by the civil society. Different activist groups are uncovering and preserving the memoirs and atrocities of the II WW and Soviet occupation. Today these movements function as influential non-governmental organisations, continuing to preserve memory and, in many cases, cultivate civil society. What we would like to see more in the future is integrating NGO activities and government action." (Blog post 31.01.2012: Memory Work and Civil Society, <http://cambridgeculturalmemory.blogspot.ca/2012/01/memory-work-and-civil-society-crash.html>)

Among the countries that were under the sphere of Soviet influence, the Baltic countries were not only erased from the world map, but also from the memory of those living in the free world. Therefore, it is not surprising that there was some tension surrounding the newly liberated Baltic countries, not only for the liberated peoples themselves. Everything seemed new again, especially the freedom to make decisions, but we were also exciting to foreigners. Despite their role as teachers of ways to run a state, economy and businesses, foreigners were also introduced to our culture.

Thus, it seems natural that both Balts and foreigners were curious to learn more about Baltic history and culture directing their focus towards Baltic memory institutions. The interest was truly reciprocal. We were put back on the map and the world was interested in knowing who we are and what Balts are like.

On the 10th birthday of BAAC it is important to ask how this kind of organization came into being a decade after the collapse of the Soviet occupation. Perhaps this was also an attempt to overcome the disruption, a desire to include all Baltic peoples in the international archival community. Perhaps it was a desire to teach and provide support to our efforts from our Western and Scandinavian colleagues, and the need to integrate within the Baltic community. Or perhaps just pure human curiosity on both sides- who are these “others” and what are they like?

Confirmation can be found from one of Lasse's many detailed and pleasant BAAC conference summaries. It seems that our Scandinavian partners, who provided us with professional wisdom, also received useful knowledge from us about how historical events affected our countries as well as our mentality. As Lasse wrote: “I can't decide what I was most impressed with, taking a stroll in downtown Tartu in the early afternoon the day before the conference. Was it the ambience of the city with all the young students, all the inviting restaurants and the piously restored historic buildings? I have read the history books and know the heavy toll the city took under the advancing Red Army in 1944. How could it survive the war and its aftermath of Soviet deportations and death squads tracking down Estonian intellectuals? We got a glimpse of the work done by dedicated people in the national institutions under difficult political conditions, proud of their cultural heritage and at the same time aware of its importance for the future. Then it feels really important with the kind of networking and sharing of knowledge and experience that BAAC stands for and how it is manifested through, for example our conferences and workshops.”

But now I have rushed ahead in time. The world was not created in a single day and neither was BAAC. In the interest of preserving the historical truth, we must take an excursion into an earlier time, the time prior to BAAC's establishment, a time from which many other BAAC members including myself do not have personal memories. Thus, for the following discussion, I will rely on the memoirs of Tedd Urnes.

The ideas for the creation of BAAC reach back to the year 2000. The Nordic-Baltic Seminar headed by the International Federation of Television Archives (FIAT/IFTA) took place from May 26-27th, 2000 in Tallinn. The seminar was hosted by Estonian Television and was held at the Hotel Viru. The members of the organizing committee were: Jyrki Stolt (YLE), Reet Harkmaa (ETV), Tedd Johansen (later Urnes, NRK) and Lasse Nilsson (SVT).

Two years later, on October 12- 18th, 2002 the FIAT/IFTA Conference took place in Antalya, Turkey. Delegates from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania participated in the conference. The General Secretary of FIAT/IFTA, Tedd Johansen/Urnes, was chair of a working group to support members from the Baltic countries.

During the conference in Antalya, representatives from the Baltic countries had informal meetings with the aim to set up a conference or seminar in Latvia. The contact person for audiovisual archives in Latvia was Andris Kesteris (the Library and Archives Canada).

What was the state of international AV archiving at that time? In his book "Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles" (first published 1998, republished 2004) Ray Edmondson writes: "Although the first audiovisual archives came into existence about a century ago, and the field may be said to have developed self-awareness from the 1930s onwards, sustained growth is basically a phenomenon of the second half of the 20th century. It is therefore a young field, developing rapidly, with resources and skills very unevenly spread around the globe." Edmondson adds that it was during the 1990s that the development of a codified theoretical basis for the profession finally became a concern, for several reasons.

"Firstly, the obvious and increasing importance of the audiovisual media as a part of the world's memory had led to a rapid expansion of archiving activity, most notably within commercial or semi-commercial settings beyond the ambit of the traditional institutional archives. "

"Secondly, individual practitioners in audiovisual archives had long lacked a clear professional identity and recognition within the collecting professions, government, the audiovisual industries and the

community in general. /---/ The emergence of organizations aimed at meeting these individual, professional needs was a sign of change.”

”Thirdly, the lack of formal training standards and courses for practitioners had emerged as a significant issue.“

”Fourthly, rapid technological change was challenging old assumptions as the so-called “information superhighway” advanced.

IASA was established in 1969, FIAT/IFTA in 1976 - these are all fairly young organizations in comparison with the IFLA established in 1929 and the ICA in 1948. Therefore, even during the restoration of the independence of the Baltic States, audiovisual archiving was still a budding field.

But let us return to the story of the birth of BAAC. The close contact with The Nordic Branch of IASA led to the seminar in Riga in the year 2004, which took place from September 30th-October 3rd. The title of the seminar was ”Partnerships, Access and Preserving Our Cultural Heritage” and it was supported by the Latvian Television, Lithuanian Radio & Television, Estonian Television, Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, Swedish Television and Norwegian and Swedish Embassies. The host for the seminar was Latvian Television.

I first heard about the organization of the first Riga seminar in October 2003, when I met Andris at a Baltic event in Ottawa, the Octoberfest. As I spoke with Andris over the roar of the excited festival crowd, he casually mentioned the seminar that was planned to take place in Riga sometime in the future. We discussed television archives and other “big names” in the field of audiovisuals, which are fairly foreign to me. At that time, I was more focused on the archives of Estonians abroad, the reason for my trip to Ottawa. But at the beginning of the fall in 2004, I received an invitation from Andris to attend the Riga seminar, with the request that I bring as many Estonians as I could along with me.

At the time I was head of the Estonian Cultural History Archives. ECHA is the main depository of the archival documents of Estonian literary and cultural figures. The photo archives of ECHA are also remarkable but our audio and film collections were pretty small, very specific, limited and considered

to be of secondary value compared to our document archives. At least, this is what we, a group composed of mainly literary scholars, had gotten used to thinking. What Ray Edmonson had written seemed to apply accurately both to us and to myself: ECHA had yet to define itself as an AV archive. That's why at first, the Riga Seminar did not seem to be a priority for me nor for the ECHA. But Andris insisted and - voilà! - there I was, in the beautiful city of Riga, enjoying nice autumn weather and a warm welcome from Latvian TV and the Seminar organizers: Andris, Lasse, Tedd, Rasa and others.

I didn't belong to the team and I didn't have a paper. I was just looking around, listening to the presentations; I made lots of new contacts (also among Estonian AV colleagues I had never met before) and understood that it was still a useful trip, an example of how taking a break from an everyday routine can be useful. The Riga Seminar was indeed refreshing and useful for many reasons.

What do I remember from the first seminar? The head organizers of the seminar, of course. The effective bustling around of the brilliant coordinator, Nora Vojevodska's (later Licite), and Andris Kesteris' friendly and encouraging moderation. Lasse Nilsson's and Jaqueline von Arb's perfect presentations and, of course, Tedd. I remember the general curiosity of our Nordic colleagues. The excitement of Baltic participants, particularly at a special meeting we held at the very end of the seminar dreaming about all kind of co-operation projects, mostly related to digitizing. There were lots of questions, fewer answers, and a fair amount of fun and laughter. Too much excitement, I thought (quite typically for a sceptical Estonian!). We'll see what will remain of it when everyone returns to everyday life, I thought... But here we are, eleven years later, still together.

The first Riga Seminar was a success. It brought together an exciting group of international people, ideas and inspiration. Different worlds met in Riga. We were ready to overcome the historical disruption. The time was ripe for the establishment of BAAC.

The Riga Planning Meeting took place at the end of April 2005, about which Lasse has written the following: "There was of course our brilliant conference organizer, from our host organization, Latvian Television, Nora Licite, and Andris Kesteris of the Library and Archives Canada together with Tedd Urnes of the NRK. The latter both inexhaustible inspirers and skilled organizers when it comes to international audiovisual archiving events in general, and Baltic ones in particular. /---/ There was also

Rasa Miskinyte, producer from LRT in Vilnius, Vilnis Auzinš of the Latvian Museum of Photography and Ivi Tomingas from the Estonian Film Archives./---/ The reason for this "name dropping", apart from having met these colleagues already last year, is to emphasize the depth of the representation of Baltic and international audiovisual archives at this planning event. So maybe, it is not a coincidence that we shared a meeting place at the restaurant, Raibais Balodis, Latvian for "the speckled pigeon", as a metaphor for this diversity."

The aim of this meeting was twofold: to find out whether it would be possible to establish a Pan-Baltic audiovisual archiving cooperative organization and to organize a second Riga conference in fall 2005.

The new council was elected in Riga. The members of the council were: President Piret Noorhani, (Estonian Literary Museum), Vice-President Rasa Miskinyte (Lithuanian Radio & Television), Vice-President Inga Vilcane (Newspaper Diena Library, Riga), Secretary Nora Licite (Latvian Television). Board members were: Tedd Urnes (NRK), Lasse Nilsson (SVT), Andris Kesteris (Library and Archives Canada), Reet Harkmaa (Estonian Television), Jan Aasmund Jakobsen (Norway), Ivi Tomingas (Estonian Filmarchives), Vilnis Auzinš (Latvian Museum of Photography), Eha Väinsalu (Estonian Television), Lelde Neimane (Occupation Museum, Riga) Alexander Jaransky (Lithuanian Radio & Television) and Egle Gudelyte (Lithuanian Radio & Television).

I did not know about all these discussions because I got sick the night before my trip to Riga and was unable to attend the meeting. Sometime in the afternoon on the day of the meeting, Andris called me from Riga and asked me if I was willing to be the President of BAAC. "Don't worry, you don't have to do anything," he added encouragingly. I don't know if I can blame a high fever or something else (frankly, I suspect I was drawn to the excitement of a new challenge), but I accepted the offer.

This board established in Riga was an interim board and named the Baltic Audiovisual Archival Council. The board's main purpose was to prepare for the next seminar in Riga and to formulate BAAC into an official organization and non-profit association.

By that time, I had been the director of the Estonian Cultural History Archives at the Estonian Literary Museum for almost 10 years in addition to being on the board for a number of different organizations

and a member of the Board of Directors for a non-profit organization, all of which had taken place in Estonia. Thus, collaborating with a variety of people and institutions was nothing new to me. However, I had not been a part of any international organizations, let alone knowing anything about how to go about directing one. Oddly enough, a second international initiative began at the same time between the archives of Estonians abroad and Baltic archives, the collaborative web we now know as the Baltic Heritage Network. It seems that internationalization was becoming the trend and for me as an archivist, both of these ventures were connected.

Learn, learn, learn was my motto for the next few months. I had to learn how to do business in English, which I had not studied at any one of the schools I attended. I had to develop the mandate for the organization in English. I had to find out what kinds of legal differences existed between local and international non-profit organizations. I had to get all the necessary information from all the other board members in order to register the organization as an NGO. In the process, I discovered that different countries have very different ways of dealing with bureaucracy. It turned out that not everyone has an ID-number like the Estonians do, who are accustomed to using this number when dealing with legalities and are willing to share it with everyone. Instead, in some countries there were Social Security Numbers that were kept secret.

Some board members did not agree with one of the points in the constitution, which stated that all members are equally and personally responsible for all the financial decisions made by the board. But this kind of statement was required for Estonian legislation. Clearly, I could not neglect my primary work, so I was busy and life was a little stressful, but it was also exciting.

At this point, I'd like to personally thank all the founding members of BAAC, who played a role in its creation, but I would especially like to thank Andris, my English teacher and editor, who remained patient, positive and encouraging as I learned how to be a president.

I had to learn how to work with people and institutions from different cultural backgrounds, thought processes and ways of interacting. The reason I am sharing all of these personal experiences is to encourage others, who may be doubting themselves in situations similar to mine, but the risk is worth

it! You will not only expand your own worldview and possibly learn new, valuable skills, but it will also provide more professional opportunities for your institutions and colleagues. It is possible that now, ten years later, interacting within this larger context may be easier, as Baltic people have grown accustomed to being a part of the large world. But maybe not. One thing I know for sure, BAAC has been a great opportunity to practice international collaboration for all of us.

The second seminar in Riga was also successful. It took place from September 15th-17th, 2005 at Latvian TV with the title: "Pan-Baltic Images: Reaching Out To The World." 31 presentations and workshops were held.

Participants came from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Sweden, Norway, Canada, France, Germany, Finland. During the meetings, plans were already being made for a larger event to take place in 2007- a BAAC-IASA joint conference.

A new BAAC board council was also elected at the 2004 seminar in Riga, which had to officially register BAAC as a new organization. This was established in the spring of 2006. The founding documents were signed on March 21st at the Estonian Embassy on the Tyrgata in Stockholm. Why were they signed at the embassy? This was because the Secretary of the Embassy, Sven Tölp, was authorized to authenticate the signatures. The signatories were Piret Noorhani (Estonia), Juozas Markauskas (Lithuania), Inga Vilcāne (Latvia), Andris Kesteris (Canada), Tedd Urnes (Norway), Lasse Nilsson and Lars-Gunnar Bengtsson (Sweden). There was also an ordinary member among the official board members, Kristīne Pabērza (Latvia). The board meeting was continued on the premises of Swedish Television, where Eva-Lis Green (Swedish Television) and Gunnel Jönsson (SRF Radio Archives, IASA) greeted participants and attended the meeting.

BAAC was registered as a non-profit organization in Estonia (Tartu) on April 4, 2006. Another date to celebrate!

As I was writing this talk, I began to copy-paste various BAAC events, conferences, local seminars, etc, purely out of interest. The list was over 20 pages long! So, friends, this means that we already have a draft for a complete book manuscript! We don't have time to go over all of them now, but some

tendencies captured my attention.

The event that started out as the Riga Seminar in 2007, had first taken place in Riga, of course. In 2007 the first IASA-BAAC joint conference was held, where the Riga Seminar was not mentioned. In 2008, the Riga Seminar traveled abroad for the first time and took place in Tartu, although it was still called the “Riga Seminar” with the addition of the words “in Tartu.”. But in 2010 the title “Riga Seminar” was replaced by the designation “BAAC annual conference.” The conference took place in Riga again, but without any traces of the seminar from which it was born.

Today, the humble Riga Seminar has vanished into the annals of the historical record and only remains a nostalgic memory to veteran BAAC members. The BAAC Annual Conference has confidently replaced the Riga Seminar. This is a natural path to take.

Another natural change is a shift in the composition of the board. One piece of wisdom I have learned over the years, is to know when to back away so as not to be an obstacle and put brakes on developments.

I find, that Juozas and Zane have been more fitting people for filling the position, as I am only marginally involved with the “audiovisual.” It was a great joy for me to help in the establishment of BAAC, but this “growing child” needed caretakers who were a better fit for that role. Under the care of Juozas and Zane BAAC's activity is more specialized and in depth with regard to the audiovisual field. BAAC has been collaborating with similar partners in large international projects with organizations such as IASA and SOIMA. Thanks to Pekka Gronow's initiative, BAAC was involved even with the shaping of European Union legislation in the AV field. There should be a professional organization involved in this kind of detailed field related work.

In addition to its main event, the Riga Seminar/Annual Conference, BAAC has also organized a number of local events. We have held study tours in not only our homeland, but also in the homes of our close neighbors, in Finland and Sweden. I remember how much excitement and curiosity there was when we met at the different memory institutions in Tallinn and Tartu with Estonian colleagues to be introduced to their collections. There have also been larger international meetings in the other Baltic

countries and Sweden.

Our web of collaboration has also expanded not only in size, but geographically. The BAAC founders were representatives of the Baltic States, Norway, Sweden and Canada. Since then, the organization has attracted interest and membership from countries outside this sphere. France, England and Italy have also been part of the picture from the beginning and naturally, our neighbors, from Finland and Poland, also joined us. Our society has become globalized through IASA and SOIMA.

It has been great to be a part of the growth and expansion of the audiovisual archives community. Following the second IASA-BAAC joint conference in Vilnius in 2013, Andris wrote: "Although BAAC and IASA differ greatly in comparative size, resources and scope of membership, it is fair to say that they work in a complementary fashion. As with other organizations of this nature, the main goal is one of exchanging valuable information among colleagues on a global basis, and at a reasonable cost. For the BAAC, one of the founding principles was that professionals, whose organizations did not necessarily have budgets for international trips and conferences at exotic venues, could get exposure to the exchange and development of expertise in their fields. Initially, this was particularly so for our colleagues in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It is amazing how, in less than ten years, BAAC members are all participating in a truly international initiative, where the activity has also grown tenfold. With every year, which also includes important workshops by related archives, museums, radio and television companies, the network has been growing."

Yes, we have built a wonderful community for which we share responsibility. We need to be professional in our everyday work, including in our collaboration. But we also need to increase community awareness and to have an effect on the public. We need to help people understand the importance of audiovisual heritage to secure a place for it in people's historical knowledge. This is always easier when we work together. We are one archival community. We are almost a family. Happy Birthday BAAC + family! Our baby is growing into a teenager. Are the rebellious years still ahead of us? If yes, then let's hope that we will continue to fight for a good cause.