7. Ideologies in Disseminating Traditional Dancing: Renewed Models and Reflections on Safeguarding Dance as ICH from Norway

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This chapter investigates strategies for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage amid rapid societal and technological change, focusing on the Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance (Sff). Through three case studies, it examines methodological renewal, bottom-up processes, and ownership: (1) revitalisation of a regional dance tradition; (2) re-transformation of dissemination strategies; and (3) contested archival access. Based on the author's various perspectives when at Sff, the focus is on the years 2019–2024.

Keywords: Traditional dancing, safeguarding dance as intangible cultural heritage, cultural brokerage, archive dissemination, bottom-up methodologies, ideology

The Institution

In 2023, the Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance (Sff) celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Since its establishment, ethnochoreologist Egil Bakka's dance archive collection has been at the heart of Sff, today one of the largest collections of traditional music and dance in Europe. Sff was founded as part of a safeguarding strategy for traditional dance and music, where research, informal (and later formal) education, and transmission were built around this ever-expanding collection. The archive is rooted in extensive fieldwork, including filming and interviewing tradition-bearers, as Bakka (1999) describes in his article 'Or shortly they would be lost forever: documenting for revival and research'. The archive was developed in collaboration with enthusiastic folk dancers and musicians, and for fifty years, it has provided a space to revive traditional dances and bring them back "home".

Sff is a foundation, a heritage institution, and an umbrella organisation with a representative board. The foundation's aim is to safeguard and transmit Norwegian traditional music and dance as expressions of cultural identity with distinctive qualities. This goal is pursued through four subgoals: coordinating and ensuring representativeness; expertise in public administration; fostering rigorous scientific work in the documentation, examination, and dissemination of knowledge; and ensuring both quality and breadth in the transmission of traditional music and dance. The institution employs staff in areas of traditional music and dance dissemination and research, with a long-standing emphasis on dance dissemination due to its institutional dance collection history (see below). In 2009, Sff was accredited as an NGO under the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. At Sff, specialists are involved in archival work, research, different kinds of dissemination, project and innovation activities. There is an extensive national network: a network for traditional music archives, a network for traditional dance transmission, and a network for all traditional music and dance institutions, festivals and organisations. The archival materials are used by educators, curators, performers, students, researchers, enthusiasts, tradition-bearers, and revivalist organisations. Sff shares its archive through digital access, exhibitions, lectures, and collaboration with public schools, universities, heritage institutions, national authorities and NGOs. The foundation has support schemes to encourage activities that create, promote, safeguard, document, and make Norwegian traditional music and dance accessible all over Norway.

The Chapter's Content

Sff took the initiative to bring together the partners for the EU-funded *Dance-ICH* project. This initiative was built on two key pillars. The first pillar was the methodology for safeguarding traditional dance and participatory dancing, a long-term effort initially started by Bakka, and further developed through renewed models created by the staff after his retirement in 2013. This pillar forms the core of this chapter. The second pillar was the continuation and further development of *Museene danser* (Dancing Museums), a project that Tone Erlien Myrvold discusses in Chapter 9 of this book.

In this chapter, I discuss the renewed models and safeguarding methodology of Sff, exploring the institution's ideology in the period 2019–2024 of "bringing the dance back home", in line with the principles outlined in the 2003 UNESCO Convention. Key aspects of this methodology include bottom-up processes, mediation, and cultural brokerage. I also examine safeguarding practices that place archival material – particularly a film collection spanning from 1967 to the present – at the heart of the process. Three case studies are offered here which illustrate an evolving model of safeguarding that prioritises flexibility, community engagement, and careful mediation between the past and present.

The chapter is based on empirical research from my perspectives as a dance notator, researcher, facilitator, and pedagogue, who began working at Sff in 2001. The dance notator's perspective highlights the richness of the archive, which includes multiple interpretations of the same dance by different dancers. The dance pedagogue's perspective focuses on how this richness can be taught. The dance researcher's perspective addresses dilemmas related to ownership, community involvement, and the varying attitudes towards heritage safeguarding among "ordinary" community dancers and those considered "performers of traditional dance." My position at Sff may also be described as that of cultural broker (Jacobs, Neyrinck, and Van Der Zeijden 2014b; Baron 2021).

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Ideology, the 2003 UNESCO Convention, and Renewed Models of Safeguarding

Sff's safeguarding practices have, from the very beginning, been grounded in an ideology where the film collection is viewed as a shared expression, culture and property of the local community. The dissemination of this collection emphasises the plurality and variations within the traditions. I adopt here a definition of ideology as "a set of beliefs or principles, especially one on which a political system, party, or organisation is based" (Cambridge n.d.).

One such ideology stems from the 2003 UNESCO Convention, which aligns with Sff's objectives. The Convention defines safeguarding strategies in Article 2.3 as follows:

> measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage. (UNESCO 2022)

In the Nordic countries, the term *folkedans* (folk dance) is used by ethnochoreologists, revivalists, and tradition-bearers to describe both the traditional dances of rural communities and the dance materials and activities of the folk dance movement (Bakka 2007a, 13). However, there has been ongoing discussion, particularly in Sweden, about distinguishing between *folkedans* (folk dance or folk dance movement dancing) and *folklig dans* (vernacular or traditional dance). Nordic folk dance specialists, including Nilsson (2009) and Bakka (2001), associate the labels "popular dancing", "traditional dancing", and "folk dancing" with social dancing. In this chapter, I use these four concepts interchangeably, without distinguishing between revivalist activities and the so-called "authentic" traditional form.

Despite Sff's long history, a new generation of employees felt the need to question its fifty-year experience in safeguarding strategies and dissemination that connected community involvement, transmission, mediation, and facilitation to a unique archive of traditional music and dance. We[1]

[1] I refer to a collective "we" that reflects the collaborative process of questioning and refining our methodology and reflexivity. This "we" encompasses the joint efforts of the staff of Sff, and

aimed to foster reflexivity regarding authority, interests, impact, and roles in the safeguarding process (Baron 2016). We sought to understand how traditional music and dance, as heritage practices, and authorised heritage discourse are crafted, preserved, and contested (Thouki and Skrede 2024). We asked ourselves: have we empowered the tradition- bearers and the folk dance movement, or have we unintentionally disempowered them through our scholarly, top-down approach? This led us to reconsider and reinterpret the principles and beliefs that should ground our work. We began reflecting on our roles as ICH mediators (Baron 2021; Jacobs and Neyrinck 2020): according to Article 15 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, the safeguarding and promotion of ICH should be a bottom-up approach, driven by the communities, groups, and individuals themselves (UNESCO 2022).

Our questions were influenced by several factors. In 2009, Sff had been accredited as an NGO under the 2003 UNESCO Convention. In 2014 and 2015, some of us became trained through UNESCO's training-of-trainers workshop. By 2012, Sff had become an associated partner in the two-year joint master's programme Choreomundus – International Master in Dance Knowledge, Practice, and Heritage (Choreomundus n.d.). I was a Ph.D. candidate and part-time teacher in that programme, which provided the scholarly foundation for other colleagues.

Together, we developed ideas around cultural brokerage and creation of intangible cultural heritage (hereafter ICH) networks and nodes, influenced by and in engagement with the texts of Kurin (1997), Casteleyn, Janssens and Neyrinck (2014), Jacobs, Neyrinck and Zeijden (2014a; b), Jacobs and Neyrinck (2020), and Baron (2016; 2021). In 2018, we initiated an inspirational seminar exploring the possibilities of connecting and cooperating among tradition-bearers, the revival movement, music and dance groups, their organisations, museums, and archives at the showcase festival, conference, and hub *Folkelarm* in Oslo (Sff 2019). We proposed that traditional music and dance heritage communities and the folk dance movement create networks and nodes with heritage institutions and schools connected to the formal education system to identify threats and find solutions for transmission and safeguarding (Mæland 2020). We pointed to the Setesdal Valley, where, through the process of listing their traditions on the 2003 UNESCO Representative List, they had established such networks around

especially Tone E. Myrvold, Sjur Viken, and myself, both prior to and during the application process for the EU-funded *Dance-ICH* project.

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their tradition- bearers (UNESCO 2019; Lien 2020). We also highlighted our own projects, *Bygda dansar* (Countryside Dancing) and *Museene danser* (Dancing Museums) which aim to disseminate dance in participatory ways, reaching out to practitioners, tradition-bearers and relevant networks (Sff 2021a; Sff n.d.a).

Our institutional heritage and working methods at Sff are rooted in a model of cooperation with local communities to build an archive for dissemination and to empower or revive traditional dance, bringing the dance "back home". This process was illustrated by Egil Bakka himself:

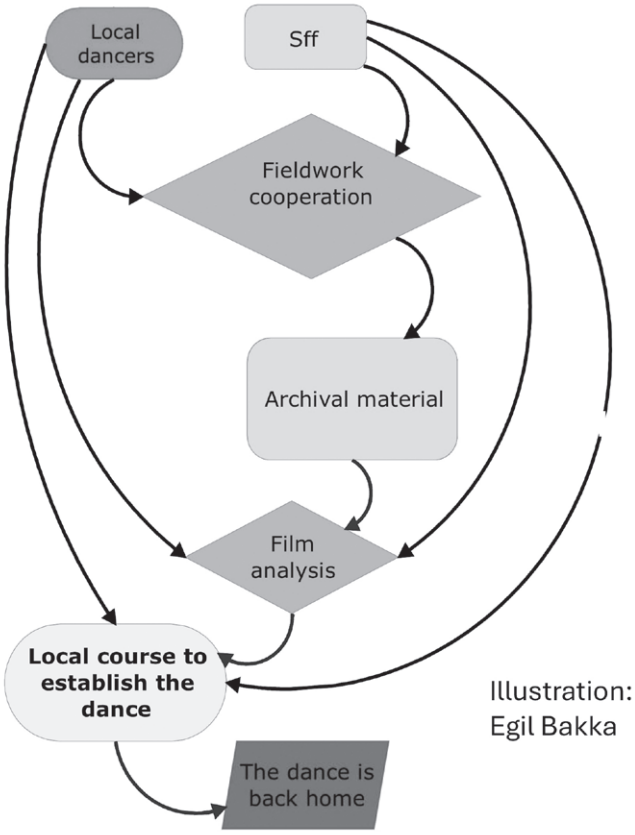

Figure 1. *Sff's methodology and process of safeguarding dance as ICH.* Illustration by Egil Bakka, 2005. Figure published with permission.

This model worked well when the collector was still actively involved at Sff. However, when the staff, who were not collectors, began disseminating the archival material, they encountered challenges – especially when there was little or no cooperation with the tradition-bearers. Well-intentioned efforts to disseminate or teach for safeguarding could create tensions, particularly when heritage communities wanted ownership of their own material and its dissemination. The material itself could be perceived as a threat by the tradition-bearers if the collected film footage depicted dances that differed in motifs or stylistic traits from current performances. Another challenge was the teaching methods. The university-educated staff at Sff had been taught with an ideology and methodology that emphasised diversity and creativity on the dance floor, reflecting the variety found in both the communities and the archival material. However, many of the tradition-bearers were self-taught in their teaching methods and often ended up teaching a fixed version of the dance, even though this was not necessarily how they danced the tradition themselves.

The "new" staff became aware that archive dissemination had to be approached with care, mediation, and cultural brokerage – often negotiating different beliefs and principles between the university-educated staff and the community, or more frequently, between various community members and tradition-bearers. As a result, we began to adopt initiatives originating from the tradition-bearers themselves, testing different methods of cooperation and mediation. The first attempt to illustrate this renewed model was presented in a paper at the 32nd Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology in Slovenia in 2022 (Mæland 2022).

The renewed model (see Figure 2) – moving from archival material to transmission, and bringing the dance "home" – will be exemplified in the following text through three examples: 1) reviving a local dance tradition, 2) re-transformation of Sff's dissemination strategies in different regions of Norway, and 3) rethinking archival material dissemination in the digital age.

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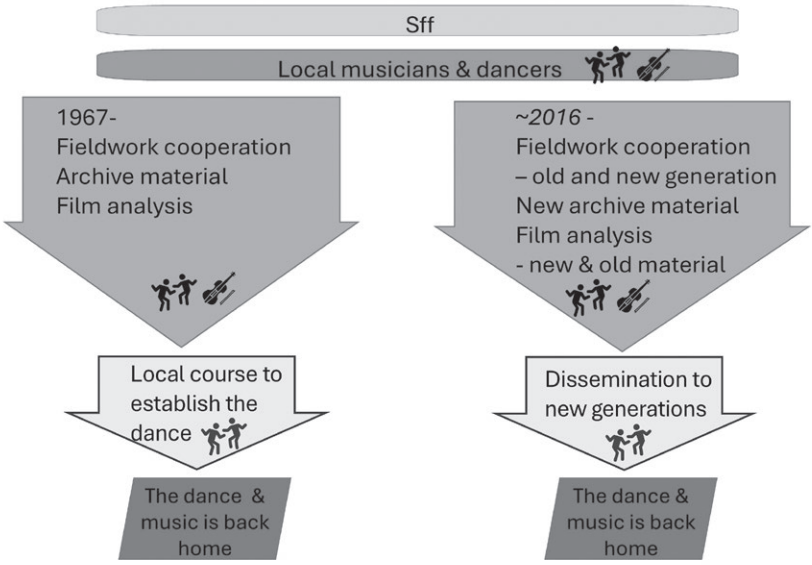

Figure 2. *Renewed model – Sff's methodology and process of safeguarding dance as ICH.* Figure by Mæland, 2022.

The Project Springar Dancing from Sørfjorden

The term *springar* from the Sørfjorden fjord in Hardanger refers to both the tunes traditionally played on the Hardanger fiddle and the couple dance with distinctive characteristics in terms of motifs and rhythm. The dance involves multiple couples dancing in a counter-clockwise ring, each performing their dance motifs separately but in synchronisation with the rhythm. Many types of tunes are played and safeguarded in the *springar* tradition of Hardanger. The dance is one of the oldest forms of traditional couple dance in Norway, dating back to pre-1800 and follows, according to Norwegian Ethnochoreology terminology, a classic three-part structure each with distinctive motifs: a *winding part* where the couple turn under each other's arms with one or two hand holds, *an unfastening part* where the couple separate and dance solo, and *a couple turning* in close embrace (Bakka 2007b).

In the project *Springar from Sørfjorden / Sørfjordspringar*, Sff's methodology was applied. Sff's approach is rooted in action-based knowledge development, using the film archive to provide opportunities for revitalising

and safeguarding variations of local dances in collaboration with local communities. Sff has developed methods for analysing traditional dances, focusing on aspects such as couple motifs and movement qualities, including the *svikt* analysis (Bakka 2007b; Bakka and Mæland 2020), with the goal of transmission (Bakka, Flem and Okstad 1993) and safeguarding traditional dances as multitrack practices (Bakka 2020). The teaching methodology is continually evolving to ensure sustainable safeguarding. In an online article by Mæland, Rosvold and Velure (2025), we discuss revival strategies for the regional *springar* dance from Sørfjorden in Hardanger, Norway, using the further developed Sff methodology of transcription and analysis of film archival material:

1. Dance transcription, analysis, and dissemination of dance documentation have been central to our work. By transcription, we mean carefully writing down what a dance couple does in a particular performance, capturing each specific realisation as accurately as possible using the notation system developed at Sff (Bakka, Flem and Okstad 1993). The transcription methodology involves observing and analysing dance movements, practising them, and conveying them as faithfully as possible.
2. This method was developed to gain knowledge about dance through collected film material, following an epistemological tradition where knowledge about dance is only acquired through the actual dance realisations that occur in time and space. This method captures the practical knowledge of skills, norms, and the dancers' concept of dance in a traditional context (Bakka and Karoblis 2010). A "dance concept" can be defined as "the sum of motor skills, knowledge, and performances that enable a dancer to perform a dance in accordance with the norms in the environment" (Bakka, Flem and Okstad 1993, 39). It is from this dance concept that dancers can produce varied but acceptable versions of a local dance.
3. The goal of the analysis, based on the transcriptions, is to understand the grammar, patterns, variations, improvisation, diversity, and personal freedom within this tradition. In the *Sørfjordspringar* project, we transcribed each dance couple and every instance they danced on film in the archive. We sought to avoid oversimplifications in the presentation, aiming to capture the complexity of the *springar* tradition in Sørfjorden (Mæland, Rosvold and Velure 2025, 5-6, my translation).

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The project was initiated by tradition-bearer Magne Velure, who had been involved in the fieldwork cooperation in Hardanger and Sørfjorden with Bakka in 1967 when they were students. Velure, originally from Sørfjorden, was at that time both a dancer and teacher of the *springar*. In 2019, he contacted me at Sff and Magni Rosvold at her workplace, hardingfela.no, to revisit and work with the archival material. Rosvold worked as a folk dance mediator in the Hordaland region, which includes Sørfjorden. At the time, Rosvold and I were collaborating on the *Bygda dansar* (Countryside Dancing) project (see below).

Rosvold and I initiated a process with our colleagues at Sff, with local heritage institution colleagues in Hordaland, and with fiddlers and dancers from Hardanger, inviting them to discuss and dance the archival material, and to engage the tradition-bearers in filming and interviews. Due to COVID-19, the process was not straightforward, and digital meetings were required. However, we managed to meet in person as well, and Rosvold organised numerous events in Hordaland. The renewed model above was created to illustrate this process (Figure 2).

Velure, now living elsewhere in the country, remained in close contact with the local traditional music association and was invited to teach the *springar* at weekend seminars. Rosvold often attended these events to document them. Simultaneously, Rosvold and I tested our analysis and how to disseminate the pluralities of the archival material through workshops. Rosvold also initiated teacher training courses in Hardanger. At the *Dance-ICH* Workshop 2 in the Hungary Open Air Museum in May 2023, I demonstrated two of these methods through practical teaching, discussing the relevance of teaching according to a multitrack practice. A multitrack practice is not limited to an authorised form and often features multiple alternatives in its structure. Practitioners can choose between several options which "represents a particular challenge for the safeguarding of ICH" (Bakka 2020, 39–40).

One method I used, developed as early as 1999 during my BA studies in Norwegian Applied Ethnochoreology at NTNU, became an inspiration for many dance teachers. We saw how it could easily be applied to this material. The teaching method is a dance game, which gradually adds more rules: dancers perform one by one, moving, in time with the musical rhythm, randomly all over the floor, as in the *lausdans* (solo unfastening part of the dance), and then, on cue, they add new couple motifs. The game transitions from dancing alone (unfastening part) to finding a new partner on the floor

to dance different turning motifs under each other's arms or couple turns. Ultimately, the game evolves into a semi-strucured dance, incorporating motifs and steps similar to the *springar*. This method works well when introducing the *springar* to new audiences, especially to children and to young people, teaching them how to play with (or choose between) duration, steps, and alternative motifs.

We faced, however, a large archival collection of forty dance realisations, spanning from 1967 to the present, which we transcribed and analysed (Mæland, Rosvold and Velure 2025). Drawing on our previous knowledge and teaching experience, we tested how to teach the dance within a comprehensible frame while providing attendees with the tools to explore the variations we had detected. We aimed to create a space for variation and improvisation, fostering a dance floor that resembled a traditional social dance event, where people could enjoy their own specific version of the dance. We organised the dance motifs and steps as a multitrack grammar, with rules for variations and improvisational elements within the framework of the *springar* dance concept.

This work was a significant learning process. The systematic work we did was fruitful, yielding new knowledge and facilitating cooperation with tradition-bearers, younger generations, and the official school system. However, the authors also encountered some resistance. From my perspective, I had assumed that my two colleagues – the tradition-bearer and the folk dance teacher from the region – were considered locals. Both had extensive experience of cooperation with the main traditional dance and music association in the area, *Hardanger Spelemannslag* (Hardanger Fiddle Association). While there was interest from the members, and they participated in workshops and seminars, there were challenges with timing and alignment of objectives. Reflecting on the process, I believe the resistance stemmed from different aims and views of tradition. This raised tensions between top-down and bottom-up processes. Our goal was deep analysis and transmission of a multitrack practice, while their goal seemed simply to bring the dance back home.

Another factor that we faced was that few people on the board of *Hardanger Spelemannslag* were from Sørfjorden. This raised the question: what about the *springar* from where many of them live, in Granvin, the neighbouring municipality? It's a good question that we also pondered: there is less archival material from Granvin, and fewer living tradition-bearers than from Sørfjorden. Some tradition-bearers from Granvin believe the *sp-*

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ringar from Sørfjorden is not "theirs", as most of them are from or live in Granvin. There are very few recordings of traditional dancers from Granvin nor are there many who are still alive. Except from a few motifs and steps, we found very little distinction between the archival material from Granvin and that from Sørfjorden.

These questions lie at the heart of the ideological debate within the Norwegian folk dance movement. Since the late 1960s, the ideological shift among traditional dance collectors and central folk dance teachers in Norway was to move away from national romanticism toward local dance traditions. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a movement among researchers and tradition-bearers that emphasised these differences. However, this shift is now being questioned. Today, Velure and I hypothesise that the *springar* belongs to a larger region of Hardanger, beyond just Sørfjorden. Our hypothesis aligns with the ideological shift questioned by other researchers in Norway, who also question the municipality-based ideological approach:

> Could we actually find evidence that people in pre-industrial communities had a perception of song, music, or dance that varied from village to village, as we see in the folk music community from the 1970s onward? (Haug 2005, 36, my translation)

Social anthropologist Jan Petter Blom, an influential pioneer ethnomusicologist in Norway, pointed out that we may either emphasise patterns in playing and dancing that connect, or those that differentiate (Blom 1989). The "brute facts" show regional differences in *springar* playing and dancing in Norway, but determining where to draw the line is impossible due to geographical, generational, and individual differences, as well as artistic innovation and social interaction (Omholt 2006). Per Åsmund Omholt concludes in his Ph.D. thesis: "It is most fruitful not to view traditional areas as fixed borders, but as more fluid, movable areas surrounding different centres, depending on which dimensions one focuses on" (Omholt 2006, 16, my translation). The archival material from Hardanger seems to support Omholt's research.

This discussion highlights how the interplay between researchers and traditional bearers over time influences traditional practices and their dissemination, and how this may lead to local tensions and challenges with researchers and heritage institutions such as Sff.

Safeguarding Traditional Dance – From Bygda dansar *to* Dansespor

Sff's methodology also served as the safeguarding method for the long-standing traditional dance transmission project *Bygda dansar* (Countryside Dancing). For 21 years (2001–2022), Sff, through *Bygda dansar* (BD), worked in various regions of Norway to safeguard the living practice of dancing local traditional participatory dances, with young people as the target group. It was a three-year, ambulatory project that moved from one region to another. In each region, Sff's teaching methodology and educational model were adapted to the geographical and local environments, beliefs, participants, and dance and music traditions of the area (Sff 2021a; Mæland et al. 2021). Some of the principal objectives were to create meeting spaces for the young, between them and the local traditional milieux, the professional folk dance teachers employed by Sff and Sff's dance archive; to develop new methods and techniques for presenting and teaching traditional dance, and to develop the competence of local traditional bearers as instructors. BD was initially funded by the Norwegian Culture Fund and later received annual funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture.

BD was based on three key priorities: 1) The need from revival organisations to recruit young people to play, dance, and engage in their activities 2) Sff's goal of archival transmission – bringing the dance from the archive back to the community and 3) Norwegian cultural funding policies at that time, which supported professionalisation. The negotiation between these priorities sometimes led to tensions, as described below.

The project was promoted as good practice on the *Safeguarding Practices* website. The main purpose of the website is to share experiences related to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the Nordic and Baltic regions. In 2017, I outlined five key factors for the success of safeguarding traditional dance among young people in Norway:

Professional Dance Teachers: The success of the project was largely due to the professional dance teachers who had the time, energy, and pedagogical tools to recruit youngsters. They brought skills for cooperation with dancers from the revival movement to revitalise dance traditions based on living traditions and film documentation of traditional dancers and musicians. The plural understandings of local dance traditions were transmitted to the youth.

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Collaboration with local tradition-bearers: Dancers and musicians from the area were brought into the project to teach, dance, host social dance gatherings and to ensure that young people felt welcome in the folk music and dance movement.

Traditional dance and music from the particular region formed the basis for all activities, including staged performances. The emphasis was on maintaining the diversity of human body types and dance styles: solo and couple dances with rhythmic footwork and their connection to traditional music. This uncompromised approach ensured that the young peoples' embodiment was grounded in traditional social dancing rather than in staged versions.

Professional musicians, choreographers, and stage directors were involved, ensuring that the young people worked seriously with traditional dances from their area. The professional staff maintained high-level dancing and performances.

The young participants: A crucial success factor was the young people themselves. Effective recruitment strategies and the creation of positive social environments for the young helped them to stay engaged in the project. Through dancing, local youth communities were established in their home counties and these local communities came together in national arenas, forming a shared national community for traditional dancing (Mæland 2017).

Despite these positive aspects, BD began to face challenges. Over time, the project's three priorities – each with its own set of goals – became less connected to the changing social structures. The project also lacked sufficient resources to adequately meet all of its goals, leading to frustrations among both local tradition-bearers and professional dance teachers.

In 2021, two surveys and reports were written as part of the evaluation process initiated by Sff (Hjemdahl 2021; Mæland et al. 2021), both of which confirmed the success of Sff's teaching methodology. Many former participants are now tradition-bearers and nearly all the young professional dancers have backgrounds in one or more *Bygda dansar* projects. According to the participant survey, 47% of respondents stated that BD was a significant reason for their continued engagement in traditional dance today. The teaching methods received positive feedback from the young participants, project staff, and local stakeholders. The action-based knowledge developed through the film archive, emphasising rhythm, variation, improvisation, expression and personal style, was particularly highlighted in the

reports. In the participant survey (from the young people's perspective), three main reasons for continued participation emerged: the social atmosphere and camaraderie, the opportunity to improve as a dancer, and the influence of the teachers. These factors were emphasised by the 47% who credited BD with playing a significant role in their continued engagement with traditional dance (Mæland et al. 2021, 67–70). The results showed that although each project was unique with different teachers, Sff's employed teachers made a lasting impression and played a key role in creating social environments and developing dance skills.

Both reports also revealed, however, that the recruitment strategies, which aimed to attract young people with no prior experience in traditional dance from high schools to BD, were not successful. The independent report, which interviewed various stakeholders, also indicated that BD was often seen as a top-down model by many participants:

> The project has great potential in its collaboration with the local folk dance communities, both in terms of process, professional skills development and participation from local communities. It is in the relationship between regional anchoring and national professionalisation that many of *Bygda dansar*'s major challenges have occurred and there is potential for improvement. The challenges the project faced related to different expectations for what BD should contribute to a region, how regional communities should be involved, co-determination and resource allocation. Furthermore, challenges have arisen around management, mediating and transferring knowledge, and determining who controls the 'right' knowledge about dance. Not least, it has been challenging to agree on how much impact, involvement and ownership the regional communities should have. There also seem to be different perceptions of how BD contributes to regional folk dance communities and what kind of local imprint it leaves on a region. The project model used by *Bygda dansar* did not align with the level of participation expected. (Hjemdahl 2021, 7–8, my translation)

We, the Sff staff, reflected on the fact that, in almost every region we entered, we encountered multiple voices vying for ownership of the traditional dance in the area. Many of the professional teachers employed by

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Sff, even those from the same region, had to mediate between these different viewpoints. However, this bottom-up mediation role was not always recognised locally, and as a result, we ended up in situations where none of the stakeholders felt that we were fully aligned with their interests. In BD, the project staff, including the teachers, deliberately chose a role that empowered the young people, aiming to secure common ground for stakeholders to continue as tradition-bearers and to maintain their engagement with the youth.

The Sff staff took the traditional milieu's views on the project seriously, addressing the issues raised in Hjemdahl's report, our surveys and our own reflections. As a result, in 2022 we developed a new programme called *Dansespor* (Dance Traces) to continue the work of BD, although we chose not to follow any of Hjemdahl's models directly. After evaluating Sff's strategy, our expertise and the needs of the folk dance community, we identified a challenge we wanted to address: a programme that would align with Sff's strategy and the needs of the folk dance community. We concluded that Sff should take on an advisory or facilitative role, focusing on folk dance instructors, tradition-bearers and enthusiasts who wish to create activity in their region or existing environments. We also decided to expand the target audience to include primary school teachers, extra-curricular arts educators (*kulturskolelærere*), museum pedagogues, voluntary organisations, and upper secondary school teachers.

Our aim was to create a lasting impact, avoid "hitch-hiking", and acknowledge that performing folk music goes hand in hand with a commitment to dance. We developed *Dansespor* as a programme to meet the needs of today and the future, with the overarching goal of creating activities that promote familiarity and knowledge of traditional dance, while facilitating more attractive presentations. The programme was designed to be flexible, adapting to the needs we encounter. We established sub-goals that could be adjusted as needed.

Since autumn 2022, *Dansespor* has focused on:

1. national courses and gatherings that provide knowledge about local dance traditions and offer a toolbox for attractive dissemination activities,
2. a network for traditional dance mediators across the country, and

3. grants for local dissemination projects for those who have attended courses and are part of the network—offering mentoring and follow-up for selected folk dance mediators in collaboration with their local environments.

These sub-goals aim to create a structure where the safeguarding and promotion of traditional dance is a bottom-up approach, initiated by communities, groups, and individuals themselves. They enter our seminars with safeguarding goals, and we act as facilitators, providing tools, guidance or serving as dialogue partners. The seminars also help to create networks and connections among participants and offer grants to establish these networks in their home regions. We also work closely with other national institutions involved in folk dance, such as the offices of the two largest membership organisations for traditional dancers, musicians and tradition-bearers. These organisations have members across towns, cities, and rural areas throughout Norway, many of whom regularly practise traditional dance in social settings or more professionally on stage. We are conscious of complementing their offerings, bolstering the teachers and supporting volunteers organising the activities. We aim to contribute positively to strengthening volunteerism and regularly invite our partners to evaluate the process to enhance and develop our activities based on stakeholder needs.

The traditional dance milieu has already indicated the need to strengthen activities for young people and has asked us to cooperate on new youth initiatives now that *Bygda dansar* has concluded.

From my perspective, these new structures have improved our working conditions with tradition-bearers, folk dancers, enthusiasts and cultural heritage professionals. We are now mediating on behalf of those who request our help, using a bottom-up approach. We ask them about their needs and propose activities they may find interesting, or not at all.

Dance Archive Dissemination and Digital Access

The Sff archive, in its fifty-one years of existence, has been a valuable resource for research, education, transmission and revitalisation. Over the years, we have built strong, long-term relationships of trust with various stakeholders and tradition-bearers. The active use of the archive has led to the documentation of dance forms, publications and the revitalisation

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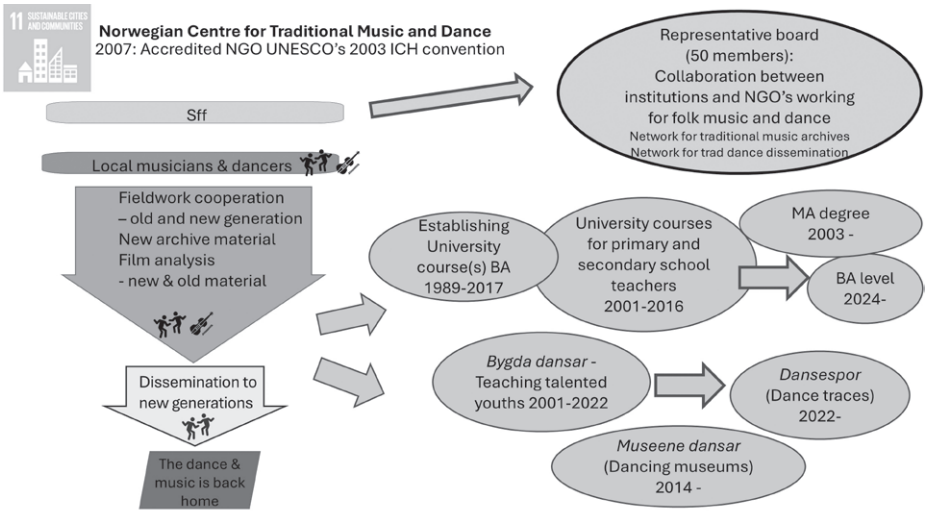

Figure 3. *This figure shows how Sff's archive methodology and process of safeguarding dance as ICH, are operationalised through Sff's networks, projects and university studies.* Figure by Mæland 2023.

of local dances through collaboration with local communities. From 1989 to 2014, Sff transmitted its knowledge through basic Ethnochoreology courses in collaboration with the Department of Dance and Music at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). These university courses were grounded in archival materials to disseminate knowledge about the traditions, unique features of traditional culture and methodological tools for research and revival. Many of these former students have passed on their knowledge in their own regions and further developed their expertise through in-depth fieldwork with tradition-bearers and additional research in the archive.

Starting in autumn 2024, Sff's staff collaborated to revive the core Bachelor's-level subjects in Norwegian Applied Ethnochoreology, a course open to the Traditional Dance community, including individuals of all ages. This development is a result of political efforts to re-establish a Bachelor's programme in Traditional Dance Performance at the Department of Traditional Arts and Traditional Music at the University of South-Eastern Norway. This programme, which was previously offered by NTNU in collaboration with Sff and Ole Bull Akademiet (a heritage organisation from another part

of Norway) from 2009 to 2012, traces its origins back to an initiative by Sff in 1989 when a 30-credit university subject was introduced, continuing until 2014 (a few courses ran until 2017).

The Sff archive has become an invaluable resource, particularly for students and tradition-bearers who express a desire for digital access to its content. Sff offers digital access, however most of the material is not openly searchable. This situation is frustrating for stakeholders who expect open access and wish to see all materials made available on platforms such as YouTube (Thedens 2018). We, as employees of a national archive, face at least two challenges related to the demand for open access. First, much of the material has yet to be digitised or properly organised, nor is it in formats suitable for digital distribution. Second, there are ethical and ideological concerns: should the archive provide free digital access for all, or should access continue to be mediated by knowledgeable staff? Norwegian ethnomusicologist Tellef Kvifte discusses the dilemma of accessibility versus understanding the material (meta-data). He writes:

> On the one hand, the service of specialist archivists will help the user to also formulate better what to search for, as well as give the user directions regarding what is considered proper use of the material. Searching on internet may provide as much – or more – material than a visit to an archive will, but it may be more difficult to know what one actually retrieves, what kind of material it is, under what circumstances it is collected, and the kinds of cultural contexts one should know in order to evaluate the material properly. (Kvifte 2014, 293)

At Sff, the policy has been to prioritise dissemination to the communities where the material was collected – essentially, "bringing the dance back home" – and not necessarily to folk dance groups outside these communities. Our primary audience remains these communities, students and researchers. This policy is informed by traditional ownership, legal considerations, and the consent given by those who contributed to the archive, as well as the conditions under which each film or recording was made (Viken 2017). A colleague at the National Library of Norway has questioned our policy, suggesting it might foster distrust. In 2018, he pointed out that few users were contacting the archive (Thedens 2018). However, since then, the number of inquiries has increased, and today we receive daily requests

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for material. Over the past years, we have worked to improve our services. A dissemination archivist was appointed to focus on this area, and more material has been digitised. Users are now provided with meta-data and assistance with their revitalisation projects. These efforts have enhanced our archive's reputation, resulting in more satisfied users.

Kvifte, who has extensive experience working in archives, questions the effectiveness and limitations of folk music archives. He has observed that many users search for an "authentic" version of traditional music and dance, and asks if traditional music and dance is about a product (found in the archives), the masters (the tradition-bearers), or the "oral" processes of learning through interaction and feedback. He argues that the latter causes the variation that is at the heart of traditional cultures (Kvifte 2014). Such variation may be harder to convey through archives unless both the variety and the context are preserved and transmitted through knowledgeable staff.

Returning to Sff's focus on protecting communities' ownership, this connects to the 2003 UNESCO Convention, which recognises the right of communities, groups and sometimes individuals to control the transmission of their cultural material. Over the years, we have encountered tradition-bearers who are both sceptical of and feel threatened by the material in the archive. Many of my colleagues and I, past and present, have had to mediate between the archive's content and the concerns of tradition-bearers, or between different tradition-bearers themselves. Since both the staff's knowledge of traditional dance and the archive's material demonstrate richness and variation within local contexts, we use this knowledge to foster acceptance of diversity. There is no single "correct" version of a tradition; rather, we aim to accept what exists in its diverse forms. These negotiations often lead to an understanding and a desire for continued collaboration with knowledgeable staff.

The *pols*, a dance tradition from Røros Mining Town, is well-known in Norway's folk dance revival movement. It has become nationally popular and is included in the repertoire of nearly every folk dance club in Norway. While the popularity of the *pols* benefits the community, it complicates the question of geographical ownership. Folk dancers without direct ties to the community seek to deepen their understanding of the dance and often turn to the sound or film archives for guidance. Our usual response has been to direct these individuals to high-quality dance representations by living tradition-bearers available on YouTube or to encourage them to travel to learn

from these bearers. This approach has generally been accepted, as access to tradition-bearers is good, and the tradition is considered alive and well.

In recent years, however, the tradition-bearers of Røros have shown more interest in archival materials of past bearers. Several seminars have been held to explore this further. As part of our search for new safeguarding models, we found an opportunity to collaborate with the tradition-bearers in an initiative led by TrondheimFOLK, a professional folk music and dance organiser. This collaboration resulted in the creation of an "archival concert", later renamed *arkivdansekonsert* (the "dance archival concert"). We developed this event as a pilot project combining academic content dissemination, viewing archival material, interviews, and live playing and dancing by tradition-bearers (Sff 2021b; 2021c). This collaboration allowed us to share our knowledge of meta-data, while also learning from the tradition-bearers about the materials in our collection. Funding for the project made it possible for the tradition-bearers to participate, and together we reviewed the archival material, selecting pieces they wanted to showcase at the event.

Initially, we were cautious about negotiating between the archive and the tradition-bearers, but we soon realised that both the dancers and musicians found the material exciting. They reconnected with the past traditions that had meaning for them, and were not concerned with playing or dancing differently from the archival sources – perhaps because the sources themselves revealed the diversity of living traditions. The collaborators recognised this diversity within their own practices. The only fear expressed was actually the potential loss of that diversity.

Together with the tradition-bearers, we decided to bring some of these conversations to the stage, where we contextualised the desire to safeguard the rhythmic variation, improvisation, expression and personal style within the *pols*. They all expressed a sense of loss due to the refinement and unification that had occurred in the revival movement and within the folk dance and music clubs.

In the first versions of the archival dance concert, we performed alongside the tradition-bearers, interviewing them and introducing the archival materials. We also collaborated with a dramaturge. The feedback we received indicated that our involvement gave solid recognition to the tradition-bearers. The event was overwhelmingly well-received, especially when we offered it during the showcase festival *Folkelarm* as part of our fiftieth anniversary in November 2023.

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We chose to integrate this idea into our *Dansespor* (Dance Traces) programme, where we also shared the concept as part of our toolbox (Sff n.d.b). Currently, our collaborators in Røros have been asked multiple times to participate in similar dance archive dissemination events, and similar concepts are being developed in collaboration with other tradition-bearers in Oslo. Through *Dansespor,* we have funded a collaboration project in Hallingdal, a region with a strong traditional heritage, involving a museum, tradition-bearers and young dancers and musicians. The goal was to pass on nearly lost variations to the younger generation of tradition-bearers. The young adults, guided by a tradition-bearer and an expert in interpreting the plurality in the film collection, were empowered and enthusiastic. The participating young adults have already used their newfound knowledge to disseminate traditional dance beyond the project.

These mediated processes are not straightforward, and the varying ideologies of Sff and its stakeholders contribute to this complexity. As I have discussed, we have had to exercise our skills in translation – acting as brokers and facilitators – to find common ground between professional discourses and local practices. However, it is also our duty, as a heritage institution, to challenge and engage with the community's knowledge, as emphasised in Norwegian official documents outlining the political direction of the museum sector towards 2050. The Ministry of Culture stresses the importance of building understanding and identity through local traditions, while simultaneously challenging self-understanding to foster new perspectives. Museums must remain both repositories of knowledge and spaces for critical engagement with that knowledge (Meld. St. 23 2020–2021, 54).

Conclusion – Ideology, Safeguarding, and Bottom-Up Processes

This chapter has drawn upon my experience as a dance notator, researcher, facilitator, and pedagogue at Sff especially from the period 2019—2024. I argue that Sff's experiences and development over more than fifty years reveals crucial lessons in cultural heritage safeguarding. Sff's shift from an archive-centred approach to a more community-engaged model highlights the complex relationship between institutional expertise and community ownership of cultural traditions.

Three key insights emerge:

1. The tension between archival preservation and living tradition requires careful mediation. Archival documentation is essential for safeguarding dance traditions, but it must be transmitted in ways that respect and support the variation of living cultural practices. The success of projects like the S*ørfjordspringar* revival and the archive dance concerts shows how archival material can enrich rather than constrain contemporary practice when properly contextualised.
2. Effective cultural heritage safeguarding requires a balance between institutional expertise and community agency. Sff's transition from *Bygda dansar* to *Dansespor* reflects a broader shift from what became perceived as top-down transmission to facilitative support, emphasising that sustainable safeguarding must be driven by community needs. This aligns with the 2003 UNESCO Convention's emphasis on bottom-up approaches, while maintaining the value of professional expertise in supporting community efforts.
3. Finally, the challenge of digital access versus mediated transmission highlights broader questions about cultural heritage in the digital age. My experience suggests that while digital accessibility is important, the context, interpretation and ethical considerations provided by knowledgeable mediators remain crucial for meaningful transmission of cultural traditions: when traditions are shared digitally, provenance may quickly be lost and forgotten. From that follows that if we as a national institution declare our digital archive as heritage with open access, it is no longer a matter of the local community but for the wider community and the state and its heritage cultural policy. How this corresponds with the rights of communities, groups and individuals according to the 2003 UNESCO Convention has to be further explored and negotiated in the years to come.

These insights point to an evolving model of safeguarding that prioritises flexibility, community engagement, and careful mediation between the past and present. The future of safeguarding traditional dance lies in combining institutional expertise with community ownership, as demonstrated by Sff's recent initiatives like the *Sørfjordspringar* project, *Dansespor* and the dance archive concerts.

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Through consideration of three specific cases, this chapter has highlighted key aspects and aims to contribute to broader discussions on safeguarding cultural heritage in an era of technological and social change. In future practice, successful strategies must continue to evolve, balancing accessibility with context, expertise with community ownership and archival objects with living traditions.

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