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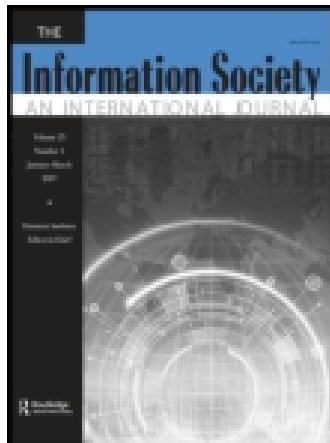
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### Another Wood Between the Worlds? Regimes of Worth and the Making of Meanings in the Work of Archivists

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# Another Wood Between the Worlds? Regimes of Worth and the Making of Meanings in the Work of Archivists

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**Through interviews of Nordic archives professionals, this article explicates the transformation and complexities of the worth and meaning of archival records and archival work. The analysis shows how the worth and meaning of archival records and the work of archivists are constituted in a complex interplay of quasi-institutionalized orders of archival work, their associated but often conflicting regimes of worth and information, and changing local intermediary practices.**

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**Keywords** archival records, archives, archivists, regimes of information, regimes of worth, work

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Schellenberg (1956/2003) begins his classic *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* with Byzantine Emperor Justinian's order that "throughout each and every province that a public building be allocated, in which building the magistrate is to store the records, choosing someone to have custody over them so that they may remain uncorrupted and may be found quickly by those requiring them"<sup>1</sup> (Schellenberg 2003/1956, 1). One and a half millennia later this order still points to the simplicity and complexity of archives and their role in society.

While an archive serves the *longue durée*, it harbors a disconnect between the creators and users of records. According to Ekbia and Evans (2009), most of the (archival) records are objects that are *a priori* revalued and resignified, that is, moved from one regime of worth to another the moment they are placed in an archive and

also every time thereafter they are used by someone. The paradox of archives and records management is that at the same time archiving trivializes records, it elevates them to become evidential constants of legible practices and also of unarticulated ones, which are of unanticipated value to future readers.

This article explores how archives professionals experience and explicate the transformation and complexities of the worth and meaning of archival work and the archival records themselves. Archival work is undergoing major transformation from a field dominated by a highly institutionalized and structured regime of information (in some senses similar to sciences, Bowker 2005) to a complex field of multiple competing structural arrangements. The study is based on an analysis of interview transcripts of eight Nordic archives professionals (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The analysis explicates the frictions of the partly overlapping and partly contradictory structural arrangements—orders of archival work, the intermediary role of situated cross-order practices and their relation to how archival work has been conceptualized in archives and records management domain in terms of the Giddensian inspired records continuum theory (Flynn 2001; Cumming 2010). Conceptually, the archives and record-keeping are viewed as processes that span the entire life cycle of the records without making a sharp distinction between (historical) archives and (contemporary) records management (as is customary in the Nordic countries, e.g., Norberg 2003). The analytical framework of the study is based on the notions of the regimes of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) and regimes of information (Ekbia and Evans 2009). The analysis shows how many of the contemporary challenges of archives and archival work can be traced back to the emergence of overlapping, competing, and dichotomous structures that simultaneously support and interfere with the situated

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practices of creating, archiving, organizing, and using records and archival materials, and the simultaneous diversification and reproduction of the identity of archives and records management in the context of the discourses of information and knowledge management and cultural heritage.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There are few comprehensive empirical studies of archival work itself. Studies employing interview and survey methodologies have tended to focus on specific aspects of archival practices (e.g., digitization and policies, Kim and Lee 2009; cooperation of libraries, archives, and museums, Tanackoviae and Badurina 2008; description of archival work, Battley 2013). Others have focused on conceptual issues (e.g., Clement, Hagenmaier, and Levine Knies 2013), archival knowledge (e.g., Duff, Yakel, and Tibbo 2013) and skills (e.g., Johare and Masrek 2011). There have been few studies on the archival work as a whole.

Gracy proposes archival ethnography (i.e., ethnographic studies of archival work, not to be mistaken with Ketelaar's notion of archival ethnology; see Ketelaar 2001) as an approach to study archival processes in situ "rather than [...] idealized conceptions of archival theory" (Gracy 2004, 336). Besides Gracy's own study of a community of film preservationists (Gracy 2001) and a French ethnography of archival practices (Both 2010), most of the ethnographies and in-depth studies of archives and records management work have tended to focus on records creation and administration practices at the offices of origin before they are handed over to the custody of archivists (e.g., Yakel 2001; Shankar 2004; Valtonen 2005; Foscarini 2009).

Belovari's (2013) work on how the professional practices of museum professionals can shape the public understanding of museum artifacts also suggests how an archivist can actively shape the meaning and worth of archival records, as opposed to being a just a custodian of archival holdings. Anthony's (2006) research on how the archivists' knowing is highly situated in their work and its context points to the reciprocity of the influence. Her study shows that experienced professionals relied on their knowledge of the history of their home institution, people, and departmental functions, whereas novice archivists were compelled to compensate for their lack of contextual knowledge by resorting to meta-searching. Kearns and Rinehart's (2011) comparative study of the self-perceived "information responsibilities" of archivists and librarians represent another line of research. According to their analysis, the both groups considered access (to information) to be their first

priority. Archivists took more responsibility for preserving, processing, collecting, and management, whereas librarians were more inclined to emphasize evaluation, research, and teaching as significant aspects of librarianship. Manning and Silva (2012) conclude their comparative survey of the responsibilities of academic archivists with and without library responsibilities by expressing their concern for the increasing workload and competency problems associated with the increasing diversity of responsibilities that include "archival duties" (e.g., grant writing, writing policies and procedures) and "nonarchival responsibilities" (e.g., digital initiatives). The study clearly shows how the dual role as archivist-librarian brings both the benefits (interaction) and problems (time, workload) of the double duties. There is also some empirical work on how the public conceptualises the archival profession. According to a large study conducted by Usherwood, Wilson, and Bryson (2005) in the United Kingdom, the public tends to perceive archives (together with libraries and museums) as relevant and trusted repositories of public knowledge even if they are not used by everyone all the time.

In contrast to the relative scarcity of empirical research, the paradigmatic evolution of archives and records management has been discussed to a considerable extent. Here archives are seen to have been primarily administrative instruments of premodern regimes that in the beginning of the 19th century serviced the fascination with history in the period of romanticism and in the subsequent centuries served the primarily European nationalist and imperial endeavors (Cox 2000; Duchein 1992). Thereafter, the second half of the 20th century was a period of pluralization in archives and archival thought (Cook 1997; Ribeiro 2001). K ormendy (2007) sees this change primarily as a result of an external, societal pressure.

The archive and archiving have now expanded beyond great people and governments to cover public movements, local history, and marginal communities. Furthermore, archival theory and practice have moved from earlier descriptivism oriented positivism to functionalism (Delmas 1992) and critical discussion of the subjectivity and role of archives, archivists, and other stakeholder groups (Cook 2011; Lane and Hill 2010; Yakel 2011). According to Cook (2013), archives themselves have been transformed in the process from passive curators to active appraisers to societal mediators to community facilitators. From the 1990s onward the paradigmatic changes have been influenced by new theoretical openings, for instance, from the perspectives of Giddensian sociology (McKemmish 2001), postmodernism (Cook 2001), and critical theory (Dunbar 2006). The contemporary theory has challenged the constancy and immutability of archives and appropriated the ideas

of processualism, life cycles (Borglund and Öberg 2006), and, increasingly, the one of continuum (Upward 1997) and participatory negotiation (Shilton and Srinivasan 2008; Robinson 2007) of archives and their holdings.

Even if the contemporary discussion has extended the long *durée* of the relevance and worth of archival work and records, the premise of archives and their significance is based on the fundamental tenet of archival work dating back to the late 19th century and beyond—the *provenance* of the records and the organizational context of their office of origin (Bazerman 2012). The different conceptualizations of records as information, documents (Yeo 2007), evidence (Brothman 2002), transactions (Cox 2001), or speech acts (Henttonen 2007; Yeo 2010) are all dependent on their origins. The link between records and their worth in terms of both corporate surplus value (an important driver of corporate archives and records management; e.g., Bailey 2007; Ataman 2009; Bailey 2011) and their less tangible role as a source of societal accountability (a central aspect of the discussions of the need to strive for more inclusive and representative archives, e.g., McKemmish et al. 2012; Shilton and Srinivasan 2008) are dependent on their provenance. In spite of its fundamental nature, provenance is a controversial and complex concept (Douglas 2010). Its apparent simplicity conceals the difficulty of determining what is original, and consequently, as Cook underlines, shifts archives far from being “unproblematic storehouses of records awaiting historians” (Cook 2011, 601).

In addition to broadly theoretical and societal re-articulations of archives and archival work, the rapid advance of digital technologies and surge of digital information have provoked debate on how digitality and social media affects archives and archival work in the future (e.g., Bailey 2008; Zhang 2012; Theimer 2011). The techno-influenced societal change together with the simultaneous evolution of archives and archival work has been portrayed both as an unavoidable condition (Bailey 2008) and as an opportunity (Stevenson 2010). In general there is a relatively broad consensus on the continuing value of the fundamental principles of archival work in the digital context (e.g., Gilliland-Swetland 2000; Duranti 2010), but as, for instance, Bailey has urged, there is a need to “fundamentally rethink the way in which we [records managers] strive to achieve them” (Bailey 2008, xv).

The discourses of change highlight some of the major contexts of relevance of the archival work. In the archival field, there are several competing perspectives anchored in different historical trajectories that conceptualize archives as information institutions (e.g., Gilliland-Swetland 2000; Buckland 1991) or cultural heritage institutions (Manzuch 2009), or that emphasize their

distinctiveness by highlighting the noninformational and noncultural nature of archival records as pieces of authentic evidence (e.g., Duranti 1999). The mission of archives has been described in terms of preserving and providing access to culture and heritage (e.g., Barry 2010), memory (e.g., Cook 1997; Gilliland-Swetland 2000), and knowledge, supporting learning, promoting identity and understanding (Gilliland-Swetland 2000), and, for instance, serving (e.g., Sundqvist 2007) and empowering their users (e.g., Usherwood, Wilson, and Bryson 2005). Archives are considered to have a civic role as societal and cultural institutions (e.g., Hickerson 2001; Jimerson 2004; Johnson and Williams 2011), and access to their assets is perceived as a new civic right (Dempsey 2000) independent of the cultural background of the citizens. The role of archivists has been characterized in comparable terms in the literature. The outlines of work roles of the “new archivists” tend to underline the significance of such factors as outreach (Theimer 2011), technology skills (e.g., Stevenson 2008), pedagogy in formal and informal education (e.g., Krause 2010; Zipsane 2009), and engagement (e.g., Prelinger 2010) and partnerships with records creators (e.g., Keough and Wolfe 2012).

Archives and archival work have also captured the popular imagination and the attention of many widely cited philosophers and cultural theorists (e.g., Ebeling and Günzel 2009; Foucault 2002; Derrida 1995). In parallel to the subjectivist emphases of the contemporary archival theory, the humanities scholarship has referred since the 1990s to the archival turn, a move from perceiving archives as a source to considering them as a subject (Hutchinson and Weller 2011). In spite of this general turn, the old ideas of “archive” and “archiving” have not disappeared, and they have a certain tendency to surface as emblematic references to what archives are supposed to be (e.g., Brockmeier 2010). In an attempt to elucidate the premises of different types or ideas of archives, Bowker (2010) makes a distinction between formal archives and trace archives. Bowker’s formal archives are preemptory and sequential, whereas trace archives are “about habits and customs and place rather than coordinate time and space” (Bowker 2010, 213). In contrast to a formal archive, a trace archive is inscribed in the lived environment rather than collected and curated.

Bowker’s idea of trace archives has certain similarities with the Giddensian inspired records continuum model (Upward 1997; McKemmish 2001). In contrast to the life-cycle approaches, the records continuum model emphasizes that records reside in a space–time continuum and have parallel uses and roles throughout their existence that begin long before they end up in an archival repository (Borglund and Öberg 2006). Moreover,

the model suggests that the process of archiving records (from records creation, to their capture in the archival domain, organization, and pluralization) parallels the phases described in Giddens's theory of structuration (Giddens 1984; Upward 1997).

Even if the theoretical (including Bowker's) and often metaphorical conceptions of archives and archival work tend to differ from the practical realities of the institutions (Ebe 2009), they are indicative of the cultural and societal underpinnings and implications of archives and archiving (Ernst 2008). They capture the confluence and dissonances between scholars, archivists, and other stakeholder of archival records and institutions that, as Manoff (2004) notes, indeed revolve around a shared preoccupation with the function and fate of the "record." Theorists, including Derrida (1995), Foucault (2002), and Ernst (2008), have discussed from different angles the implications of the paradigmatic continuity and change of "archives" as monuments of an obsession to preserve (Derrida 1995), as *loci* of as much constructed as recorded, and consequently political, memory (Foucault 2002), and the complex material and technological relation of archives and what they archive (Ernst 2008). Even if these observations are not primarily empirical, they capture many relevant premises of the archival work discussed in the literature: its situatedness in overlapping organizational contexts, the significance and perplexity of the conceptualizations of the records and their use, and the practical constraints of acting as an archivist and a user of archival records.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ekbia and Evans (2009) suggest in their study of land management in the U.S. Midwest that the complex processes of decision making operate on the basis of different "worlds" or "polities" (borrowed from Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) in which the value of people and objects is measured in different terms according to a regime of worth specific to that world. These regimes incorporate not only economic values but also a variety of personal and social ideas of worth. According to Ekbia and Evans, the regimes of worth (of Boltanski and Thévenot), in turn, embody regimes of information that incorporate varying meanings of information in the world in which it exists.

A central tenet of the regimes of information is the notion of situational informativeness of information. Ekbia and Evans base their argument on the earlier observation of Buckland (1991) about the situational nature of an object's "informative" capability. In effect, the meaning is not universal, but related to a particular situation, which, according to Boltanski and Thévenot

(2006), is associated to the various worlds (with associated polities), inhabited by individuals, and their related regimes of worth (Table 1). In contrast to mainstream and administrative research that categorizes people by their membership in exclusive categories, for instance, as archivists, administrators, or educators, this approach acknowledges that a person can participate in any and simultaneously multiple systems of worth and meaning. Here a situation is construed to be a combination of all the regimes that are active in a given time-space. Within a particular world, the worth of people and objects can be determined by on the basis standard "tests," for example, wealth of two individuals. In contrast, there are no legitimate tests available for measuring worth between the worlds (e.g., comparing wealth to notability). Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) argue that if the agents are nevertheless oriented toward common good they may reach a compromise, but this settlement is always weak and subject to any redefinition of that what is considered to be "common good."

Ekbia and Evans (2009) built on the Boltanski and Thévenot work suggesting that each regimes of worth is associated with a regime of information (Table 1). A regime of worth embodies the measure of worth in a particular world, whereas the regime of information determines how a particular object or an individual is informative (cf. Buckland 1991) within a particular polity.

The present study takes the notions of regimes of worth and information as prototypical contexts of activities and their associated systems of worth and meaning. The empirical work described later in this article shows how the polities provide a lens for explicating how worth and meaning of activity (here archival work) and its constituents (here specifically archival records) are created, distorted, and denied in the practices of how archivists work. In the context of archival work, we posit that the polities of Boltanski and Thévenot are articulated, practiced, and can be identified within different orders of work, defined as constellations of circumstances, articulated purposes and practiced principles linked to, but seldom directly concordant with, the prototypical regimes. The orders of work are constellations of practices and, literally, in a Garfinkelian sense (Garfinkel 2005), orders of how things are done. Theoretically, an order of work can incorporate a single regime of worth and information and thus be a stable order of activities rather than a fragile settlement. In practice, however, we believe that even relatively stable orders tend to be associated with constellations of regimes that subsist as a fragile compromise and a shared, even if sometimes only implicitly formulated, idea of common good (i.e., worth) and a shared understanding of meaning (i.e., what is informative).

**Table 1**

Worlds and their related regimes of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) and information (Ekbia and Evans 2009)

World	Description	Regime of worth	Regime of information
Inspired	World of vision, passion, and imagination.	Symbolic role and originality.	Information as intuition.
Domestic	World of traditions, customs, conventions.	How much objects contribute to the establishment of hierarchical relations among people.	Information as anecdote.
Fame	World of attention, persuasion, presentation.	The attention, reputation, and respect for objects.	Information as message.
Civic	World of solidarity, group membership, collective interest.	The capability to serve collective good.	Information as documentation.
Market	World of desire and competition over the possession of valuable things.	The capability to satisfy desires.	Information as commodity.
Industrial	World of science, technology, efficiency, performance.	As instrument and means of production.	Information as measurement.

The making of an order of work is, as later shown, a part of the process of sociomaterial sensemaking that has similarities with Giddens's (1984) notion of structuration. However, in contrast to institutional orientation of Giddensian "structures," we see them as Garfinkelian social orders that represent actual orders of action. In other effect, they are not true aggregates (i.e., assemblages of actual acts) in the Giddensian sense, even if they can be treated as such by the individuals who are engaged in sensemaking in a social setting.

The Giddensian parallels are of interest here because the records continuum model is widely used in archive studies for explicating the evolution of records and their contexts from the decision that led to its creation to its use for various purposes (McKemmish 2001). The theoretical premise of the records continuum model is in the Giddensian process of structuration (Upward 1997). Our research suggests that the regimes of worth and information can further advance the analysis by elucidating the ways in which records are valued and how they are signified as documents, evidence, transactions, speech acts, or information.

## METHODS AND MATERIAL

The empirical material consists of eight qualitative interviews of archives and records management professionals from two Nordic countries. In accordance with the aim of the study to focus on archivists' experiences and meaning-making and in contrast to the ethnomethodological approach of observing the actual orders of work, the interview approach was chosen, to let interviewees articulate their understanding of the practical and conceptual

organization of their work and to explicate the premises of worth and meaning given to their actions by themselves. In contrast to a survey, interviews gave interviewees opportunities to articulate their views in depth and in detail, and the interviewer a comparable opportunity to ask for clarifications and additional information.

The design and conducting of the interviews was based on the semistructured thematic interview approach of Hirsjärvi and Hurme (1995) and carried out as a part of a larger study of the information work of archive, library, and museum professionals. The interviews focused on the interviewees' professional work. After initial questions about education and work experience, the interviewees were asked to describe their work (daily tasks, organization, positive and negative challenges), work-related information sources and information seeking, and their perceptions of the value and significance of archives and archival work. The interviewees were also asked to reflect upon how they would like to see that the work of archivists would change in the future and, inspired by the critical incident approach, to describe an recent actual case of working with archival records they (upon their own understanding) could describe as an "achievement." All interviews were conducted by the author, taped, and transcribed by a professional transcriber. The interviews lasted on average 120 minutes. The author analyzed the interview transcripts together with original recordings using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The results were revisited and revised after 1 month of the original categorization for assessing its validity, and again 1 month later, reanalyzed using negative case analysis (Lincoln and Guba 1985) with a specific purpose of finding

contradictory evidence that would decrease the reliability of the drawn conclusions.

The choice of interviewees was based on a modified theoretical sampling with sensitivity to basic demographics (age and gender distribution, particular types of archival institutions) and convenience (voluntary participation). For the sake of an assumed relative overlap of data and possibility to reach saturation in reasonable time, the sample was limited during the interview and theory-building process to public archive institutions. Private enterprises also keep archives, but the variety of archives keeping and records management practices in the private sector was considered to increase the heterogeneity of the material to an extent that would have limited the possibility of making meaningful analytical inferences of a reasonably sized body of data. The sample was formed during the interview process and informed by a simultaneous analysis of the archival sector in the two countries with an aim at a reasonable representation of different types of institutions and duties (as to content and status of the employee in the hierarchy) that would complement the analysis and provide working level of saturation. Simultaneously, the sample was consciously limited to professional archivists and mid-level management to get qualified but not too abstract information. The choice of interviewing professionals in two countries was motivated by the considerable national differences in archival traditions, practices, and theorizing (e.g., Norberg 2003; Bruebach 2003; Tamblé 2001; McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar 2005) around the world. In the global perspective, the two Nordic countries are similar to an extent that allows the analysis of the whole interview record in one, but at the same time distinct enough to make it possible to distinguish and look past at least some national particularities. Considering the sampling approach (theoretical considerations, convenience and quota), the sample is not representative of a larger population, but is still useful considering the qualitative approach and the conceptual and exploratory rather confirmatory aims of the present study.

Four of the interviewees were men and four women, two of each from each of the two countries. Five interviewees had worked more than 10 years in the archival sector. All interviewees represented local and regional institutions, or regional offices of national institutions. Their work duties ranged from customer services to marketing, collection management, and administration. Interviewees provided an oral informed consent and were guaranteed anonymity. For reporting purposes, the interviewees were assigned false names (Table 2).

The empirical approach has some obvious limitations. Even if the author has done his best to avoid taking

“researcher degrees of freedom” (Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn 2011), additional studies are needed to confirm the exploratory results of this study. Findings are based on a relatively small number of interviews from only two countries, which limits to the possibilities of generalizing the expressed views. In order to control for the overexpression of individual opinions, the analysis places a special emphasis on views expressed by multiple interviewees. Second, considering the exploratory aim of the present study to provide evidence for the existence of a phenomenon in mind, the possible inability to generalize is not considered to be a major issue. Third, even if an ethnographical approach could have provided more in-depth information on individuals and their work, the interview approach was considered to be a reasonable compromise to get depth and breadth on work practices and their associated regimes of worth and meaning within and between individual organizations.

## ANALYSIS

### Orders of Archival Work

The analysis provided evidence of the presence of six constellations of archival work that are linked to the six worlds of Boltanski and Thévenot (Table 3) and their related regimes of information. We conceptualize these analytical constellations as orders of work, referring to the analytical entity discussed earlier in this article. However, in keeping with social orders in general, the orders of work are not monolithic. They accommodate a large variety of different interpretations and ideas of the work, its constituents, and character that are in tension with each other. Even if, as it is shown later in the article, it is possible to reach compromises between the different orders of work, a central aspect of the orders of work is in their incompatibilities.

The first, archival order of work, is closely associated with an ideal of an archetypal archival work that was seized by the interviewees as a certain kind of envisaged “universal” nexus of archival praxis. It is characterized by the partly real and partly imagined historical continuity of archival and records management practices, professional collegiality and mutually acknowledged expertise of archivists, focus on records (in contrast to other materials; e.g., Abo: “You can go to the prints [...] but even better go to the original archival record”), and a shared general conviction of the public societal significance of archives and records management. According to the archival order, the archives are public authorities and mainstays of democracy and accountability in the society: “[Archives] is mainly a question of democracy [...] that citizens can take a look afterward or on current



**Table 2**  
Informants

Informant	Work description
William	Departmental director at regional archives; works on oversight and preservation.
Adso	Archivist at a city archive; works with both oversight and outreach.
Abo	Archivist at a regional archive; works with oversight and archival pedagogy.
Severinus	Archivist at a regional archive; works with education, consulting, and oversight.
Malachi	Archivist at a large higher education institution archive; works with digitization and researcher service, and consultation.
Berengar	Archivist at a regional heritage management institution; works also as a librarian.
Adelmo	Archivist at a regional archive; has worked with reference service, conservation, description and genealogy, by the time of the interview mostly with inspection of records management at public authorities and education.
Benno	Archivist at a large municipal archive; works with the planning of archival accumulation and records management.

public matters” (Adso), or “For citizens we exist [. . .], we [are] public authorities” (Severinus). The archival order also demarcates archives from other institutions. An archivist perhaps acknowledges the overlap of certain interests of archives and some other organizations, but as Severinus notes, for instance, “[Museum and library professionals] have a bit different view of how cataloguing is there and description and others.” The technical aspects of archival information systems were also a matter he “[would] not like to interfere with.” The social significance of this order of work for the professionals themselves is illustrated by how informants articulate many aspects of information seeking and sharing in their work as an exchange between professionals: “A general starting point is that [at] the other end of the telephone line is a professional who knows the thing” (Severinus).

The archival order is closely linked to the civic polity of Boltanski and Thévenot in its predominant conceptualization of the worth of the archival records and archives in terms of a common collective good. In this context, archival records are informative as documentation that embodies past activities, legislation, agreements, arrangements, and settlements. Archivists at public archives, for instance, Malachi, underlined the importance of keeping public records for the collective good, and Malachi regretted that the different divisions of his organization were not always following the legislative requirements.

Second, similar to how the shared the idea of the premisory nature of the notion of “archive” demonstrates the fundamental significance of the archival order of work, the similar emphasis of the organizational context and work practices at the office of origin (i.e., the organization that stands for the creation of the records) shows the similar bearing of the organizational order. The organizational order is not, however,

similarly sensitive to the long-term priorities of the archival order of work and tends to focus on the immediate relevance and usefulness of records. In order to understand, describe, and organize the records originating from a specific record-keeper, “It is important to gather as much information about the organization as possible” (Adso). Also others, including William, Benno, and Severinus, described in detail the necessity and complexities of obtaining a proper understanding of an organization and the work practices of its employees as an essential part of the work of an archivist. In addition to the management of archival records, the organizational context influences also the recordness of things. Abo described how the organizational patterns of work had contributed to that the personnel had failed to recognize the evidential significance of a particular stock of photographs. He recalled also another case when he had discovered that the organization had a considerable collection of old films that were never considered to be of interest to the institutional archives.

The ideas of perceiving information as measurement data (related to Boltanski’s and Thévenot’s industrial world) and as a commodity (market world) are visible in how archivists describe the organizational order of archival work. For the organizations, whether public or private actors, the value of archival function is commonly related to its capability to serve the business by functioning as a reserve of compulsory or otherwise useful “industrial” assets or tradable commodities. Even if the interviewees that represented public archives did not emphasize the value formation aspect to an equally prominent degree as, for instance, corporate records management literature (e.g., Bailey 2007; Ataman 2009), especially Benno and Adelmo underlined the significance of organizational accountability as a central aspect of archival work. As Abo and Benno noted, however, the

**Table 3**  
Orders of archival work

Orders	Description	Example	Informants
Archival	The order of work builds on the self-understanding of archival profession (traditions, conventions, professional expertise, collegiality, idea of the particularity of archives and the knowledge of the management of archival records) and its purpose of supporting the existence of a public sphere in the society.	<p>“We have long experience . . . We can substitute each other” (Severinus). Particularity of archives: “We tried to keep [archival documents and museum objects] separated” (William). Knowledge of the records: “[Archivists need to] have a connection with the materials” (Adso). Purpose: “[H]opefully I am participating in keeping up a good public sphere in the society” (William).</p>	William, Adso, Severinus, Adelmo
Organizational	Order of work is determined by the institution specific policies, needs, preferences, and work practices at each office of origin (i.e., the organization that produce archival records).	“The closeness of the region offices has been useful for us [archives]; there you can get information on what happens” (Abo).	William, Abo, Severinus, Benno
Antiquarian	Order of work is based on an idea of the intrinsic historical and cultural usefulness and interestingness of records and information inscribed in them combined with an implicit, indeterminate contemporary understanding of the exceptionality and uniqueness of particular records.	“It can be also the form of the record . . . sometimes it is related to that it is an exceptionally beautiful drawing” (Berengar). “I would like to change things so that materials would become better available [online] so that people would realize what wonderful materials we have” (William). “It is very difficult to say what can be interesting” (William).	William, Abo, Berengar, Adelmo
Pluralistic	The existence of archives and the order of archival work are determined by the anticipated needs and preferences of the contemporary and future society and the users of the archival holdings.	“Archives are used in historical and social science research [. . .] The big question is whether we are preserving the right parts of the materials when other parts are disposed. [. . .] This is being contemplated a lot” (Adelmo).	Adelmo, Benno, William
Digital	The order of work is determined by the participation in the “digital society,” i.e., the society characterized by the Internet as an institutionalized source and channel for publishing information, and forms of participation mediated by digital technologies.	“I want to work with and really make the digital archiving work [. . .] the most interesting thing is to take archives to the twenty-first century” (Malachi). “[t]he challenge at the archive is to digitally manage digital documents” (Malachi). “[it is good that] old source collections are available online” (Malachi).	Adso, Malachi, Berengar, William, Severinus, Benno

**Table 4**  
Constellations of information practices in archival field

Practices	Description	Example	Informants
Everyday adhococracy	The practice of coming up with abrupt measures to manage unplanned matters ad hoc.	“We react to what is offered. There are some light definitions [. . .] but in practice the acquisitions have been ad hoc things” (Adelmo).	William, Malachi, Adelmo
Institutional policies	All archives are different and archivists make local adjustments to standards. The worth is determined by the local practices, preferences, and values at each archival institution.	“We have a proposal for a disposal scheme from them [. . .]. And then NN, my boss has worked in [Region], and he has taken things from there and we have also made a small mix of things” (Abo). “Archival regulations it could not be called here at our [archival institution] so its called archival rules” (Abo).	Abo, Berengar, Adso
Outreach	The practice of increasing the relevance of archival materials by helping people to use them for their own purposes and for marketing the archival holdings and their perceived significance.	“I like the pedagogical part and to get people understand why archives are important” (Adso).	
Digitization	Practice based on a conviction that digitization of holdings has an implicit value for the archives and archival holdings.	“I would like to solve the problems with digital preservation [. . .], which would need acute attention” (William).	
Priorization	Overcoming the major limitation of archival work, the lack of time to do everything that is perceived to be necessary to do.	“[I]t is difficult to focus when you have to work with too many things” (Adelmo). “Updating one’s competence is difficult, especially if you work parttime” (William).	Adelmo, William

(potential) relevance of archives is not always well understood by the management as a direct asset, and archivists can be left to fulfill certain legislative obligations and left out of the daily operations of the organization. Benno’s description of how his superior at his former employer had thanked him for making her understand the relevance of archival function at an organization exemplifies this gap.

The antiquarian order is a somewhat paradoxical notion in the context of the archival profession and, even if related to, in tension with the organizational and archival orders of work. The antiquarian order emphasizes the *longue durée*, but in contrast to the continuum of archival institutions and processes, the historical perspective of antiquarian order focuses on antiquarian or *museal* value of archival documents (i.e., their value from museums’

perspective), often underlined by the contemporary ideas of heritage and the past at the present. Many archivists acknowledge that “it is very important to preserve cultural heritage in general and in the region. That is, public authorities are a part of our common cultural heritage” (Abo), but at the same time, the authorities and even the archivists themselves may consider that the cultural and historical aspects are a relevant in only a part of their daily work. The support for heritage-related work within an organization can be that “my boss said that it’s ok” (Abo), suggesting that there is no real support and it could equally well be “not ok.” The most eager proponents of antiquarian premises and outreach seemed to be the ones who were actively engaged in archival pedagogy and exhibitions planning. Others cited the importance of the activities on a more abstract level as

something obvious, but not necessarily as something that is a part of their daily work: “The general cultural heritage aspect goes without saying” (Malachi). William considered that outreach and exhibitions are important for archives, but he sees them mostly from the point of view of the materials and would have been glad to leave the practical activities for museums. The boundary work between museums and archives was apparent also in the comments of Adso and Abo, who reflected on the type of outreach, pedagogy, and public engagement archives should aspire to. In practice, their descriptions of their work reminded one of how museums tend to reach out to their audiences, but at the same time the interviewees told how they were actively trying to find empathetically *archival* approaches for their work.

The archival and organizational orders are relatively easy to locate in the civic, and industrial and market worlds, whereas the affiliations and “common good” of the antiquarian order are more convoluted. Even if the worth of archives and archival work as measured in civic terms (archival materials as cultural heritage, a form of common collective good; e.g., William’s remark, “generally speaking this cultural heritage aspect is self-evident, we think so too”) can be located within the same regime of worth together with the collective ambitions of the archival order, the interviewees appreciated the worth of individual archival records and collections intuitively, rather than by specifically referring to a greater collective good. The archival records are “fantastic materials” (Berengar) not only because of their documentary value, but also because they are intriguing for a number of different innate reasons that “are difficult to specify” (William).

The references to the pluralistic order were similar to the antiquarian order in the sense that the order was simultaneously axiomatic and controversial for the interviewees, and in apparent conflict with organizational and archival contexts of work. The archivists readily acknowledged, citing Adelmo, that “the big question [is that] whether we are preserving the right parts of the materials when other parts are disposed [. . . that . . .] is being contemplated a lot.” The archival order construed the measure of worth in highly intrinsic terms, whereas the regime of worth within the pluralistic order is fluctuating and can be seen as an aspect of the “fame” in the individual priorities of the interviewees. Part of the pedagogical interest of Adso and Abo can also be explained in terms of the pluralistic order and their interest in making archives relevant in the contemporary society. Even if some of the outreach activities could be described as marketing, both Adso and Abo underlined that their ambition was to make a difference instead of merely increasing attendance.

In contrast to the self-explanatory worth of archives and archival work within the archival order, the pluralistic order encompasses a significantly more convoluted idea of the value of the archival work and the anticipated external demand of records. Both organizational and archival orders assume a monocontextual approach with regard to the management and use of archives, for example, focusing narrowly on the office of origin. Furthermore, the records were supposed to satisfy a “need,” of someone [e.g., a future researcher (Adelmo) or genealogist (Malachi)], which is linked to the economy of worth even if monetary terms were not explicitly used. The regimes of information tended to be similarly perplexing, as here the measure of informative potential of the archival records was lack of money (mentioned by all interviewees) to realize the informative potential of the holdings.

The references related to the *digital order* were largely subordinated to more explicit concerns of archival management, research use, and, for Adso and Abo, the work with the public audience. Malachi was the only interviewee who put significant emphasis on digitalization as a guiding principle of his work. William and Benno saw digitization of archival workflows as a major change, but for them, technology was an external regime that archives were “forced” to confront, rather than an instrument of change emanating from within the world of archives. Berengar noted that he “expects a lot of [the digitization of archival collections]” and sees it as a “major upheaval,” but similarly to William and Benno, he saw it as something that is imposed by the contemporary society rather than coming from the archives. “The challenge at the archives is to be able to take care of digital records. [. . .] I think it is the most interesting thing, to take archives to the twenty-first century” (Malachi). The need to digitize holdings tends to be expressed in a matter-of-fact tone: “[In an ideal situation, I would like that] everything would be digitized and many more databases would be created” (Abo).

If the pluralistic order subscribed to an idea of the fame as a measure of the worth of different viewpoints, in the digital order, the “digital” has been elevated to a similar position. This premise tended to be based on the conviction and anticipation of the its worth (e.g., Berengar, Malachi) rather than on direct references to any specific advantages.

Finally, several interviewees described the significance and a sense of satisfaction based on working hands-on with personally interesting archival materials. The most of the interviewees subordinated the *personal order* of work to the archival, organizational, and antiquarian priorities when they were directly asked about their relative importance. Even when the interviewees were hesitant to emphasize it, all of them acknowledged

some degree of personal interest in some aspects of records and archival work, by making a general reference to the idea that “all” archivists are interested in history (e.g., Adso), by talking about their (earlier) personal research interests (e.g., Severinus, Benno), by explaining their fascination to the records they had been working with (e.g., Malachi), and by adding how the interests and personal preferences influenced the ways of their work. While the informants tended to put more emphasis on the collective priorities, it is apparent that the personal interests were in tension with other orders of work.

In contrast to the civic (pluralistic and archival) dispositions of work, within the personal order, the worth of archival records and archival work is linked to their capability to provide inspiration. All interviewees at some point described their personal fascination with some particular archival records (e.g., Abo and textile samples and films) and the archival work itself (e.g., Malachi on the possibility of making a difference at a venerable institution). Even Benno, who in general placed a lot of emphasis on the organizational and societal value formation, referred to the symbolic and personal rather than civic role of the documents when he described his excitement at the discovery of a long-lost original of an old map.

Even when the orders of work were largely parallel to each other, the interviewees described both explicit and implicit conflicts between them. Here conflict arises out of incompatibilities between orders of work. The antiquarian worth and significance were perhaps the most openly problematic issue for the archivists because of the difficulty of determining relative significance and measuring its value. Incongruities were also sensed between the archival and organizational orders of work. Personal orders of work were often articulated as proxies of societal or archival interest, but as Malachi described, his work with archival materials and seeking of information were often influenced by his personal ideas of what is interesting and relevant. According to the analysis, the most problematic order of work was the digital one. Even if the interviewees tended to argue that it would benefit the archival work in general, it was highly unclear how the anticipated benefits would be realized in practice. At the same time, the digital order was implicitly described as a given order of work that comes from the society. This assumption was partly practical and based on other orders of work. As Benno noted, the question of the digital preservation of archival records needs to be solved because of the rapid digitization of records management in organizations. At the same time, however, the appropriation of the “digital” was commonly motivated by an indeterminate intrinsic value of becoming digital. For instance, Malachi argued that “I want to work with and really make the digital archiving work [...] the most interesting thing is to take archives to the

twenty-first century,” without giving an explicit clarification of why he wanted to do that and what is especially promising in digital archiving.

The different orders of work and their mutual tensions can be broadly divided in two categories. The archival, organizational, antiquarian, and pluralistic orders of work can be seen as inherent to the archival work, and a product of a long evolution (e.g., Cook 1997 2001; Blouin 2007). In contrast, the digital and personal orders of work are external and contextual, and more closely relate to the technological, societal, and microsocioal contexts of today (e.g., Bailey 2007; Theimer 2011; Gilliland-Swetland 2000; Duranti 2001). In this respect, the first four orders are more or less directly opposed to each other, whereas in the case of the two remaining orders of work, the tensions are more subtle, multifaceted, and indirectly related to the orders that informants recognize as a core of their work.

### Cross-Order Practices

In parallel to the identified orders of work in the archival field, the analysis revealed a spectrum of “cross-order” information and work practices. In contrast to the prototypical worlds and orders of work, they are local and transient in time. Instead of referring to an individual order of work and regime of worth, the practices make references to multiple, even conflicting, dispositions of activity. These contradictory allegiances can be explained by a double bind in the orders of work, and a pragmatic need to address the eventualities of daily work. In terms of the Boltanski and Thévenot framework, these may be seen as attempts to reach a “common good,” a compromise between conflicting ideas of the purpose of work, its worth, and its idea of meaning. Table 4 summarizes five such practices identified in the analysis. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to present an overview of the prominent constellations of practices identified in the interviews.

The *everyday adhocracy* of archival work describes a prevalent practice of solving unexpected problems and managing both personal and institutional issues, often with resources that are perceived to be seriously limited: “We should be like 10 full-time employed to be able to specialize a bit more” (Abo). The adhocracy is typically articulated as a necessary survival strategy that attempts to balance between the conflicting purposes and conceptualizations of worth and meaning present at a situation in hand. For instance, Adelmo described in detail how the present possibilities and long-term wants lead to sometimes rather “hurried” decisions. It seems that the everyday adhocracy is essentially a practice that can be used to compromise between all possible orders of work

and measures of worth and meaning, although in the analyzed material, the most common references to ad hoc practices seemed to relate to the bridging of archival and pluralistic orders of work, that is, finding a balance between conventional archival practices and anticipated contemporary and future needs.

The *everyday adhocracy* is related to the practice of institutional policies. In contrast to the idea of the universality of archival principles, the practices of institutional policies are premised by an individual archival institution, its host organization, and their perceived autonomy and uniqueness in relation to other institutions. Benno, who had experience of writing national guidelines for municipal archives, noted that it is difficult and to a degree impossible to satisfy all conceivable needs by a single set of criteria. Berengar, Benno, and Adelmo were explicit about the problems of blanket solutions and the necessity of local practices and adjustments for the success of their work. Even if the practice of institutional policies was oriented to the local, the diversification was clearly a controversial issue. Partly, the principled attitude of the informants was to avoid anomalies and partly, as Malachi noted, in practice the different organizations are often “more similar than people are ready to admit.” Therefore, the institutional policies can be seen as a compromise between the idealist universalist aspirations (described, e.g., by Adso; often related to the archival order and regime of worth) and local organizational and practical ideas of worth and meaning.

Third, the practices of *outreach* emerged in the analysis as a cross-order approach for merging societal and archival perspectives of value and meaning. Outreach was articulated both as a practice of helping people to find relevant archival records that could be helpful and interesting to them. At the same time, a parallel purpose of the same practices was explained to be to help people to “realise what wonderful materials we have [at the archives]” (William). Abo was concerned about the visibility of his archive and underlined the need to highlight its usefulness both as an administrative instrument and a public good. Outreach was typically referred to as a practice of overcoming the indifferences between pluralistic and archival orders, but in case of their administrative relevance, even between archival and organizational orders or work.

*Digitization* is perhaps the most peculiar of all cross-order practices, because of its explicit reference to a certain technical procedure. The interviewees tended to refer to digitization in terms highly similar to outreach as a cross-order method of bringing archives and their users closer to each other and for addressing the gap between organizational and archival, and archival and pluralistic ideas of worth and meaning. Outside of any specific critical incidents (specific instances of their work), the

interviewees were seldom precise in how the digitization of records would help to reach a compromise and reach a shared idea of “common good.” In contrast, multiple informants including Adso, Berengar, and even Malachi made several direct references to the unspecific capability of the digitization to address problems that arise from the incongruences between the different orders of work and their related measures of worth.

Finally, most of the interviewees (including Adelmo, Malachi, William, and Abo) made frequent references to the lack of time and prioritization as a practice that supports the daily work at an archive. All informants referred either explicitly or implicitly to the time constraints as a major issue they would like to solve if they were to have the possibility to do whatever they liked to make their working conditions as good as possible. In contrast to adhocracy, the prioritization of was articulated in more systematic terms. For instance, Adso described in detail how his practices of seeking archival materials for exhibitions were based on a combination of balancing and prioritizing between personal considerations of significance, earlier knowledge of the archival collections, and projections of public interest and popular relevance. Prioritization helped especially to find a compromise between archival, and personal, digital, and pluralistic orders of work in circumstances when it was practically impossible to reach an ideal outcome from the perspective of the archival order of work.

## DISCUSSION

A closer look at the orders of work, their related regimes of worth and information, and work practices that contribute to the unfolding of compromises between conflicting arrangements can enhance our understanding of their intricacies. The existing literature (e.g., Anthony 2006) has established that the work of archivists is highly situated (like any work; Suchman 1987), but the discussion of its situatedness has tended to focus on specific aspects of the work (e.g., appraisal or outreach; Shilton and Srinivasan 2008; Theimer 2011), histories of archival theory and work (e.g., Duchein 1992; Cook 1997), and direct proposals of its premises and future priorities (e.g., Gilliland and McKemmish 2004; Duranti 1999), rather than present-day archival work in all its complexities. The present study is empirical but limited in scope, which is insufficient for providing a broad overview of how archivists in general work or conceptualize the value and meaning of their work. It does, however, give a glimpse into the economies of worth in archival work in the two Nordic countries and a framework for explicating work practices in other contexts both within and outside archival institutions.

The six identified orders of work have many parallels with earlier observations of archival work published in the literature. The interviewees perceived the archival order as the backbone of the records-keeping enterprise, in accordance with earlier scholarship (e.g., Gilliland-Swetland 2000; Duranti 2010; Thomassen 2001). At the same time, incongruencies between the archival and organizational orders of work highlight the current controversies—whether archives are information, evidence, or heritage institutions (e.g., Gilliland-Swetland 2000; Duranti 1999; Manžuch 2009), how germane the distinction is between historical archives and contemporary records management (Duchain 1983), and how relevant the notions of information and knowledge management are to records management (Convery 2010). Also highlighted is how the different conceptualizations of archival records—evidence (Brothman 2002), transactions (Cox 2001), and speech acts (Henttonen 2007; Yeo 2010)—can be brought back to the different regimes of worth and information: whether a record is a “measurement” of an event, a document of a transaction, or a “domestic anecdote.”

Worth is based on trust (Ekbia and Evans 2009) and a strong social evidence of authenticity, but at the same time, it can be very intuitive and anecdotal, as Berengar’s explanation of the value of archival records shows. According to him, the archival records are “fantastic materials” not only because of their documentary value, but also because they are intriguing for reasons that “are difficult to specify.” The intricate interplay of the often historically anchored civic and contemporary inspirational regimes of worth and the idea of the value of archival records remind one of the assertion of Manoff that archival discourse provides an entry point to understanding and explicating the change of knowledge-making practices (Manoff 2004).

If the antiquarian order and the interplay of its associated regimes of worth can help to understand the intricacy of the collective and intuitive good in the context of archives and cultural heritage (Blouin 2007), a closer look at the pluralistic emergence of value can elucidate the complexities of individualistic and collective values. A possible reason for why the questions of participatory archives (Huvila 2008), activism as a part of archival profession (Prelinger 2010), and outreach and the desirable degree of opening archives for the contributions of nonarchivists (Yakel 2011) have been controversial topics in the archival literature is that the discussion of the desirability of the various degrees of engagement refers alternately to the civic (records as a public good), inspired (their symbolic role to, e.g., individuals and minority groups), market (archives are relevant if they are satisfying a demand), and to a certain degree even other regimes of worth. The evolution of the pluralistic

order of work and its leaning toward different regimes of worth and, consequently, how archival holdings have been associated with diverse regimes of information explains also the paradigmatic changes in archival profession (e.g., Cox 2000; Duchain 1992) from the “domestic” premodern archives, to “inspired” historical archives, “civic” public archives, “industrial” records management departments, and, it seems, to the contemporary process (e.g., Cook 1997; 2001; Duranti 1998) of redefining the regimes of worth and information of the future as a new “common good” of the archival work.

Similarly to the archival, organizational, and antiquarian orders, the pluralistic order of work is related to historical conditions and the regimes of worth of the contemporary society. They are both historically developed from organizational and antiquarian to the archival and pluralistic orders, and coexisting in time with varying hegemonic emphases depending on different personal, collective, and institutional priorities. Even if the currents of the contemporary archival discourse highlight pluralism, the archival, organizational, and antiquarian orders are, as shown by the analysis, still playing a significant role in defining the priorities and worth of archival work.

In contrast to the first four orders of archival work, the underpinnings of the digital and personal orders are less specific to the archival work. The digital order can be seen as a manifestation of the largely contemporary social order of inevitable external change that Sahlén (2005) calls “modernization” and that has been discussed by cultural theorists coming from outside of the field of archival studies, including Derrida (1995), Ernst (2008), and Foucault (2002). The references to the digital order in the interview data portray it as an unavoidable contextual fact that has to be taken as granted. This trajectory follows more closely the determinism of, for instance, M. Castells than the contextually more sensitive analyses of the digitization of, for instance, Bowker (2005; Bowker et al. 2010) or Borgman (2007). The underpinnings of the personal order of work can be found similarly in the broader corpus of literature in, for instance, classical (e.g., Wouters 1989) and more recent studies of work (e.g., Gregg 2011), in information science literature (Nahl and Bilal 2007), and in the archival ethnography of Both (2010) with multiple accounts on the significance of emotions and passion as a central driver of work and information use.

In addition to the explanatory power of the orders of work and their related regimes of worth and information, the analysis of the interview material shows the significance of the mediating cross-order practices as constituents of the (paraphrasing Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) *compromises* across the different regimes of worth, or as Manoff (2004) conveys it, the shared preoccupation with

the function and fate of the “record.” The cross-order practices can be seen both as actions that lead to a compromise, and as significant constituents of the common good *per se*. If the regimes of worth and information in which archival work and archival records are worked form the premises of the common good, it is the cross-order practices that enact the compromise and sustain the *longue durée* of that what is understood as archives, archival records, and archival work. The specific cross-order practices do, however, have differences in how and when they enact these compromises. Institutional policies are a good example of a long-term cross-order activity based on the longevity of archival work, institutional traditions, and the experience of senior archivists discussed by Anthony (2006). In contrast, the everyday adhocery is a practice of the transient present related to the knowledge strategies of the junior archivists in the same study. When compared to these two cross-order practices, parallels of the practices of digitization and outreach can be found in the archival literature and the often optimistic propositions of the opportunities of provided by pedagogy (e.g., Krause 2010; Zipsane 2009), engagement (e.g., Prelinger 2010), and, for instance, digital technologies (e.g., Bailey 2008; Theimer 2011).

Even if they are constituents of a middle ground, the documented cross-order practices seem to have a tendency to be partly asymmetric. They arise from a specific regime of worth and persuade conflicting orders to accept a particular idea as a starting point for negotiating a compromise. The dominance of particular orders of work in the cross-order practices might weaken their capability to resolve tensions and reach compromises. In the interview record, the asymmetry is most obvious in the outreach cross-order activity that, in spite of its user-oriented and compromising flavors (e.g., examples in Table 4), fundamentally leans toward a precedence of archival or institutional regimes of worth and, as such, limits its usefulness for establishing a common ground between the competing regimes.

As noted specifically in the context of the contested orders of work, trust plays a central role in the context of the information worlds, as Ekbj and Evans (2009) stress. In contrast to their suggestion, the present analysis seems to indicate that the significant aspect may not be the measure of trust invested in source, but rather how it is produced within particular regimes of worth and information or between them in the context of specific cross-order practices. Similarly to how information is practiced rather than essentialist according to Garfinkel’s sociological theory of information, the present study suggests that in the context of the regimes also trust and accountability are about doing rather than being. Instead of the investment, especially in the context of cross-order practices, the key seems to be the practice of investing. The

observation is consistent with the recent scholarship on trust, credibility, and authenticity in information science scholarship (Rieh 2010) and extends the current conceptualizations toward the idea of trust being relative to the inhabited worlds and the regimes of worth and meaning being at work. The analysis suggests that trust is, or can be, a relatively unproblematic notion with specific objects or persons within a specific regime of worth. The civic value of archival material as a source of documentary evidence does not compete with the civic value of the same material as a part of the cultural heritage. Even if it is possible to perceive collective good from different perspectives, the judgments are based on comparable premises of worth and meaning, that is, that of a certain understanding of beneficiality shared by more than one person. In contrast, the combinations of the evaluation of collective good, fame, and personal intuition were delicate processes that required cross-order balancing, such as the discussions of who will be using archival materials in the future (Adelmo) or how to seek useful information for an exhibition (Adso). The questions of representing minorities or work processes in Nordic municipalities are not as dramatic as in some of the cases discussed in the literature (e.g., Caswell 2010), but still illustrative of the intricacy of the consequences of crossing different measures of worth and meaning.

The notions of worlds and the regimes of worth and information in the archival context can be further set against the Giddensian inspired theorizing of records continuum, which has had an unparalleled impact in the contemporary archival theory. Even if the extension of the regimes-thinking toward an explicit scrutiny of regime-specific ideas of particular types of archival documents might lean more toward a similar compartmentalization of different conceptualizations of records (i.e., entities) and their use than the life-cycle thinking, implicitly and explicitly criticized by the Garfinkelian (2008) theory of information and record continuum theorists alike (e.g., Upward 1997), the regimes (as specifically discussed by Boltanski and Thévenot) provide a potentially useful third perspective to records and archival information. In contrast to life-cycle-based approaches (with a typically rather essentialist point of view of the different conceptualizations of records in the different phases of their life), the premise of the regimes-based approach would be that the conceptualizations relate to parallel processes of bringing order to social practices articulated as institutionalization and (in a Giddensian sense) structuration in different worlds. In contrast to the relatively open process of how the worth, use, and usefulness of records evolve in time, which leads to (opportunities of) pluralization, the regimes of worth and information can help to explain the interplay of how and why archival records are being conceptualized and used



by different individuals for different purposes in parallel to each other. For someone, the worth of a record can be in its monetary value or consequences, and at the same time, the same document can be a source of inspiration or a historical anecdote. As a part of the same process, the cross-order practices such as adhococracy, institutional policies, outreach, digitization, and prioritization provide bridges to make compromises between different regimes of worth. An ad hoc decision can help to explain a choice as acceptable within the frame of a “common good” for conflicting regimes of worth. The description of Adelmo of the prioritization of archival records in the writing of appraisal and disposal policies that balance between the industrial world of archival management and the civic priorities of the preservation of public documents provides a good example of how compromises emerge in practice.

In a more general sense, the present study shows also how the regimes of information are not necessarily dependent on specific types of information objects as in the examples discussed by Ekbia and Evans. The question is how an individual information object (e.g., an archival record) and the information it carries and manifests are conceptualized within different regimes of information. In this light, the dichotomy Bowker (2010) seen between trace archives and formal archives is partly a question of perspective. Even if a formal archive is jussive as Bowker argues, it is peremptory only within a particular regime of information that has produced it as an archive within a particular of regime of worth. A typical archive of a public authority is formal within that specific regime and in particular contexts within the organizational regime of information, which rely on the practical usefulness of archival material for specific purposes. Within the remaining contexts of the organizational regime and in all other regimes, the formal archive is reduced to a mere collection of traces that needs to be recontextualized and reinstitutionalized to make sense within the scope and for the purposes of these regimes. Respectively, an archive becomes formal and jussive only if it rests upon a distinct regime of worth, even if it would be considered to serve the “common good” from the perspective of multiple regimes. In contrast, the individual archival records have a greater freedom to take multiple trajectories on the continuum, rest upon different regimes of worth, and function under a variety of regimes of information. But in spite of perplexity of social orders, their related practices, and constituent intangible and material objects, the making of an archive and archival record is invariably tied to the implicit or explicit measures of value and meaning associated with them, the regimes of worth and information in the world inhabited by archivists and all others who are working with archival materials.

## CONCLUSION

The measures of worth of archives and archival work have changed during the history of recordkeeping. For a long time, archives were dominated by an institutionalized regime of worth that saw their relevance as providers of documentation for the sovereign to effectively govern their subjects, to collect levies, and to legitimize their authority. The paradigmatic turn of the 19th century recast archives as sources of historical knowledge and records. The 20th century pluralized the understanding of archival holdings, which were now thought to be informative in different ways in different situations. The pluralization was further accelerated by the rapid emergence of digital technologies and a paradigm shift that underlined relativism and subjectivity of archivists and archival holdings.

At present, the archival community is again in a period of competing paradigmatic views of the value and relevance that are premised by different understandings of the worth and the character of the meaning of archival records and archival work. The central question is how (within specific regimes of information) and on what premises (within particular regimes of worth) the significations and value of archival records and the work of archivists are being constituted. On the basis of the present study, we claim that a closer look at the orders of work can help us understand the interplay of the social circumstances that give rise to these regimes. A parallel scrutiny of the situated cross-order practices can bring similar order to the understanding of the actions that facilitate workable compromises between the regimes. The changing notions of archival records can be seen as a “dance” of the regimes of information and worth within the partly overlapping and secluded orders of archival work.

The present study shows that the paradox of archival work, and beyond the specific context of this study of work, is that in practice, the worth of (archival) work, its constituent “things” (archives, archival materials), and their meaning in the society are not solvable problems of discovering or deciding what their inherent nature should be. Instead, they are questions of how the things (archival records) and work are embedded in situations and practiced—both theorized and acted upon—within and between the pertinent social orders of (archival) work, their underlying regimes and the use of (archival) materials. Archival work and the constant process of making and remaking an archive are invariably dependent on their implicit and explicit commitments to specific regimes of worth and their associated regimes of information, on that which is considered to be the worth and meaning of archives.

## NOTE

1. Schellenberg's source for this quote is Baldassare Bonifacio, who committed it to writing in 1632.

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