

O Conference Web Site, where art thou? - A survey of retrieving information of library conference web sites

Best practice article

Marte Ødegaard^{a*}, Tone Charlotte Gadmar^a and Line Nybakk Akerholt^a

^a*University of Oslo*

Abstract

Academic conferences are key arenas for sharing developments in library- and information science. As academic library staff, we promote open, transparent, and accessible research – but how well is our own professional output from conferences documented and retrievable? This study examines the availability of materials – such as presentations, posters, and programs – from Norwegian library and information science conferences. We used a three-step approach: targeted web searches for websites, outreach to conference owners asking for guidelines on archiving material, and analysis of entries in the Norwegian research database Cristin/NVA. Our findings reveal a low level of retrievability. Many conference websites and materials are no longer accessible, and few organizations have clear guidelines for archiving or sharing content. We also suspect there appears to be limited culture or practice around registering conference contributions in Cristin/NVA. In our article, we also present recommendations for preserving and making conference materials accessible, and invite a broader discussion on how we, as a profession, can ensure that library science knowledge shared at conferences is not lost but remains part of the scholarly record.

Keywords: *library conferences, information retrieval, academic libraries, web retrieval, FAIR*

Nøkkelord: *bibliotekkonferanser, gjenfinning, fagbibliotek, FAIR*

***Contact:** marte.odegaard@ub.uio.no

Introduction

The social mission of research libraries and the bedrock of the library and information science education revolve around knowledge organization and retrieval, preservation, documentation and archiving research, and metadata. Academic conferences are key arenas for sharing developments in library- and information science. Documentation of activities is important for the afterlife of a conference, to document what happened, verify participation, and is done by archiving material on open platforms and make sure content is published as articles. This documentation can later be used for mapping trends and developments in a field (Rudd, 2024; Sandnes, 2025). Past conference programs will also be valuable when planning future events, to avoid repeating earlier year's themes and speakers. Past programs are also valuable for newcomers in a field, as it will be a way of familiarizing themselves with the field. As academic library staff, we promote open, transparent, and accessible research – but how well is our own professional output from conferences documented, open and retrievable? There are developed recommendations on how to promote *Good Practice for Conference Abstracts and Presentations, tailored to medicine and science* (Foster et al., 2019). This guidance is developed to support submission and presentation practice and focuses on practices concerning distributions and long-term archiving of material from conferences.

Missing conference programs where we have participated, conference website domains bought by truck rental companies or web casinos (see appendix 1 <https://osf.io/256kx>), and conference contributions missing from national registers is something we, the authors, have encountered in our daily jobs the last year. This whole backdrop made us curious about what the practices are, concerning archiving and registering contributions from colleagues who have presented at conferences and seminars.

Aim of study

To investigate if material from Norwegian libraries in research and higher education conferences and recurring seminars are archived, we want to investigate these three research questions; 1) is it possible to find documentation and archived material from Norwegian academic library conferences and recurring seminars?, 2) do conference owners and organizers have guidelines on archiving contributions and materials, and if so, what do they say?, and 3) are conference contributions registered the national research archive Cristin/ NVA?

Methods

The sample of this survey are a selection of Norwegian conferences for research and higher education libraries, as well as data on conference contributions from Norwegian university libraries. The conferences are owned and organized by Norwegian institutions and organizations. We have included conferences which have been active during the last 20 years.

Data extraction

We applied three methods for collecting data: 1) internet search for conference web pages and material, 2) survey about guidelines for publishing conference material among conferences owners and 3) data from the Norwegian research register Cristin (from 2025 Norwegian Research Information Repository NVA).

Internet search for conference web pages and material

To find out what has been on the conference program, we wanted to find conference websites and material. In this context, we define conference material as written or audiovisual documentation of the contributions, such as presentations, lectures, workshops, posters, and the like. The documentation can consist of written documentation such as presentation files, transcriptions or manuscripts, or published articles of the contributions, but also audio-visual such as audio and image recordings.

To investigate whether it is possible to retrieve conference web pages to find information about the scientific content of the conferences, we searched the web. First, we identified which years the given conferences were held, and which institutions or organizations had been the organizers. We searched the internet for conference names and year, trying out potential web addresses (e.g. name of conference, conference name and year), and looked for archives at owners' websites. Known conference addresses were looked up using Wayback Machine from Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/>). Our findings were noted in a spreadsheet and coded for categories. Our main goal was to see if we were able to find the original web sites for the conferences and reoccurring seminars found in our sample. In addition to finding the web site itself, we wanted to see if we could find the overall program, detailed program, presentations in any format. We were also interested in whether the conference web sites were hosted on their own domains or were hosted by the owning organizations. See table 2 for all categories. The web searches and data extraction were done during May 2025.

Survey on conference guidelines

We also wanted to find out if the organizers and owners of conferences had any guidelines for publishing or archiving conference material. Therefore, we conducted a survey which was sent to the owners or main organizers of the 8 conferences which are still active. The survey was set up using Nettskjema and was approved by SIKT for requirements in data protection legislation. The questions in the survey were:

- As the owner of the conference, do you have any guidelines for archiving, retrieving, and disseminating conference materials?
- What do the guidelines say about archiving, retrieving, and disseminating conference materials?

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- If there are no guidelines, what do you think the reason is?
- What is needed to create guidelines for archiving conference materials?
- What needs to be in place for your conference to be able to archive conference contributions?

Cristin/NVA data

To check if employees in Norwegian libraries in research and higher education, register their conference contributions, we harvested data from Cristin/NVA database (www.cristin.no)¹, where such activities are registered.

Our first task was to investigate whether the libraries at universities and colleges were identifiable at individual administrative reporting units in the Cristin/NVA system. For seven of the larger academic institutions, it was easy to identify conference contributions from library employees as the library was identified as an individual administrative unit in the portal. In other cases, it was not possible to identify the contributions from library staff isolated as they were lumped in together sub-units with other technical and administrative staff at the universities and colleges.

The seven universities with identifiable library administrative Cristin/NVA units were The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet), University of Bergen (UiB), University of Oslo (UiO), University of Stavanger (UiS), Arctic University of Norway (UiT), and University of South-Eastern Norway (USN). For these seven institutions, conference contributions from the library staff were extracted for the years spanning 2010 to 2024 for the Cristin/NVA categories ‘Conference contributions and academic presentations’ (in Norwegian ‘Konferansebidrag og faglig presentasjon’). These categories span a little wider than just conferences per se but contain both posters and oral presentations and vary from research level to popular dissemination. It still provides a good picture of the variety of contributions from academic library staff on this arena. The search and data extraction from Cristin/NVA were performed in medio March 2025.

Results

The sample for the two first parts of our study (the internet search for conference web pages and material, and survey) consist of 10 conferences and recurring seminars for libraries in research and higher education, with activities the last 25 years, see **Feil! Fant ikke referansekinden..** The owners or main organizers of the conferences are 1 public institution, 1 directorate, 3 universities, 3 associations and 1 network. Six conferences are held annually, four

¹ Cristin was until 2025 a database for registering activities and results at the research institute sector, the higher education sector and health trusts in Norway. Replaced October 2025 by Norwegian Research Information Repository (Nasjonalt vitenarkiv, NVA). Data from Cristin is transferred to NVA.

are held every other year or less frequently. Two of the conferences in the sample, EmTacl and Subject librarian conference, were discontinued and both last held in 2015 and is therefore not included the survey on conference guidelines.

Name of conference [authors translations]	Description
Biblioteklederkonferansen [Library Manager Conference]	- Organized annually by <u>National library of Norway</u> .
Bibliotekmøtet [Library meeting]	- Organized annually by Norwegian Library Association. - Has call for contributions.
BIBSYS Conference	- Organized annually by Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT). - Has call for contributions.
Emerging Technologies in Academic Libraries (EmTacl)	- Discontinued (active 2010, 2012, 2015). - Organized less than annually, by NTNU University library. - Had call for contributions.
Fagreferentkonferansen [Subject librarian conference]	- Discontinued (active 2010, 2012, 2015). - Organized less than annually by Universities Norway Libraries (UHR-B). - Had call for contributions.
Kunnskapsorganisasjonsdagene (KORG) [Knowledge organization days]	- Organized annually by Department of Archivistis, Library and Information Science. Oslo Metropolitan University. - Has call for contributions.
MUNIN Conference on Scholarly Publishing	- Organized annually by UiT The Arctic University of Norway. - Has call for papers.
Phd on Track Network seminar	- Organized annually by Phd on Track network - Has call for contributions.
SMH-Dagene [SMH Days]	- Organized less than annually by Norwegian Library Association special interest group for medicine and health (SMH). - Has call for contributions.
VIRAK	- Organized less than annual by Universities Norway Libraries (UHR-B). - Has call for contributions.

Table 1: Background information of selected conferences

Internet search for conference web pages

Based on the list of conferences, 94 single conferences and seminar events were identified. We were able to find web sites for 38% of the arranged events, meaning that most web sites for conferences and reoccurring seminars are lost. In our investigation, we have identified different reasons for this. Some of the conferences are owned by an organization, but different institutions take turns as organizers of the specific events. If the conference then doesn't have its own domain, the institutions host the sites, and those sites are vulnerable for closure as the institutions "clean up" their web sites. The same challenge can occur when two institutions are being merged, which usually also means a new web site is created. Another trend we saw in the material was that conferences are categorized as events in an event calendar, which also goes out of date, and will be unpublished at some point. It was also difficult to find traces of programs, abstracts, names of contributors, and actual presentations, as all our parameters have a hit rate below 30%.

We will also mention that we did find other information on the conferences such as articles about the conferences in library journals, or blog posts written by conference attendees. We did not include these in our findings, as we were interested in official information from the conferences themselves, but these represent an important greater cultural “organic” context that should be interoperable with the conference material.

	N=94
Were we able to locate conference website?	38%
Does the conference have its own conference domain?	33%
Was it possible to find presentations? (video/ audio recording, presentation files, script transcriptions)	29%
Was it possible to find the conference theme?	26%
Was it possible to find the overall program? (structure/ schedule)	24%
Was it possible to find the detailed program? (title and summary of presentations, author information)	22%
Was the website at the host institution?	21%
Was it possible to find information on host institution(s) for the conference?	21%
Was it possible to identify who were on the program committee?	10%
Was ‘Wayback machine’ useful to find material?	4%
Are conference contributions published (other than abstract)?	3%

Table 2: Results from internet search survey

Survey about guidelines

All eight owners of active conference replied to our survey regarding guidelines for archiving. Although small in form and length, valuable information can be drawn from the responses. They immediately indicated a clear tendency; where those with an outspoken guideline had clear language for open archiving of conference material and about the technical difficulties one can experience in the process. In our analysis we discovered some issues regarding terminology used in the questionnaire and the responses we received; we should have defined archiving as in the context of making conference material available according to the FAIR (findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability) principles (GO FAIR Initiative, n.d.) via open web domains or repositories. This to avoid mix-up with in-house administrative records. This led to that we also noted nuances in the responses “yes”, “partially”, “no” when compared to the other answers from the respective respondent.

In table 3 we list the results from question 3 “Are there guidelines for archiving, retrieving and disseminating conference materials?”. Two responded “yes” and two “partially”, but in the light of the terminology we guess further enquiries would reveal an even clearer trend towards “no”.

The replies were categorized into six topics that crystallized across the questions. Challenges related to lack of infrastructure, concerns related to questions if contributors have taken accessibility, copyright or other legal aspects into consideration. Preparing for sharing and archiving material also requires routines or guidelines (which are mainly lacking) time and

motivation, in addition to knowledge and skills on how to.

Are there guidelines for archiving, retrieving and disseminating conference materials?	N=8
Yes	25%
No	50%
Partially	25%
Coding of survey replies	
Infrastructure/ continuity	8
Legal aspects (consents, copyright to material, web accessibility)	7
Interest/ Motivation/ Utility	6
Routines/ requirements/ policy	5
Resources	5
Knowledge, skills	4

Table 3: Results from survey on conference guidelines

Cristin/NVA data

The search and data extraction from Cristin/NVA resulted in 2327 conference-, seminar- and popular dissemination contributions from library staff from the seven selected institutions Figure 1. These contributions displayed a large variety; oral presentation and posters, aimed at a span of different contexts and audience; from formal national- and international conferences to more ad hoc local networking and seminars or popular science. In total, the dataset qualitatively displayed a high-, varied- and creative level of academic activity and a willingness to share in the academic community. Of these 2327 contributions, a sub-set of 646 contributions fell under the category ‘conference paper’ and was also linked to identifiable national or international conferences. In most cases the contributions were from authors from a single institution, but we also found 26 cases of collaboration with authors from multiple institutions.

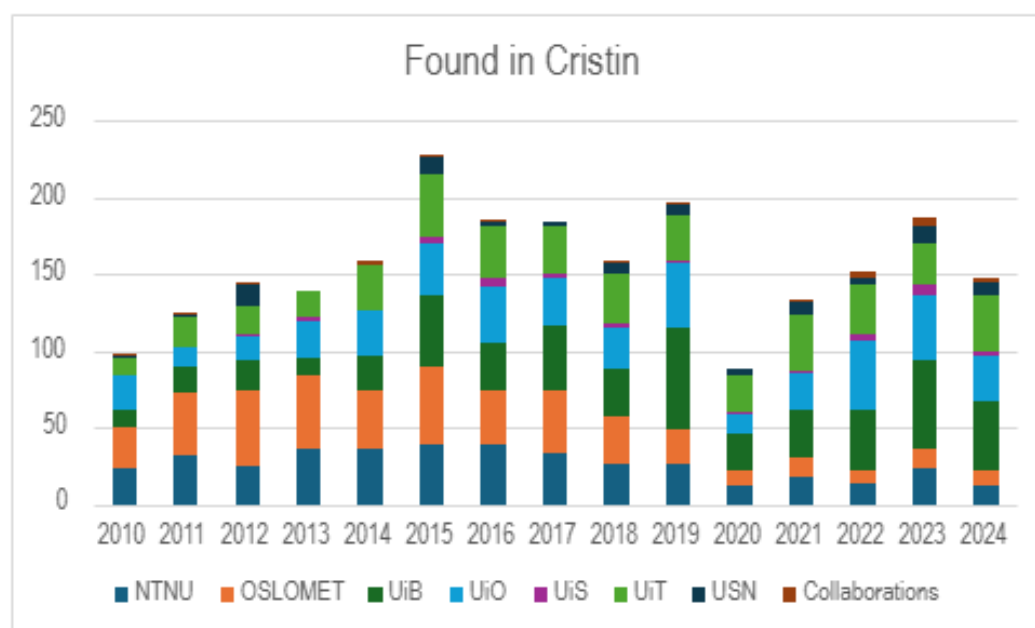


Figure 1: Total number of ‘Conference contributions and academic presentations’ from employees at the seven selected academic libraries for the period 2010-2024.

Most notable in the dataset is that the total number of conference registrations is low. If only a few contributions from a known, larger national conference can be found in Cristin/NVA, we know that most of the conference presentations have not been registered. It is however not mandatory to register conference category work through Cristin/NVA, so it is left to the individuals' preference and initiative to register their contribution. Still, the number of total registrations from conferences is low; an average of less than 50 'conference papers' a year as a grand total for seven large university libraries points to a substantial under-registration of contributions. Another feature to note is that there does not seem to be a clear pattern to the number of contributions relative to the size of the library. Smaller libraries could have a similar number of contributions to much larger libraries with more staff, which may point to the importance of establishing good local support practices and culture for registering this type of work.

Discussion

The best practice conferences and the worst-case scenarios.

Our findings reveal a low level of retrievability. Many conference websites and materials are no longer accessible, and few organizations have clear guidelines for archiving or sharing content. We also suspect there appears to be limited culture or practice around registering conference contributions in Cristin/NVA.

There is a paradox that infrastructure, knowledge, access to archives, and resources, copyright issues, and accessibility are pointed out as obstacles to archiving material, as these are key issues within open research in which research and higher education libraries are important players. And all of this results in a loss of material that can be of historical interest and is often the only publicly available proof that specific themes were discussed and debated by the sector. Some clues can be found in academic- and professional journals, but the library and information field constituted by large of best practice efforts – often best presented in the conference context. In some cases proof of existing conferences with a retrievable program is the only documentation of activities that strengthen competence.

Respondents of the survey point to the importance of shared professional expectations, infrastructure, and professional practice. Good routines, requirements and policies from the conference owner and good infrastructure for preservation and sharing are the most important factors in whether the conference manages to preserve and share the conference material afterwards. There is interest and usefulness in preserving and sharing the material from both an internal and external perspective, but it also requires extra resources before, during and after the conference and one must have good routines for obtaining consent and licensing for sharing (cf. the Copyright Act) and one must ensure that universal design requirements are complied with. Knowledge and skills are the least obstacle to achieving good practice for sharing, if infrastructure and common routines and practices in the professional community are in place.

One of the respondents also noted that the organizing committee took the initiative to publish a conference special issue.

We have one main concern regarding the missing information from the two largest and most expensive conferences. Information about even the simplest metadata such as time and place are only retrievable from secondhand sources such as media and blogs. This leaves us with the impression that neither presenters, audience nor the greater professional field is important.

When we look at the features of the individual entries in the Cristin/ NVA reporting, we find large variation in the meta-data depending on the reporting individual. Meta-data like conference name, description, place and date may vary from conferences that are identified as the same, and a uniform standard seems to be lacking. The final and maybe most remarkable finding in the dataset is that even for the Cristin posts with good meta-data pointing to real, identifiable conferences most of the web-links pointing back to the conference pages and its program are non-functional web-links. The web pages and domains they point to no longer exist or in some cases the domain is bought or “hijacked” by other entities that have absolutely nothing to do with the conferences or academia in general or simply seem to have internet phishing intent. The sad fact is that in many cases the only trace of the conference contributions is that the individuals behind it remembered to register their work through Cristin/ NVA. Good, permanent registration in Cristin/ NVA is difficult when the metadata standard and infrastructure is lacking. A common national repository for conferences could probably ensure better retrieval on a permanent basis.

We must also address that there are differences amongst the conferences and seminars included in our samples, and that our data sample is small. Some are networking seminars, some are partly academic conferences, some are more best practice conferences, but they are all chosen as they are important fora’s for sharing research, best practices and debate on libraries and information science in Norwegian higher education sector. It could therefore be interesting to compare our sample to a bigger, international sample.

Implementation for practice – advise for organization of future conferences

The work with this project has just made it more clear to us that we as a field of practice up to this point - has let ourselves down regarding documenting the history and development of different subject disciplines related to Norwegian library and information science.

Based on our findings, we have some recommendations for organizers of conferences and seminars.

- We would recommend that conference organizers establish guidelines on archiving materials for conferences as it has historical value for developments and trends in libraries in higher education.
- The recommendations for good conference practice developed by Foster et al., (2019), contain important key issues useful also for library and information science, but with less stress on the concerns related to sponsored talks and submissions. The guidelines could act as a starting point, but issues concerning the afterlife of the conference should be included.
- There is a need for a permanent website for the conference. This should be on a neutral open site. If the conference is established as part of an organization – the website must be on a stable web address (URL) Further on – use a permanent webpage also for handling descriptions of each conference.
- Prepare contributors for sharing and archiving already in the submission process; make sure authors agree on sharing, including clarifying copyright issues and accessibility on their material.
- Either embedded on the conference’s own website or using open data archival services for storing, retrieval and dissemination, the conference archive should enable the use of identifiers for key bibliographic metadata.
- Organizers should play an active role in registering the contributions in NVA, by either preregistering contributions, or make a template on how to register for all contributors to follow.
- All libraries should also build a culture to register everything that is not required to be registered in NVA, to highlight research and development work.
- Conferences and reoccurring seminars should investigate the possibilities to publish special issues of journals or use institutional publishing platforms where contributors can submit their presented work. This could be a way of encouraging contributors and give incentives for develop their presentations and make their work more visible as academic work.

Conclusion

We suggest creating a culture, praxis, and common set of guidelines for FAIR-conference material both within institutions, for disciplines on national and international levels and for international conferences. For library and information science, this starts with our-self and asking questions to colleagues, leaders and conference organizers: How will this conference be Findable, Available, Interoperable and Retrievable later on? Will the internet domain be stable? How do we secure permanent citations and prevent link-rot? How do we encourage our colleagues to participate and share their knowledge, and how do we discuss and use this information and knowledge later on? This is our history and our culture – possibly also a culture of best practiced FAIR conferences.

Data sharing

All files from the project, including data from our surveys, is available on Open Science Framework <https://osf.io/9c7w3/>.

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