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The weekend when violence took over – on documenting a memorial site

Abstract In this chapter, I will start by describing the course of events during two violent days in Helsingborg when the football clubs Djurgårdens IF (from Stockholm) and Helsingborgs IF (HIF) met for the season's first match in the Allsvenskan football league in March 2014. One man died, in addition to several cases of assault and vandalism. A remembrance place soon formed on the site where he was killed, with scarves, team jerseys and candles. The day after the match, the HIF supporter club Kärnan organised a manifestation against violence, which was attended by several thousands. At Kulturmagasinet, we realised that we needed to do something, document and collect material, but this involved considerable problems. The second part of this article describes our staff's thoughts, discussions and practical experiences.

Keywords football violence, collective grief, memorial

Introduction

Kulturmagasinet is a municipal institution belonging to Helsingborgs museer (Museums of Helsingborg), with a staff of some 20 people engaged in acquiring and managing Helsingborg's collections, documentation of cultural heritage and public art. Kulturmagasinet is also responsible for the mediaeval castle tower Kärnan.

Kulturmagasinet's assignment includes producing at least one major planned contemporary documentation each year. The violence in connection with the season's first Allsvenskan match in 2014 alerted us to the need for being prepared to document unforeseen, extraordinary events.

A besieged city

On Sunday, 30 March 2014, the local football team HIF and the football team Djurgården from Stockholm met for the first Swedish match of the year, but what could have been a football party ended in tragedy. This article gives an insight into what happened in Helsingborg, and how the staff at Kulturmagasinet documented the memorial place that emerged.

On Saturday, 29 March, the away fans began to arrive, and they were many, around 4,000. By Saturday night, the scene had become chaotic, with several cases of aggravated assault and rioting. In the centre of Helsingborg, dozens of Djurgården fans stormed the tavern The Headless Swan in search of HIF supporters: "Now Helsingborg you bastards we will kill you," the attackers shouted. They assaulted the supporters with chairs and bottles. Tavern owner Michel Cavalli told the newspaper *Helsingborgs Dagblad* (Rasmusson 2014) the day after:

They were everywhere and smashing everyone and everything. The worst was what happened on the sofa at the back. Two girls in their 20s sat there bleeding heavily from their faces. They had been hit by bottles, glasses and chairs that the guys threw at them. The father of one of the girls was in the place, and he covered his daughter with his own body to protect her.

A few days after the incident, the local newspaper published (Anderson 2014) an appeal to its readers on the internet to submit their stories to the newspaper, so it could get an overview of the chaos. On a map of

Helsingborg, the public could click between different memories. The title of my article and some of the quotes are borrowed from there.

Several people who were at the bar Bara Rock around 11pm witnessed how two or three male Djurgården supporters were assaulted by several people. Charlotta, from Helsingborg, recalls (Andersson 2014):

One of the Djurgården fans is attacked and thrown head first through one of the windows at Bara Rock then lies on the ground and is kicked in the head, back and stomach. When the HIF hooligans spots one of the other Djurgårders running away, they chase after him and beat him up just outside Restaurant Viking. We help the first one get up and wash his wounds, and then we take him to Viking to his friend who got beaten up.

The chaos continued all night, with several cases of assault, and the police did not consider order to have been restored to the normal weekend level until 3am. No mention was made of cancelling the match at the security meeting the following day. On the Sunday before the match, some supporters attempted to clash with each other. Two eye witnesses wrote (ibid. 2014):

Suddenly the HIFers began shouting outside Helsing. ‘They’re coming! They’re coming!’ I went outside and saw a group of 60–70 Djurgården troublemakers moving towards us through the main square. I felt there were far too few police officers around.

Seconds later, other HIFers notice some 150 Djurgården supporters approaching quickly from St Mary’s Church. The police have no track of this despite the helicopter in the air, and HIFers are screaming at the top of their lungs to get police attention. The Djurgårdeners manage to get all the way up to the bar Helsing and people are literally running into the restaurant for fear. I don’t usually feel afraid or insecure in similar situations but the absence of police was scary at this point.

It was finally time for the supporters to march on to the Olympia football stadium. A 43-year-old Djurgården supporter and his group chose to take a different route, via the stairs up to Kärnan, the tower of Helsingborg. On the stairs he met a 28-year-old man, an inveterate HIFer who punched the 43-year-old man, which caused his death.

On the north stand at the Olympia, the fans' mobile phones started ringing and pinging. The news of the death spread and the atmosphere soon grew aggressive.

Outside the stadium, you could hear Djurgården fans shouting "Murderer, murderer, murderer". The match was stopped when supporters stormed the football pitch. The situation was chaotic and full of fear. Roger, who was trying to make his way home, recalls: "As they rushed towards us, lots of people, families and others who had run to the west, stood desperately pulling at the doors and bars because they wanted to get in and take shelter, they were terrified." One of the attackers targeted him because he was wearing a HIF scarf and hit him over the head. "When I met his gaze, it felt like he just wanted to kill me." And "We were hunted by 10–15 masked Djurgården supporters as we walked away from the Olympia. They shouted 'You will all die' and chased us with iron bars. People ran over cars and right out into the traffic. They fled for their lives," remembers Miriam (*ibid.* 2014).

The memorial site

Immediately after the incident leading to the death of the 43-year-old, a memorial site began to emerge. Club scarves, jerseys, candles, messages and flowers were placed in a circle on the ground. The same evening, HIF's supporter club Kärnan organised a manifestation against football violence, gathering thousands of people. This was a manifestation for the person who had lost his life, but also for the entire incident: the violence at The Headless Swan, and the supporters' march to the stadium. People felt that their city was under siege and no one dared go outside. The Helsingborgers wanted to reclaim their city. "We are the good force. And together we are saying that we've had enough!", said Martin Nilsson, president of the Kärnan supporter club (*Helsingborgs Dagblad* 2014, 23:30 min). HIF president Claes Olsson spoke about the assault against the sport, about the tougher attitude at football matches, the lack of respect for others, and that society had to stand united to make football a positive force and experience (*ibid.*, 25:14 min). Therese Kruse, Head of Department at *Kulturmagasinet*, attended the manifestation:

When I arrive at Terrasstrapporna just before seven, the memorial site is crowded. People are standing along the banisters on both sides of the stairs, and people on their way to Stortorget, the meeting place for the manifestation.



Fig. 1: The memorial at the Terrace stairs in Helsingborg



Fig. 2: Wet paper material where placed between acid-free blotting paper to dry.
Photos (2): Sven-Olof Larsén © Kulturmagasinet, 2014

The memorial site has grown so you can hardly get around it, the space is very cramped. People have stopped in the stairs, so it's impossible for me to get down to Stortorget, which is packed with people, probably thousands. A lot of teenagers, but also adults, kids and families with buggies are present.

In the middle stairs, people with torches are standing, and then the Kärnan supporter club president starts the manifestation with a speech, followed by the HIF club president. Then a minute's silence for the Djurgården supporter who died, and it's a powerful sensation when thousands of people stand silently.

Everyone on Stortorget is instructed to go up the stairs and pass the memorial site to pay tribute to the dead man and lay down offerings or flowers. It gets crowded and progress up the stairs is slow, but the memorial grows, with more scarves, banners, flowers and candles from many different sport clubs. 20 minutes later, the line to the memorial is still long. Many people stay behind along the railings after climbing the stairs, to watch the memorial and how it is growing (fig. 1, p. 60).

The collection

At Kulturmagasinet, we realised that this was an incident that should be preserved and documented. We believed it was important to preserve the memory of the incident where so many took a stand against violence. Our documentation efforts would engage a large number of staff in various ways, so we met with all kinds of professionals: directors, antiquarians, conservators, warehouse personnel and a photographer, to discuss how to proceed. How should the documentation be performed, and what should the collection include? Since we were all emotionally affected, the discussion mainly concerned the ethical issues, on which opinions differed. Some thought it was enough to take pictures and asked what right we had to take the objects. They signified people's private feelings. Another asked if we should document thoroughly and record how many scarves were laid at the memorial site and the names of all the clubs that were represented. Would we take in everything? If not, how would we choose?

A decision was made that we would collect parts of the memorial site. It was not possible to collect everything. Kulturmagasinet's photographer, Sven-Olof Larsén had already begun documenting the site photographically.

But there weren't just emotional issues, there was also the time factor. It was the city's executive management that decided how long the memorial

should remain. We set up a plan so that a curator and a conservator would be on call when the time came. Later, we also realised that there were not only ethical, but also practical, temporal and material issues (fig. 2, p. 60).

On Wednesday, 9 April, the city administration notified us that the objects would be removed the following day. On behalf of the city, the buildings and parks company Peab would be in charge of gathering, and four staff members from Kulturmagasinet were on site to monitor and assist the project. The process took just over two hours and was conducted partly in heavy rain. All the gifts were soaked, some were very soiled, and the floral tributes were beginning to disintegrate. We were also under time pressure. Peab had other assignments waiting.

Kulturmagasinet's painting conservator, Christina Gråbe, worked in one of the niches on the north-facing side of the stone wall around the memorial site, which offered some overhead protection. There was also a bench for the packaging materials she had brought, which she also used as a wrapping table. Christina focused mainly on the paper objects, such as drawings, notes, match tickets and letters. Here is her account:

Everything was soaking wet. The paper objects that had got wet were fragile and tore easily. Parts of the writing and drawings had bled, dissolved or disappeared completely. A large part of the material was dirty after being outside on the ground. A rough sorting was performed on site. Anything that was legible was selected and saved. The paper material was placed between acid-free blotting paper and put in boxes between cardboard sheets and dispatched to Peab's premises for storing and drying. It struck us that many of the messages said: THAT'S ENOUGH!

Kulturmagasinet's antiquarian, Pelle Johansson, was also on site:

All objects were placed in pallet rims and lifted onto lorries to be dispatched to Peab's warehouse, where everybody helped to hang the textile objects to dry. The immediate impression was the width and diversity of gifts from supporters, practically every Swedish team scarf was represented. Many souvenirs from teams in other leagues and countries had also been placed on the site. Obviously, objects from HIF and Djurgården were the most common by far. There were more than 600 scarves, and hundreds of flowers and bouquets. Votive candles and lanterns were well-represented, some with lines of text. A few of the match jerseys had been inscribed with marker pens.

Newspaper articles, especially from *Helsingborgs Dagblad*, were collected continuously from 31 March to the first anniversary and have now been copied on archive paper and are searchable in Kulturmagasinet's archive.

Post-processing

To prevent damage from vermin, all the material first had to pass through Kulturmagasinet's 12 cubic metre freezer upon arrival. The freezer rapidly lowers the temperature to -35°C and keeps it there for seven days, before a slow thaw over three days.

This was followed by the process of registering 223 objects and 175 documentary photos in the Museum's database Carlotta. Out of respect for the relatives, we postponed publication until one year after the incident. No reactions reached us after publication.

The objects were inspected by Kulturmagasinet's conservator before being put in storage. Many of the materials are hard to preserve: laminated messages, votive candles with stickers, bottles of alcohol. Another example is the installation with a paper carrier bag filled with pebbles. Among the pebbles is a battery-operated string of fairy lights and a post-it note with the text "You are not alone, Stefan" (several of the objects are marked with the name of the deceased, Stefan, and his nickname 'Myggan'). The whole installation, in turn, is in a plastic bag marked with a DIF club emblem. After the objects had been labelled for the collection, we prioritised photographing this type of item, so that they are documented when the objects themselves eventually disintegrate.

Difficulties

When something violent happens, people often spontaneously create a memorial where they can gather to show sympathy and process their feelings. The material created is usually non-durable and perishes quickly. Therefore, museums have to move quickly and get there as fast as possible. But collecting is associated with problems relating to materials, the time factor, feelings and, not least, ethics. When Kulturmagasinet discussed collecting the memorial in Helsingborg, one staff member asked whether we had the right to take the objects, raising the issue of leaving the dead to rest in peace. In her essay *Yvs icke, Död* (Death, be not Proud), Kerstin Vinterhed (2005, 5)

also writes that new “holy places” arise around the scenes of accidents. She is referring to the *Estonia* shipwreck, the Gothenburg fire, the death of Princess Diana, events that have generated strong popular involvement. ICOM’s ethical rules for museums (ICOM 2005) do not state any directives for objects of the above nature, but they could be likened to religious artefacts (articles 2.5, 3.7 and 4.3).

For Kulturmagasinet, the temporal problems included not being able to decide when the material should be gathered, and that our staff had to put their other tasks to one side. In many cases, it is crucial to act instantly; in others, we need to wait. It can be too painful to approach the task immediately. But people often have a strong need to share directly after an incident. The map of Helsingborg, where people could contribute their accounts of the chaotic weekend in 2014, is an example of that.

Another temporal aspect concerns the question of how and what to prioritise in the sometimes complicated and time-consuming processing of objects. The longer they are left, the greater the risk of forfeiting part of their context. Kulturmagasinet continuously gathered press cuttings, which has been valuable in various situations when trying to reconstruct the course of events. In future, these cuttings will also complement the objects by making it easy to achieve a day-by-day timeline.

This type of collecting also has its material-related problems: the objects can be damaged by weather conditions, dirt, moisture and rust. When we unpacked the textiles from the Helsingborg memorial at Kulturmagasinet, they had started to mould and had to be attended to by a textile conservator. It remains to be seen how long it will take before the plastic items from this site start to stick together, texts in magic marker fade and stickers on votive candles fall off.

In addition to the above, there is also the emotional aspect. Events such as those described in this article affect us on a personal level, no matter how professional we are. It is not always easy to remain objective. Perhaps we ourselves have been personally affected by the events.

Museum staff engaged in difficult subjects often have many other tasks alongside, and it can be hard going straight from an interview where they have listened to a tragic life story, or from an emotionally taxing situation, back to their usual work. Moreover, many work alone and might not have anyone to vent their experiences with.

The City provides staff at Kulturmagasinet with professional counselling if they feel the need. In the case of the memorial, however, we coped by

talking to each other. It was incredibly important that everyone who would be affected by the material and the collecting could meet and discuss.

Conclusion

The eve of Sunday, 30 March 2014, and the day after were chaotic for Helsingborg, and the staff at Kulturmagasinet who met at work on 31 March were all deeply affected. By the time the memorial site emerged and the manifestation had been held, we had already realised that we needed to act. In the moment, everything felt stressful and upsetting, but in hindsight we see the advantages of how we handled the situation; we were on site quickly and started our photographic documentation early on, we met to share our thoughts, both as professionals and on a personal level. Last but not least, we were all prepared to be flexible, to help each other and to cooperate.

So, how can we prepare for the unforeseen? In the same way that we prepare for incidents such as fires, we can be ready to act on unexpected events, for instance by having portable tables and temporary canopies at hand in our workplaces. But more importantly: we need a willingness to cooperate, to have an open climate, to dare discuss difficult subjects, and, in an instance, put our busy schedules to one side.

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