



International Society for Ethnology and Folklore  
Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore  
Internationale Gesellschaft für Ethnologie und Folklore



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## SIEF Statement on Data Management in Ethnology and Folklore

*This statement is published with the aim of supporting researchers and reviewers in dealing with current demands from legislative bodies, academic institutions, and funding bodies regarding the archiving, storage, and sharing of research data. It relates to the general freedom of academic expression and information as set out in the EU's General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR, art. 85/2).*

With this position paper, SIEF – the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore – sets out its policy in response to national and international calls for the establishment and standardisation of data management protocols for research in Ethnology and Folklore. As the leading international scholarly association for these disciplines, SIEF represents a range of professional traditions, each with specific, but intertwined, knowledge and working methods. These include ethnographic interviewing and field research, archive studies, cultural analysis, and discourse analysis. These practices shape the ethical issues addressed in this policy.

### *Free will and Responsibility*

The fields of Ethnology and Folklore generate a wide range of materials which must be handled in appropriate, and tailored, ways. The key principle is consent. Thus, long-term storage and sharing of data should be based on the principle of obtaining informed consent from those taking part in the research. The researcher's scientific and ethical responsibility to the contributors, and to the integrity of the materials, is paramount. All parties should thus be supported in taking advantage of archiving, preservation, and access systems, but must also have the right to restrict subsequent use of data, particularly for ethical or personal reasons.

### *Research and Data Specifics*

As in other areas of the Humanities, research in Ethnology and Folklore is shaped, from the very outset, by theoretical perspectives, analytical frameworks, and subject-specific methodologies. Through a reflexive process between researcher and contributor, relevant observation data is generated from which the researcher then makes a selection according to these criteria. Thus the

data is ultimately defined only through a process of reflection. The concept of “raw” data, as the so-called hard sciences understand it, does not apply to qualitative research in either historical or contemporary contexts.

In addition, Ethnology and Folklore, with their high-resolution, micro-perspective approach, place the individual, and individual experience, at centre stage. Contributors’ voices, embedded in diverse cultural and epistemic processes, are essentially unique and are heard directly. The resulting data are heterogeneous, non-standardized, and often multimedia, making archiving, access, and preservation a complex and sensitive issue.

#### *Limited Ownership and Ongoing Consent*

Above all, ethnographic research is centred on dialogue. All data is co-produced in the interaction of researchers and research participants and derives from particular social situations and contexts. Therefore, exclusive ownership and control cannot be claimed by researchers or other actors and standard intellectual property guidelines are only sometimes appropriate. Informed written consent should be sought (especially for interviews, structured recordings, etc.), though due to the flexibility of the ethnographic research process it is not universally applicable. Any such consent should be considered a “living document,” open to revision by the contributor at any time. Extra care, of course, must be taken with potentially vulnerable contributors.

#### *Problematic Archival Sources*

The use of historical knowledge from existing collections and archives plays an important role in various aspects of our work in Ethnology and Folklore. Many of these sources have been compiled under problematic political conditions, or have been shaped by social and cultural paradigms that are no longer acceptable (e.g., as regards minorities or disadvantaged groups). Dialogue with these sources therefore resembles the ethnographic research process itself. Caution is required and dissemination in published form, or in open access repositories, is often not in the interests of either subject or researcher.