

A window to new opportunities? Archival professionals in potential entrepreneur roles in the Swedish reality-TV show *It's in the Walls*

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ABSTRACT

In this article we examine the present and future roles of archives and archivists in relation to contemporary institutional pressures to entrepreneurialise. We investigate them where they meet the public, where the information sector meets entertainment in a reading of the Swedish reality-TV show *It's in the Walls*, where archives play a prominent role. We claim that the most likely archival entrepreneur would be a *go-between*, *communicating the value of archives*. In our exploration of what such go-between entrepreneurs might look like, we conceive of seven different possibly productive, possibly problematic, roles in which ALM-professionals, that is all who are working with the materials and matters of the institutions of Archives, Libraries and Museums could be cast. Focusing specifically on archival professionals, we name these, in the (entrepreneurial) spirit of a playful inquiry: *The Entertainer*, *the Expert*, *the Explorer*, *the Emotion Facilitator*, *the Educator*, *The Evidence Provider*, and *the Knowledge Organiser*. The TV show in our analysis serves as a window through which may be spotted new opportunities and we aim to contribute to a critical discussion of what the introduction of initiatives and discourses of entrepreneurship might do in, and to, the everyday lives and roles of ALM-professionals.

KEYWORDS

Reality TV; *It's in the Walls*; archives; archivists; cultural heritage; entrepreneurs; television studies; archival science; popular culture; archival professional roles; ALM; information; entertainment

Introduction

In this article we are concerned with the present and future roles of archives and archivists as they are called upon to respond to contemporary institutional pressures to entrepreneurialise. We investigate them at the crossroads of entertainment and information through a reading of the

reality-TV-show *It's in the Walls*, (Jonsson, 2015-present), where archives play a prominent role. In an entrepreneurial spirit of playful inquiry, we suggest and explore a number of possibly productive, possibly problematic entrepreneur roles in which archival professionals could be cast. Barbara Czarniawska and Pierre Guillet de Monthoux taught us that fiction can offer object lessons in the managing of organizations (1994). Along similar lines, we find that popular media like reality TV may provide examples for discussions of archival professional roles.

The concern with roles, actually all roles of “ALM-professionals” (Huvila, Kindling & Greifeneder, 2014), that is, those who are working with the materials and matters of the institutions of Archives, Libraries and Museums, has long been a topic of debate and discussion (Edquist, Bjelland & Hansen, 2023; Huvila, 2016; Khosrowjerdi et al, 2024). To irreverently simplify and summarize this vast topic, discussions of the roles of archives and archivists have been sparked by various concerns: the survival of ALM-institutions in the digital age, the influence of new public management on public knowledge institutions, the economization of the welfare state and increased pressures to market and commodify cultural goods. To this can be added paradoxical political views of cultural heritage and memory institutions, concerns about the security of records in the light of cyberattacks and hacking, and the now fast-growing role of AI, in terms of gathering and producing information.

In 2024, we know that the internet has not put an end to archives, but the eternal question, as Andrea Ellmeier points out in her article on cultural entrepreneurialism (2013), as to whether a book or a film is a cultural or economic product, remains. We may never agree on an answer since it is embedded in a web of tensions between the fields of culture and commerce which Pierre Bourdieu so famously theorised (1993), as well as in differences in perceptions of what is high and low cultures of art and taste. As Ellmeier points out, “*culture [now] shapes commodity production*” and “*high culture is becoming increasingly commercial*” (2013). The cultural entrepreneurs of which Ellmeier speaks in her study include “*a new creative workforce*” of flexible “*artists and creators*”, individuals who make their ways onto the market in new ways. The upside is large employment potential, but the downside is precarious working conditions.

As Ellmeier shows, new times, institutional pressures and societal changes indeed bring in new expressions and articulations of art, culture and entrepreneurship on the labour market, and, we add, are reflected in popular media. We ask what happens; what becomes visible, when archives and a varied body of professionals who work with them come together in a reality television show? What can we learn about traditional, present and future values and roles, potentials and problems for archives and archivists? Can we extend the range, and deepen the understanding, of what archival professionals might be and do, by exploring how they and archives figure in a sector not traditionally considered their natural habitat: the entertainment industry, more specifically reality TV?

Why archives and reality TV? We departed our investigative journey from a common platform, that of an ALM-division at a Swedish university where we both teach and research. Our respective disciplinary backgrounds archival studies (the professional role of archivists and genealogy being main interests) and media studies and ethnology (house dreams, homemaking and reality TV currently in focus), converged in conversations about a number of television shows, one of which was the Swedish public television (SVT) reality-TV series *Allt för Sverige* (Åkerlund, 2011-present), a program in which Swedish Americans seek their ancestral roots in Sweden. We discussed the series' archival usage and archivists in media and and popular culture generally, and this inspired us to further explore the role of the archivist in reality TV. We selected *It's in the Walls* (Jonsson, 2015-present) as a good material of investigation for shedding some light on aspects of the archival profession in relation to the aforementioned socio-cultural concerns and pressures, and how it resonated with the idea of the entrepreneur.

Archives, society and entrepreneurship

In general, and historically, archives have played a significant but relatively invisible role. Swedish national archivist Karin Åström Iko states that in general archives have not received much attention (2003). Archives are often taken for granted (Admund Funck & Porter, 2023). They can be seen as part of society's knowledge infrastructure (Trace, 2022), often invisible until they break down or malfunction (Chan & Klareld, 2022). Although contemporary conceptions of archives are integral to the ideas that public administration should be transparent and information freely accessible, they are generally less visible than other cultural heritage institutions such as libraries or museums. The same can be said about archival professionals.

Jennifer Pearson (2022) shows how the consequences of the framing of the archivist persona in research discourse as passive and introverted resonates with this claim and how these attributes are “*viewed as contributing to critical concerns for the sector, such as a lack of visibility, perceived effectiveness, and funding*” (Pearson, 2022, p. 95). The result is described as inefficiency when it comes to communicating value to prospective stakeholders. This suggests archivists need to develop how they communicate value, their own as well as that of their archives. For the initiated, the value of archives is of course obvious; they have long been used to preserve documentation of economic as well as cultural importance: bank records, personal letters, photo collections, medical journals, etc. These vital functions often go largely unnoticed. To become more efficient, receive more funding and recognition, it seems encouraged that the traditionally “*quieter*” archivist, their “*low-key whisper of self-promotion*” (Pearson, 2022, p. 105) needs to be replaced by a more vociferous, extroverted one. Contemplating this assumption, we speculate on whether the call for an outwardly directed archivist is a call for an entrepreneur. What would happen if the archival professional performed the role of a much more visible, loud (audible?) and proactive agent? Would this be a cultural entrepreneur of sorts?

Entrepreneurship, and business administration are not our fields of expertise, we confess. We initially entertained a layperson's typically fuzzy understanding of an entrepreneur as somebody who is doing something with money and markets. With assistance from a classic source on the history of entrepreneurship we landed in the more theoretically anchored recognition of entrepreneurship as a mix of individual and process characteristics, as intention or enactment of a set of practices aimed at innovation (Landström, 2005). In what follows, we operate with this recognition and a simplified notion of an entrepreneur as someone who sees opportunities to create and make new products and services that may stand to make a profit if launched on a market as part of a business idea (Ratten, 2023, p. 80). We also understand this role in relation to a presumed need for archivists to become visible and, if not vociferous, at least noticed: articulating their skills and advertising their realms of records for some kind of consumption/sale, whether self-employed or an employee of a public institution. The TV show in our analysis serves as a window through which may be spotted new opportunities in terms of roles for archival professionals, and our ambition with this article is not to pen a new theory of entrepreneurship, but contribute to a critical discussion of what introducing initiatives and discourses of entrepreneurship may do in and to the everyday lives and roles of such professionals.

The question must be asked though: can or should archival professionals, a category of employees traditionally considered quiet, passive and invisible, be transformed into extrovert, innovative, entrepreneurs? Judging by one of our leading cultural-heritage administrative agencies, The Swedish National Heritage Board, they might need to be. They write: “*Archives, libraries, museums and the cultural environment are depending on innovative solutions to be able to preserve, utilise and develop the cultural heritage*” (Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2021). Unfortunately, they add, “*the range of services and products is limited*” (Riksantikvarieämbetet,

2021). They actually express a desire, which we in this article read as an ambition to directly or indirectly entrepreneurialise the field. Can this be done within the traditional domains of archives? Is that really the purpose of archives and their professionals?

The Swedish Archives Act (SFS 1990:782) establishes that public agencies' archives are part of the national cultural heritage. They should be preserved and kept in order and cared for in such a way that they accommodate: 1. the right to access public documents, 2. the need for information for the administration of justice and administration, and 3. the needs of research. However, our documents and information, our 'cultural heritage', are not as publicly available as this makes them appear to be. We cannot stroll over to a shelf, 'shop' a record on display and bring it home in a cloth bag. Stockholm city archives greets its visitors with "*a bright and open area*", but documents are stored seven floors below ground, and have to be "*brought out on cartridges from locked rooms*" (Jensen, Forsmark & Larsson Östergren 2016, p. 63, *our transl.*). This invisibility may pose a problem for entrepreneurial projects in the archival sector as might society's "*general lack of knowledge*" about what archivists do and what services archives offer (Jensen, Forsmark & Larsson Östergren 2016, p. 63, *our transl.*). Cultural heritage is not just 'any' product, to innovate, market or sell.

The archival professional entrepreneur as go-between

Our response is that archivists do not appear as 'natural' entrepreneurs in relation to 'public' records. Attempts at entrepreneurialising seem to us to necessitate figuring the archivist as a go-between, somewhere between the archives and 'consumers', rather than making the archives the main attraction. The Swedish National Heritage Board initiative, The Cultural Heritage Incubator, (2018–2021), has tested and evaluated "*a model for stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship in the field of cultural heritage*", a clear example of a development embracing entrepreneurship (Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2021). The incubator presents, for example, Anne-Marie Nilsson's company Minneri as one of its collaborating entrepreneurs. Minneri focuses on helping companies, institutions and private individuals do archival research, retrieving and interpreting archival materials (Minneri, 2022). To speak of entrepreneurialisation of the archives itself, may be misguided, although a shift in perspective of what archives do may be said to be happening. Eva Tegnhed points out that archives are moving away from being institutions that preserve and store to making material available, which in turn has made archival work more visible (Tegnhed, 2018). This is potentially something that would benefit an archival professional/cultural entrepreneur, such as Minneri.¹ Minneri seems to be a go-between between archives and consumers, who, (we *posit*) has managed to communicate the value of archives to clients who are willing to pay money for retrieval of information and its interpretation. In our study we consider *It's in the Walls* as a similar *locus* for transactions of information, and look for what entrepreneur roles might figure in it for ALM-professionals to make use of.

¹ It should be noted that the archival sector is not void of business ventures. The Centre for Business History started already in 1974, and they help companies "*use their history as a strategic asset, a practice called history marketing*" (Centrum för näringslivshistoria, n.d.). Other entrepreneurs that can be mentioned are ArkivIT (2020), educator within archives- and records management, Sipu (n.d.), secure information storage firms e.g. Depona (2024); Iron Mountain (2024), professional genealogists (e.g. Sjölund, 2022; Kvist, 2024), who combine traditional family history research with DNA analysis and new digitally informed alternatives to archival searching.

Reality TV, *It's in the Walls*, and our approach.

There are many types of popular reality shows, often called *affective* TV or *makeover*-TV (Kavka, 2008; Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Enevold, 2013), and a vast number of them focus on houses and homes. As indicated above, our research found common ground in reality TV. One of us had focused on the Swedish show *Husdrömmar* (SVT, 2014-present) in which high hopes and architectural plans of a home-making project are woven into narratives of the weals and woes of the family involved, and cries and laughter are essential components (Enevold Duncan, 2022). The other focused on the genealogy-themed show *Allt för Sverige* (Åkerlund, 2011-present) mentioned above. The affective component and the meaning of home are significant in both. *Allt för Sverige* makes use of archival sources to piece together stories of participants' ancestry (Klareld, 2023). We settled on the immensely popular *It's in the Walls* (Jonsson, 2015), which combines homemaking and archival use for storytelling.

In *It's in the walls* homeowners wonder about the history of their house, conduct a restoration project with a building antiquarian and have conversations with an antiques expert (who brings forth material from different archives), learn about their property, its previous owners, their former living conditions and how they changed over time. The series uses the emotionally charged house-dream genre to hunt for cultural and family heritage. In contrast to make-over genres, including house renovations and weight-loss competitions, this show rummages into genealogies of the individual, the family and the place, but in the same way, emphasises emotions and the attraction of identity with and connection to home-making.

We started by watching several seasons of the show and discussing our initial perceptions of it in relation to entrepreneurship, cultural heritage and archival professionals. Our approach may be defined as a 'close' but contextualized reading, in which the TV-program is regarded as a text and discourse, broadly understood, paying critical attention to images, sound, and what was said and how, and its context of production. Our analysis is qualitative rather than quantitative, and we employ principles of "*reflexive thematic analysis*" (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Our definition of close reading leans on Paula Moya's "*socio-formal*" approach, which assumes that texts are to be regarded and read as complex sites for examining and reflecting upon socio-cultural political contexts, (Moya, 2016) paying attention to content as well as production, which is in keeping with much Television research (Fiske & Hartley, 2003). We have not analysed the development of the program over time, but focused on how archival professionals figure in our chosen case. For the purpose of reporting our findings in a brief article, we have selected examples from only two episodes, both from season 9: Kungsträdgården 5, Strängnäs, Södermanland episode 1 (e1s9) and episode 2 (e2s9), Torstorp farm in Grimeton, Halland. They aired on SVT August 17 and 24, 2023, and are publically available on SVT Play. The episodes are representative of the way episodes in the series on the whole are set up in terms of content and structure.

The initial coding entailed watching all episodes, making notes of when and how the archives and the archival professionals appeared in the program, what they said and did, how the archives were used, by whom, and how; how the program was introduced in voice-overs and web, press and media presentations. We discussed our findings in light of the hypothesis that the archivist should or could be seen as, or become, an entrepreneur. To our 'textual material', we added our own experiences as educators in an ALM-programme and two chance conversations with archivists. We did not perform any formal interviews. Our study is not historical, but we contextualize our case in relation to the history of high and low culture and the stereotyping of archives in popular culture over time, and situate the program in relation to other contemporary reality-TV shows, going back a few decades. With our eclectic approach, we have identified seven roles in which we found that the program assists in casting archival professionals as

communicative go-betweens, that is, in potential entrepreneurial guises. We named the seven roles in keeping with an ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ of inquiry, a playful and creative mindset, using a mnemonic ‘E-formula’: 6 E’s and a K. We will describe these roles below and show how their success depends on, and may take advantage of, the characteristics of both the reality-TV genre, such as displays of emotions, hardship, triumph, suspense and the traditional symbolic properties of archives and those who work with them, including enigmas, magic, mystery, dust and secrets.

Archives, homes and reality TV: a space for the go-between

Before we go into our analysis of *It’s in the Walls*, we will elaborate on, contextualize and give some background to archives and reality TV in relation to culture. We have hypothesized above that for the archival entrepreneur to emerge, they may need to be somebody who communicates value in a more visible way, and need to figure as a go-between. Here, we will show and argue that reality TV may be a *locus* for such a go-between, and offer a variety of roles to be conceived. A space is created for archives and archival professionals to become much more visible when/if featured in reality TV dealing with cultural heritage, specifically when it latches on to the widespread popularity of dreaming of owning and renovating homes (Enevold Duncan, 2024). This combination resonates with what editors Michael Moss and David Thomas conclude in the introduction to their book *Do archives have value?* (2019). They argue that there are two significant reasons why archives are indeed valuable: their contributions to justice and to narrative and their value to entrepreneurs, for example within cultural-heritage tourism. They point to the use which has been made:

of archives by the great English country houses. They have been able to transform buildings which are architecturally interesting and [...] worth a one-time visit into real story houses where visitors can be attracted back, time after time, to learn about different aspects of the history of the house and who lived in it. (Moss & Thomas, 2019, p. xxvii).

It’s in the Walls certainly displays similarities here in the way archives are used. The program assists in constructing a ‘house-story’, including genealogy and building history, showing participants and viewers that the house is not just any family home, but historically valuable, worth conserving and passing on, and that this act of conservation may produce cultural as well as monetary value. Money, however, is seldom mentioned in this program, which brings us to our next contextualization which positions *It’s in the Walls* as a potent mix of high and low popular culture.

Reality TV and archives - Entertainment meets Information

Today, culture is, as it has always been, a class-based story and the TV-show under scrutiny in our article is no exception. An interesting aspect is that archives in a sense still retain certain associations with high-brow culture, universities, academic research, royal institutions and national collections. This makes their marriage with reality TV even more exciting. The often garish, extroverted, commercial genre of reality TV meets the quiet, dusty, forgotten, not-for-profit, introverted archive - a wedding of high and low as it were, of the elevated, and the popular. Reality TV is, as a rule, classified as entertainment and popular culture, sometimes called ‘mass culture’, and at times even ‘low’ culture as distinct from ‘high’ culture. We will not make an attempt to define the concept of popular/culture here. Suffice to say that the battle over culture has a long history from before Samuel T. Coleridge (1830) to Stuart Hall (1980) (to mention only

a brief period and one type of battle) and is far from over. This is a fact any governmental funding debate in Sweden (and many other countries), over whose type of culture should be funded and what should count as culture, may attest to. Reality TV nevertheless prevails in the midst of such debates, being one of the most successful formats of contemporary television productions, and we argue, constitutes an interesting mix of high and low, as does archives. We hasten to add that archives were not unseen or unheard of in popular culture or TV before reality TV embraced them, and we will give some examples to illustrate our claim about their stereotypical characterization as dusty, and ‘forgotten’ and the entertainment value that is embedded in their mystery paradox.

The boring exciting archive – the paradox in the basement

Archives or archival documents are frequently present in documentaries in the form of photographs or video footage. Archives are also often seen in criminal dramas. It is not uncommon to find a police detective or investigative task force relegated to archival work in dusty or dark basements, as a punishment. On the other hand, vital evidence may be discovered in a basement, in a long-lost archival box. Herein lies an archival contradiction, that of boredom and excitement, with the paradoxical potential for burying *and* unearthing information. *The X-Files* is a prime example of how mystery and secrets are connected with archives in popular culture (Carter et al, 1993-2018; Friberg 2013). In one of Sweden’s most popular radio programmes *Ring så spelar vi!*², launched in 1968 (Sveriges Radio, 2015), Swedish Radio’s Grammfonarkivet³ features prominently as a *treasure chamber* (Esaias, 2018) to which the ‘vinyl-record fetcher’ used to run, “*during live broadcast*” (Haglund & Solvang, 2021), to retrieve the music the caller requested to have played after having answered a question by the program host. The program leader, in a voice full of suspense, would answer the caller’s request with a: “*let us see if we can find it in the archive.*” This invocation of a physical archive, continued long after the record collections were digitised. The archive is invisible, mysterious, yet promising revelation and this quality adds to the entertainment value.

Hans Waalwijk has written about archivists in fiction (books, graphic novels, films), and points out that “*it is often merely the archive, not the archivist*” that features, indicating that archives appear to be more interesting than the people working in them (2010, p. 29). However, the image of archives is not entirely positive either, according to Theimer: “*In almost all new stories that relate to archives, it is assumed that they are boring, forbidden, dusty (...journalists seem to repeat it in every news story about archives)...*” (Theimer, 2016, p. 45). We concur: this is the case in the recent British series *The Tower* (Testar, 2021-), the American classic *The Wire* (Thorson et al., 2002-2008), the filmization of Danish author Jussi Adler-Olsen’s detective novels about the police task force *Afdeling [section] Q*, (a clear nod to the X-files), for example *Kvinden i buret* (2007), made into film 2013, and the lawyer show *Suits* (Klein, 2011-2019). In both *The Wire* and *Kvinden i buret* the investigators are relegated to and carry out a substantial amount of their work in a darkish basement.

Archivists and genealogists seldom appear in the type of programs we mention here not even in cases where they are employed by the production (Mejster, 2018). More often, it is the archival documents that are visible. However, in *It’s in the Walls*, to which we now turn, the archival professionals do occasionally appear in person.

² Our translation of the radio show’s name into English: “*Call, and we will play!*”

³ Official translation: the Record Library.

Entrepreneur roles in *It's in the Walls* – 6 E's & 1 K

It's in the Walls, has been on Swedish Television since November 2015 and is currently in its 10th season (2024). Leading the program are building antiquarian Erika Åberg, and antiques expert Rickard Thunér (season 5–now; historian Christopher O'Regan season 1–4). It is a very popular program; in 2020, SVT's announcement to pause the program, was met by protests and petitions from a large number of viewers. The decision was revoked, reports Anton Glanzelius, program director for entertainment, due to “*massive engagement*” demonstrated by its audience’s “*well-worded declarations of love*” (SVT Nyheter, October 20, 2020).

In *It's in the Walls*, viewers get to follow the program leaders as they meet the inhabitants of a house selected from applications to participate in the show, to help them find the history of their house and to do a small renovation project in the vein of conservation. The presentation of the program on the digital platform SVT Play confirms our observation about the importance of the connection between home-making, heritage, family and renovation:

Erika Åberg and Rickard Thunér help homeowners curious to know more to get to know their house and its past. Rickard guides us through the fates once played out in the home and Erika unravels the built heritage of the house. She also helps the owners carefully and sustainably restore something in the home. Moving human destinies, fantastic encounters, mystery and inspiring homes. (SVT Play, n.d, our transl.)

Historical knowledge of the house is gathered through archival material, such as maps, photographs, insurance contracts, letters, ledgers etc, and at times artefacts. Episode 1, season 9, starts with the camera panning three different houses, then cutting to antiques expert Thunér sitting in an archives, surrounded by piles of paper. Behind him are shelves full of ledgers and scrolls. He raises his spectacles to more closely scrutinise the document in his hand. His voiceover declares “*All houses carry a story. But what do you know about your house?*”

The Entertainer

As the introduction described above reveals, the focus from the very beginning of every episode is on the program leader. In our analysis, we view the program leader as *performing* a number of potential roles an archival professional may take as entrepreneurial go-between. We propose titles for these various roles and our first is the *Entertainer*.

It's in the Walls exemplifies the entering of (Swedish) non-fictional archives and their professionals into a hitherto underexplored arena, that of the entertainment industry. Archives help drive the plot, create suspense and evoke feelings. The story of the history of the house is told bit by bit to the family living there now, slowly building anticipation and showcasing the archival search as a detection process, much like a detective story would. In the Kungsträdgården 5 episode, Thunér gets help from Leif Mörkfors, rural research scientist⁴ in finding information in fire-insurance documents. He says: “*If we are lucky enough to find an early insurance contract it will be a goldmine. It should be noted that many fire insurances have gotten lost along the way (...) and moreover, those that are left are scattered at different archives around Sweden*”. Thunér comments: “*it is a bit like looking for a needle in a haystack.*” When he and Mörkfors later locate the desired documents, he exclaims: “*bingo!*” and “*jackpot!*” We read these as elements of discovery and of gaming and competition. Although the show is not a program based on competition like Swedish reality-TV show *Expedition Robinson* (Hyllin et al., 1997-) or *Bonde söker fru* (Tengbom, 2006-), it resonates with the element of challenge, a trait of reality TV

⁴ Our translation. The Swedish jobtitle is “*person- och bygdeforskare*”.

(Enevold, 2013). The scene aligns as it were the archival genre with that of reality TV, and carves out a space for the archival professional to assume a role in the entertainment sector, to become an *Entertainer*.

The archives here and in the series as a whole, are framed as valuable, and somewhere you can go on an adventure, take on the challenge of the unknown, or find a treasure. The archive's unpredictability adds excitement. One cannot be sure of striking gold every time. Had the outcome been obvious and easy to come by, the entertainment value would decrease, and the narrative become a (mainly informative) documentary. As *The Entertainer*, the archival professional takes on the role of builder of suspense, another characteristic of reality TV. When Thunér informs the homeowners at Kungsträdgården 5 about the professions held by several previous owners of their house, he does so gradually: he makes them wait and he makes them guess which profession it might be based on a number of items he slowly presents to them, one at a time. The viewers are by extension also encouraged to guess and participate in the anticipation, a vital function of this type of TV considered to be of great entertainment value.

The Expert

The husband and wife who bought the house at Kungsträdgården 5 only six months earlier, are eager to know more about their home. In the role of *The Expert*, the archival professional is doing something that requires skill and knowledge, something not just anyone can do. The husband declares: “*I have made some amateurish attempts at finding something. It has not borne a lot of fruit, so, well, good luck with that Rickard! You will probably have to dig deep into the archives*”. It is obvious that an *Expert* is taking it from here.

Information seeking in archives can be difficult, and the program leader performing in the role of the *Expert* from time to time explains to the homeowners and the invisible program-audience where and how to do it and how to interpret it properly. *The Expert* is of course connected to that of the *Entertainer*, since professional skills legitimate the authority granted the *Expert*, a role played by the program leader, who in a sense also becomes the ‘game master’ controlling the tempo and information, another typical feature of reality TV (Enevold, 2013). This feature can be re-connected to the fact that archival professionals often serve as gatekeepers, as in the examples from popular culture above, where files are stored underground, and permissions and archival guidance are required to get to catch a glimpse or possibly handle the material. *Nota bene*, this might be supervised and require gloves, as can be seen in the show. This emphasizes the uniqueness of archives and need for professional handlers. The role of expert must of course also be assigned to the conservationist on the show, Erika Åberg. However, in the context of the program, her connection to the archive is less emphasised, although not less important. Her contribution is treated further into the article.

The Explorer

As pointed out above, archives are often half-way hidden or lurking in the background. They might actually not present so well on TV. After all, they are just papers in boxes. Or are they? On the one hand, this is true for *It's in the Walls* when Thunér is in an archive searching for information, and the camera shifts to Åberg conducting a renovation project together with the participants. What viewers get to see of the archival search is most often the end product, not the search. On the other hand, there are instances when viewers do get to follow Thunér to the archive to partake of the ritual. In this we see a performance of the archival professional as an *Explorer* who ventures into the unknown in the pursuit of potentially valuable evidence. This emphasises the lucrative and positive side of the mystery and indicates the existence of significant value in archival sources, which an archival entrepreneur might ‘rediscover’ and ‘exploit’.

In the Torstorp farm episode (e2s9), Thunér visits the archive at Halland Museum of Cultural History where he is escorted by archivist Anna-Lena Nilsson through an archival shelving system. She announces: “*I have picked out a few volumes about Torstorp that you can take a look at*”. In the next scene, Thunér appears, clad in white gloves, sifting through old documents. The camera first zooms in on a map from 1810 and then on one from 1910 so that the viewers can witness how the landscape has changed over time. Thunér is visibly delighted when he encounters the Wolfratt family crest from “*sköldebrevet*” [letter of nobility] 1608, which he considers an “*incredibly cool*” find. The role in which Thunér here is cast is that of an adventuring guide foraging through history, similar to David Attenborough, world-famous BBC presenter of natural history documentaries, pointing to what is interesting and relevant, processing excavated information required to tell the story. However, here the story is that of a house rather than of an elusive white-necked rockfowl. The archival professional, in this role of the explorer, digging up family professions, relations and histories, can also be conceived of as something of a *genealogy detective* or *treasure hunter*, an Indiana Jones of building and family history, as it were.



Program leader Rickard Thunér scrutinizing an archival document in the opening segment of *It's in the Walls*. Courtesy of Baluba.

The Emotion Facilitator

The role as *Emotion Facilitator*, or coach, is a common one in affective TV, usually held by the main presenter. Swedish reality home-making programs like *Sofias Änglar* [Sofia's Angels] (Rönn, 2011-2020) and *Arga Snickaren* [The Angry Carpenter] (Boman & Eklund, 2009-2017), are both built on the idea of a family suffering from crisis, for example illness or loss, resulting in failed building projects or deteriorated living situations that must be remedied. The programs help do this by restoring the family homes, materially and emotionally. The angry carpenter Anders and Sofia engage in what could be classified as therapeutic conversations with the homeowners. Thunér also gets to act in this role, although in *It's in the Walls*, emotional displays are connected to a different kind of experienced loss, a possibly vanished or vanishing imagined past. It resembles a fear of not-knowing. It evokes feelings such as nostalgia, sadness, and loss, but also tearful joy at recovering something felt to be lost or discovering something new about one's

family or property. The antiques expert and building conservationist can in these contexts be compared to the personal trainers of the *Biggest Loser* show, who act as facilitators and coaches of its obese participants' weight loss journeys and crises (Enevold, 2013), and whose task it is to coach the participants to the other side of a secret, through an enigmatic fog, as it were. Here the various roles again overlap: the *Expert's* professional information-seeking-practices result in documentation that provides historical genealogical rationales for the participants' emotional performances. The role is very important as the *Emotion Facilitator* together with the *Expert* creates an affective bridge between the homeowners and their house, with archival work.

Emotions fuel the acts of renovation as well as the reception of information retrieval. They come to the fore when participants get to look at maps, drawings, old photos or artefacts like the antique leather belt shown in e1s9 to the homeowners to demonstrate what previous dwellers crafted for a living, or climbing all the old stairs to visit the very top and inner sanctum of the wooden clock-tower neighbouring their house, where another dweller once upon a time worked as bell-ringer. The mood here, as in most television productions, is enhanced by various musical scores. Not only sadness, melancholy and sentimental expressions are set to music. The aforementioned joy from finding a relevant fire-insurance record (e1s9) is accompanied by upbeat music as are other moments of excitement. In e2s9, a soundtrack of hooves, a creaking door and ominous notes play to a narrative of Torstorp, a story about a kidnapping.

In this type of production, the archival professional becomes a cultural-heritage entrepreneur who deals not only in certificates and affidavits, but also *nostalgia* and *sentiment*, and in addition facilitates the emergence of feelings. Like a coach they bear witness and help homeowners emotionally and scientifically anchor their identity in their home-owning, to a history larger than themselves. Historian of ideas Karin Johannisson writes “*from originally being associated with a spatial dimension - a longing for a place - this feeling [nostalgia] has transformed into a temporal dimension - a longing for a past*” (Johannisson, 2001, p. 8 (*our transl.*)). *Nostalgia*, in essence, means *pain*, from the Greek *algos* related to the Greek word for “*returning home*”, *nostos*. The jump from *Expert* to *Emotion Facilitator* does not appear too far-fetched in light of this understanding of nostalgia and its connection to home and history.

To sum up, the homeowners are assisted in being moved when learning about previous inhabitants, their life circumstances, professions, and destinies and when receiving surprise visits by previous owners of their home (more below). If the *Expert* and *Explorer* bring and dispel mystery as the foundation for good drama, the *Emotion Facilitator* brings redemption and salvation in the sense of reminding the current owners of their well-being in light of the hardships of earlier generations of dwellers in their house, and the resolution of unfinished narratives, of *coming home*. In a way, they get to assure the home-owners that all is well.

The Educator

An important role that the archival professional is cast in is that of the *Educator*. They teach the home-owners about their house and its history and where they can find information about it. They also provide training in practical preservation techniques; how can they take care of, or make changes to, their house that are in line with its cultural heritage? SVT expresses it in terms of supplying help to restore “*carefully and sustainably.*” But other ways of educating homeowners (and viewers) are exercised in the program. In e1s9, the home owners are shown a document with the names of the previous owners of their house. Thunér asks them: “*can you read what his name is?*” The camera zooms in on the document, inviting the viewers to make an attempt. But no, the couple cannot make it out. They simply cannot read the old handwriting. Thunér proceeds to explain what the document says. Apart from occupying the role of the *Expert* here, he also gets to teach the homeowners about letters, and not only about details, but historical contexts beyond

the house. Here it must be noted that he not only teaches them *directly* about historical details, but as a consequence of inviting them to read the archival document, which they cannot decipher, he also teaches them (and the viewers) *indirectly* about archival expertise and knowledge organising and in doing so makes visible the necessity and usefulness of archival professionals.

In the episode about Torstorp farm, Thunér goes into detail about one of the former owners of the house who was a *kammarherre*, a chamberlain. He speaks at length about the function of chamberlains during the 18th century. The educational aspect alerts us viewers/researchers to the fact that SVT is a state-funded public broadcasting company with a specific mission to educate, which may be something which distinguishes the production from other similar shows. *Sofias Änglar* or the Norwegian show *Eventyrlig Oppussing* (Berg Barstrand, [Adventurous Renovation] 2015-present, *our transl.*), which are produced for the commercial channels Kanal 5 and TV3, feature ads and product placement. SVT is a taxpayer-funded public service company. Their business is regulated by The Swedish Radio and Television Act (SFS, 2010:696) and their vision is “to contribute to a more inquisitive, informed Sweden” (SVT, n.d.) by creating “content that engages, entertains and enriches - in the service of the public” (SVT, n.d.). The double role of the archival professional as *Entertainer* and *Educator* here becomes facilitated not only by the genre but also explained by the context of production and its funding, which in a sense demands it.

The Evidence Provider

In order to be credible, the *Educator* and the *Expert* need to occupy yet another role, that of the *Evidence Provider*, a role which is contingent upon the status of archives as holders of evidence. Archives may be not *just* information, but “*authoritative sources of information*” (International Council on Archives, n.d.), or in other words, evidence. To ensure that archives be trusted as evidence providers, certain criteria of quality, authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability must be fulfilled. In their role as *Evidence Provider* the archival professional in *It's in the Walls* embodies these qualities and the status of a truth/fact teller, a legitimiser. Hence, equipped with a certain amount of power, the archival professional may deliver “*hard facts*” about a specific property to its owners. Without the power embedded in the ‘idea’ and understanding of archives as authoritative sources of information, the go-between entrepreneur of *It's in the Walls* would have less professional weight. The *Entertainer* or *Emotion Facilitator* are balanced and backed up by the underlying authority of archives as sources of information that may serve as evidence.

Lists found in archives, such as an inventory list describing furniture and other items that once existed in a house, enable the archival professional to act credibly and with authority and a sense of authenticity and professionalism; they enable the *Expert* and the *Educator* to depict past lives with historical accuracy, at the same time as the *Entertainer* may paint a vivid and colourful image of ancestors evoking feelings that the *Emotion Facilitator* may feed back to viewers and homeowners as a witness to the moving truth unearthed and to transformations of facts into fates.

Ann-Marie Kramer (2011) has studied the popular British documentary series *Who Do You Think You Are* (Feltes, 2004-present), of which there is a Swedish version (Hogenschild Lindqvist, 2009-present) and which has many traits in common with *It's in the Walls*. Kramer's study highlights such a transformative dimension where participants (celebrities) are guided through their past and moved and changed by what they learn about their family background. Below is an instance in our show where the archival professional acts in several of the described roles and effectuates this kind of transformation.

The *Evidence Provider* sometimes confirms, sometimes contradicts, stories of the house that the home owners have heard. The viewers get to observe the reactions of the owners of Torstorp Farm as they hear that a daughter of the house was kidnapped by a neighbour in 1759. They have

heard but not quite believed it and have regarded it as merely an old tale. Thunér in the role of *Evidence Provider* produces evidence to substantiate and legitimise the ‘mysterious’ story with new facts, educates the family about ‘what really happened’ and also facilitates the emotionally laden reception of this potentially uncomfortable information about their home.

The *Evidence Provider* also produces artefacts of knowledge, and in so doing functions as *Knowledge Organiser*, a role we will elaborate more on below. In e1s9, the homeowners have noted that some of the neighbouring houses have signs, wooden or metal plaques, with brief information, dating and naming and thus signposting them as noteworthy houses. However, this signposting is something their house currently does not have. The episode concludes with a plaque being mounted on the outside wall of their home by the archival professional who in so doing provides a visible piece of evidence of the house’s (and by extension, its families’) value. The signposting of Kungsträdgården 5 sets the house up with a story based on the evidence provided. The plaque signifies legitimacy; it materialises the house as a historical/heritage site.

The Knowledge Organiser

A traditional but often taken-for-granted task which archival professionals have in addition to searching and managing archives is creating them. They organise knowledge. The signposting of Kungsgården 5 not only visibilises a story, it serves to represent many stories. In the words of the show’s conservationist, Erika Åberg: “*An old house is also an archive, only in mega format*” (Åberg, 2022, p. 173).

Knowledge of various kinds is produced and organised in the TV-show by the archival professional in their role of *Knowledge Organiser*, for example the narrative told as the program unfolds or the book given to the home-owners containing the unearthed story of the family and their house. Each episode is concluded with the homeowners being given a book which the program team has assembled. The book is a compilation of texts and facsimiles created from archival documents retrieved to puzzle the pieces of the family and house together. The *Knowledge Organiser* has ‘solved the mystery’, and eventually strung the various pieces of evidence together to create a whole and if not ‘healing,’ then transformative, picture of the heritage of the house and the home, genealogically and architecturally. The book may contain a family tree, pictures of humans and animals, photos of objects and of the house from other times. A new small archives of knowledge of the homeowner family and their house is created.

Other less tangible knowledge organising worth mentioning in this context is the facilitation of exchanges that take place between previous and present inhabitants of the house. These can be understood as immaterial cultural heritage, performed in meetings, fleeting moments, memories retrieved and passed on. The family of Kungsträdgården 5 is visited by a family of three who used to live there, a mother, father and daughter. “*I have so many fine memories from this house, it has been an amazing house to grow up in*”, says the daughter. “*Yes,*” the mother adds, “*it was a very fine time in our lives*”. The father comments on structural changes, where the wall used to be, and that the staircase used to have another colour. This is merely what is captured in the edited broadcast show. Undoubtedly, more was said. Stories like these, we argue, extend the concept of the archive, and the role of the *Knowledge Organiser*. The show here serves to illustrate a significant aspect of immaterial-knowledge organization which often goes unnoticed. We believe it merits attention as part of potential roles.

Discussion - heads or tails?

Heads?

If the archival professional's entrepreneurial role is to be a go-between who needs to (innovatively) communicate the value of archives louder and better, we may have come up with a workable list of qualities or properties above with which to market the archival professional in alternative ways. Our analysis has made visible a large number of tasks and roles the go-between may take on, be cast in, which may be interpreted as a generally creative and optimistic route to visibility and entrepreneurship.

We selected seven different roles for our discussion. We could have picked other ones, and as we indicate in the text, there are others that might have served equally well, for instance the *Adventurer*, *Detective* or *Treasure Hunter*, and of course we might have added *Program Leader* to the list. It needs to be pointed out that the mainly invisible archivists and other ALM-professionals featuring in the program and elsewhere already occupy many of these roles, perhaps all of them. Our point is nobody knows that (yet). What the reality TV format does is generate a space for expression of various forms of communication archival professionals may engage in. If we espouse the role of the archival professional as entrepreneur as a desirable future, the reality-TV format may serve archival institutions really well as it has the potential to shed light on all the potentially available aspects of their work. Equipping them with a diverse entrepreneurial stance, through reconceptualization, may be beneficial in a number of ways. That is, casting them as knowledgeable and entertaining, empowered, professional consultants and custodians of cultural heritage may be a way to re-imagine, or dust off, as it were, the archival professional and ready them for a market—alerted by new labels—eager to consume an extended range of possible services.

To return to the claim of the Swedish National Heritage Board that innovative solutions are required to “*preserve, utilise and develop the cultural heritage*” (Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2021), *It's in the Walls* could be seen as a prime example of how the cultural heritage sector, more specifically archival professionals, could be conceived of beyond their stereotypical role. Antiques experts were early on made experts, entertainers and educators by television. The immensely popular *Antiques Roadshow* (BBC Studios, 1979–present) undoubtedly has served as inspiration for *It's in the Walls*, and Thunér has also appeared on the Swedish version of the show. Entering the field of affective reality TV, the archival professional is brought into another type of TV, with more emotion-facilitation and incorporation of home-making, which makes for public interest as it resonates with an increasing financialization of everyday life (Enevold, 2022; Enevold, 2024). The interest in home-making also generates interest in history. Archivists working at the National Archives have experienced an increase in users wanting to find out more about their histories and homes as a direct result of *It's in the Walls* (personal communication, October 2023). Using archives is also encouraged in the program conservationist's book *Det sitter i väggarna. Historien om ditt hus och hur du vårdar det* (Åberg, 2022), which is expressly aimed at viewers inspired by the program. In the preface, Åberg gives thanks to archivists and acknowledges their role as experts in their field, before dedicating 44 pages to explaining where and how one can search and interpret different documents. In doing so the program has (indirectly) assisted in the process of making archives more visible, understandable, available, and less mysterious, to a bigger public.

Perhaps TV-viewers may be understood as amateurs that drive entrepreneurialisation of the archival sector. Watching TV has traditionally been seen as unproductive and sedentary, but programs like *It's in the Walls* seem to transcend the entertainment sector by inspiring and encouraging their audience to become active archival explorers ‘in real life’. A huge interest in

history (Roued et al., 2023) and genealogy has resulted in the establishment of for-profit platforms such as Ancestry (2024) and MyHeritage (2024). If the interest in ‘building-genealogies’ increases, might we see similar services for properties, a new archival market as it were, developed by archival entrepreneurs? We must hasten to add that new groups of archive visitors also report disappointment when they realise how complicated and slow it can be to find information (personal communication, October 2023). In that sense, archival work remains obscure, but this may open the market for a burgeoning *Evidence Provider* or *Knowledge Organiser* willing to help?

Moss & Thomas (2019) argue that archives and archivists need to become better at demonstrating the value of archives, in economic terms as well as “*their broader cultural and evidential worth*” (Moss & Thomas, 2019, p. xvi-xvii). Kate Theimer (2016) has compared “*the old*” versus “*the new*” business model of archives, where the first one essentially entails sitting back and waiting for users to come while the latter involves being active in terms of proactive outreach and attracting users and expanding its audience *beyond* the traditional visitor: the historian or family historian. Many archival institutions are indeed working in this direction. They are present on social media, for example Malmö stadsarkiv on Instagram¹, and Riksarkivet¹ on Facebook. They work with different forms of outreach, archival pedagogy through lectures, courses, workshops, and discussion forums to encourage visitors to use archival sources (Arkivpedagogiskt Forum, n.d). Malmö stadsarkiv uses social media as a new way of communicating their relevance to the public. Reality TV is another such ‘window’ where archival institutions may display their assets in innovative ways.

When viewed in light of Kate Theimer’s concepts of an *old* and a *new* business model of archives (2016), *It’s in the Walls* can be said to promote both the traditional custodial archivist and the modern, more active, archival professional who engages in proactive outreach to an audience beyond the traditional archival user. Conceiving of archival professionals as cultural entrepreneurs, as go-betweens making use of their professional skills and services, may be crucial to their remaining significant in a society marked by the principles of market economies and consumption – *if they can communicate their value*. The seven roles may be seen as models of such communication.

Tails?

Let us flip the coin. Archives are connected to the common good of society’s knowledge infrastructure that does not easily lend itself to be conceived of in terms of assets that need to be displayed or ‘sold’ to different user groups, but which are meant to be accessible instruments. They serve legal and transparency purposes, and offer citizens and journalists the possibility of scrutinising the workings of public agencies. Swedish archives are not only part of the cultural heritage but are also vital for the realisation of freedom of information. In fact, most archival professionals are responsible for recordkeeping as well as for cultural heritage. There is a duality here, between light and darkness, as it were.

Funding does not increase proportionately with archives becoming more present in the public eye or used in different forms of entrepreneurial ventures within state-funded institutions. The resources for archival institutions and other cultural heritage institutions are, in fact, shrinking. A new archival legislation is requested by the archival sector, but not prioritised by the legislators (Admund Funck & Porter, 2023). Government-funding of the cultural sector is a highly political issue. Perhaps the appearance in reality TV, and other popular culture, of the archival professionals as a ‘*would be nice to have*’ is really a ‘*must have*’ in order to call politicians’ attention to their crucial role as organisers and keepers of various types of heritage in society? To make possible what archivists themselves identify as their mission: to uphold democracy? Or

maybe the marketable archival professional has to be downright refused? Undoubtedly Mörkfors and Nilsson who produce records for Thunér in the episodes studied above could be cast as primary *Experts*, but would they want to be *Emotion Facilitators* (or *program leaders*)? Would they want or be able to be cast in the extended role of the *Knowledge Organiser*, or prefer the *Evidence Provider*? *Entertainer*? *Entrepreneur*?

Is Swedish reality TV ideal for providing potential roles for archival professionals, is a question that must be posed. Reality TV often features Western, white, monied, privileged subjects and topics. It may seem less ideal as we also know the archival profession is fraught with a lack of diversity among practitioners and students (Caswell, 2022). Perhaps *It's in the Walls* actually quite accurately reflects current socio-cultural patterns and demographics involved with archival work and may serve as a reminder that this is the case and in need of action. We do not have a solution to offer here, merely our awareness and we flag it as something necessary to also take into consideration.

The values of archival work—from the highly personal to the highly commercial—from existential family-healing, inspiration and education for audiences, over raising real-estate prices, boosting building-shop sales, to local and national tourism, are undoubtedly many. They all come into view as the market mission of entertainment of the reality-TV format meets the missions of public education of government-funded television, archival professionalism and the traditional symbolic properties of cultural heritage and mystery of archives in general. The programme, the participants, the archives and archivists, and the viewers all become part of an “*ever-growing web of relations that sustain archives and imbue them with meaning*” (Douglas, Ballin & Lapp, 2022, p. 20). When archives are used and shown, their sociocultural meaning is (re)created. At the same time, the TV genre and the archives themselves limit which stories can be told. The significance of existing or non-existing diversity in reality TV as representative force then becomes of the essence and generates even more questions: who can be an entrepreneur go-between and communicate what value?

CODA

To conclude and repeat, the web mentioned above is embedded in a tension between culture and commerce, high and low culture. Dare we place ourselves firmly at either end? Probably not. We are bold enough, however, to indicate, as we have above, that the archival sector *may* stand to gain in some respects from donning a creative cloak of (heritage) entrepreneurship roles as figured in the entertainment realm of reality TV. However, we also argue that all aspects of the archival sector cannot be and should not be entrepreneurialised, if it means polishing it into a shiny fully-fledged heritage pusher, in order for it to be justified and self-financed.

Perhaps what we see as a potentially unresolvable complex tension that will remain between archives and commerce, or between the symbolically dusty invisible and the marketably vociferous, can be illustrated by a scene taking place in a room of students studying to become the archival professionals of the future. Reading and discussing articles about the necessity to market, to go digital, to promote and visibilise archives in order to make them matter, a playful, yet serious, sentiment and will to resist emerged: “*oh, please, leave our secrets, mysteries and dust alone...*”

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