

54th International Conference of the Kommission für Volksdichtung |
16th Conference on Traditional Singing
Songs in Archives and Communities: Texts and Living Practices

August 24–28, 2026, Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu, Estonia

Traditional songs and ballads circulate continuously between singing communities and multifaceted archival environments of today's world, shaped by ongoing reciprocal exchange. These movements are often unpredictable and nonlinear, especially in the digital age, challenging established hierarchies and inviting new social and cultural structures.

The contemporary concept of an archive embraces a wide spectrum of repositories—including printed texts, manuscripts, audio and video materials, libraries, and digital platforms—and may be maintained by various people or communities (Manoff 2004, Zavala et al. 2017). Institutional archives operate as instruments of cultural memory and may become indispensable when a community's continuity is broken, but they are also shaped by power structures, formal regulations, and canonising practices (Stoler 2009). Community and individual collections—often referred to as non-institutional or vernacular archives—are typically more flexible, shaped by local values and personal agency.

Through living communal singing practices and rituals, communities preserve local meanings and lived experiences that are largely absent from institutional and vernacular collections. Singing together embodies elements that cannot be fully captured or archived, evoking emotional and embodied experiences, fostering communal belonging, while also defining cultural boundaries and exclusions.

We invite discussion on relationships, cooperation, and the exchange of songs and related materials between contemporary practitioners and various vernacular and institutional archives. Topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The movement of songs between various types of archives and living community practices, both before and during the internet age.
- Singing together as a practice of inclusion and exclusion: belonging, boundary-making, intersectionality.
- Songs, singing, and related archival practices that transcend community boundaries: transnationality, multiple identities, cultural hybridity, conflict, appropriation.
- Ritual singing and other bodily and musical practices in lived experience and archival representations.
- Individual experiences of singing—affective and embodied dimensions; the challenges of documentation.
- Both innovative methodologies and established theoretical approaches in the study of songs and singing practices are welcome.

Proposals with abstracts of 250–300 words and a short biographical note should be sent by **30th of January 2026** to efa.conference@folklore.ee. A confirmation will be sent to all applicants as soon as their proposal has been received. The acceptance of proposals will be informed by 20th of February 2026.

We invite speakers to include audio or visual recordings in their presentations, since all required technical support will be available.

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conference webpage: <https://www.folklore.ee/KfV2026/>

References:

Manoff, Marlene. 2004. "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines." *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4 (1): 9–25.

<https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/35687/4.1manoff.pdf>.

Stoler, Ann Laura. 2009. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zavala, Jimmy, Andrea A. Migoni, Michelle Caswell, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor. 2017. "A Process Where We're All at the Table: Community Archives Challenging Dominant Modes of Archival Practice." *Archives and Manuscripts* 45 (3): 202–215.

