

## In defense of the Festschrift: Unearthing “article graves”

As a genre of publication, the Festschrift (see §1 as to the definition of this concept and difficulties in delimiting it) has, in my experience, come into disrepute in recent years, in Finno-Ugric/Uralic Studies and beyond. Categorically excluded from many funding frameworks for scientific publications and treated as an anachronistic concept, there are a number of legitimate points of criticism to make against the entire genre, which will be discussed in §2. In spite of these, I have come to appreciate this genre of publication and believe it serves important functions in our discipline, as will be discussed in §3. Critically, I will present the recent online publication at <https://lidivoka.univie.ac.at> of an expandable compendium of Finno-Ugric Festschriften with their tables of contents within the LIDIVOKA “Linguistic Diversity in the Volga-Kama Region” bibliographical database which, with its currently (as of 15 October 2025) 10,870 entries, is among other things an endeavour to create an exhaustive bibliographical database of edited volumes in our discipline (§4). Subsequently, I will introduce an overview of what it currently covers in the domain of Festschriften and Festschrift-adjacent publications (§5) which is published as an online appendix. Finally, I will implore the reader to assist me in countering the “digital invisibility” of essential publications in our discipline (§6), and will voice some ideas as to how we can carry the concept of the Festschrift forward into the future in a more timely fashion (§7).

### 1. The platonic ideal of a Festschrift meets reality

Merriam-Webster defines a Festschrift as “a volume of writings by different authors presented as a tribute or memorial especially to a scholar”;<sup>1</sup> definitions provided in other dictionaries for English and German are roughly comparable. Comparing these definitions ultimately feels futile as everybody can see what a Festschrift is. Or can they?

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1. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Festschrift>

A prototypical Festschrift will come about when an esteemed scholar is approaching a round anniversary, be it of their birth or the start of their academic activities, and scholars in their orbit – generally clandestinely – will edit and author a volume built around the scholar’s personal and professional profile. Individual contributions to a Festschrift generally try to refer to, or at least cite, the celebrant. The contents of a Festschrift may be as eclectic as the professional and social network of the jubilarian. Many Festschriften will also contain biographical and bibliographical data on their subject and might also contain artistic elements such as poems or graphical art; oftentimes there is a *tabula gratulatoria* (which in some cases will fund the Festschrift’s publication as there may be a fee associated with being included). A Finno-Ugric Festschrift will oftentimes have a witty or emotionally resonant title either in a classic philological metalanguage (e.g. Latin, Greek, German), or in a language close to the celebrant’s heart. The occasion for a Festschrift might be a round birthday, typically the 60th (e.g. Holopainen et al. 2020), but sometimes also the 65th (e.g. Brogyanyi 1979), 70th (e.g. Kästik & Saar 2016), or even 50th (Junttila & Kuokkala 2019). The 60th birthday is especially codified in Finland: among Festschriften dedicated to a specific birthday in my collection (see Table 1 for an overview), 63.4% of Finnish-published Festschriften are dedicated to the 60th birthday, while in other countries, the 60th birthday dominates less (though it is the most popular date everywhere but Russia): ~27.5% in Estonia, ~42.25% in Hungary, ~15% in Russia (compared to ~23.3% dedicated to the respective scholar’s 70th birthday), and ~35.2% in the rest of the world.

Scholars who enjoy long lives might get to enjoy several Festschriften, for example Gábor Bereczki (1928–2012), who received a Festschrift on the occasion of his 60th (Domokos & Pusztay 1988), 70th (Kiss & Klima 1998), and 80th (Bereczki et al. 2008) birthday. Of special note here is Just Knud Qvigstad (1853–1957), whose first Festschrift was published for his 75th birthday (*Festskrift til Rektor J. Qvigstad* 1928) and who lived to receive a second Festschrift on the occasion of his 100th birthday (Lid 1953). Also notable is Lars-Gunnar Larsson, who received his first Festschrift on the occasion of his 40th birthday (Rydving & Swedell 1987), later followed by one on the occasion of his 65th birthday (Winkler et al. 2012), and Juha Janhunen, whose first Festschrift on the occasion of his 60th birthday (Hyytiäinen et al. 2012) was soon followed by a Festschrift explicitly

dedicated to his 61st birthday (Hyttiäinen et al. 2013).<sup>2</sup> Table 1 shows how many dedications within the data set presented in §5 and published in Online Appendix A pertain to which birthday (oftentimes posthumously), in total and specifically in Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Russia, and the rest of the world, respectively. It should be noted that the place of publication, while the only objective metric, is also somewhat reductionist: it does not necessarily say where the *Festschrift* was conceived and edited.

Table 1: Total numbers of *Festschriften* dedicated to a birthday in the LIDIVOKA bibliographical database

Birthday	#	40	50	60	61	65	70	75	80	85	90	95
#	361	1	8	138	1	22	84	16	34	3	13	1
Est	51	0	0	14	0	2	10	4	7	1	6	0
Fin	82	0	5	52	1	3	7	2	3	0	0	0
Hun	71	0	0	30	0	2	27	2	6	0	0	0
Rus	73	0	0	11	0	3	17	6	13	1	4	1
Misc.	88	1	3	31	0	12	23	2	5	1	3	0
Birthday	100	110	120	125	130	150	175	195	200	220	325	350
#	27	4	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
Est	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Fin	8	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hun	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rus	5	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Misc.	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

The solemn sibling of the *Festschrift* is the memorial tome, written in commemoration of a departed colleague, either in the immediate aftermath of their death (sometimes in connection with a memorial conference) or at a later date, possibly in commemoration of an anniversary. In an extreme example, Martin(us) Fogel(ius) (1634–1675) was the subject of a commemorative volume released on the occasion of his 350th birthday (Veenker 1986).

2. Apparently this is an “overflow *Festschrift*” as the sheer volume of scholarship received for the *Festschrift* compiled for Janhunen’s 60th birthday necessitated a split into two volumes, presented on consecutive birthdays (Petri Kallio, p.c.).

To the best of my knowledge, the first four Festschriften of our discipline are:

- 1850: a volume compiled in honor of the only ~31-year-old Antal Reguly (*Reguly-Album* 1850)
- 1882: a volume compiled on the occasion of Elias Lönnrot's 80th birthday (Genetz 1882);
- 1884: a volume published commemorating József Budenz's 25 years as a linguist (*Budenz-album* 1884);
- 1886: an issue of *Virittäjä* dedicated to August Ahlqvist's 60th birthday (Kotikielen Seura 1886).

The modern Festschrift could be typified by a volume published on the occasion of Ulla-Maija Forsberg's 60th birthday (Holopainen et al. 2020): *Ёмас сымыу нэ́кве вѳртур э́тност самын патум: Scripta miscellanea in honorem Ulla-Maija Forsberg*. Its title covers all bases by consisting of a Mansi element ('A good-hearted woman was born in the month of August') mostly to be read and understood by the celebrant, and for the masses a Latin definition of the book's contents. The tome is adorned by a portrait of the celebrant painted by her colleague Rigina Ajanki, contains a four-page tabula gratulatoria, an introduction, two narrative contributions, over two dozen scientific papers in three languages (English, Finnish, Komi), and a bibliography of the jubilarian's publications up to the date of the volume's publication. There is no reasonable debate as to whether this book constitutes a Festschrift.

However, oftentimes the classification of a volume as a Festschrift is less straightforward, as in the following cases. For example, the book *Šulk-kuni sanaine: Kirjoituksia karjalasta ja vähemmistökielistä* (Grünthal et al. 2022), published on the occasion of Anneli Sarhimaa's 60th birthday, might seem like an almost-prototypical Festschrift, if not for the fact that it is nowhere mentioned that this book is a Festschrift, or to whom it is dedicated. The bibliography of Anneli Sarhimaa's scientific publications suggests the nature of the publication, but this implication is subtle.

Especially in Russia and Hungary, historically also in Estonia and much earlier also in Finland, edited volumes and issues of periodicals will often have a dedication of sorts, e.g. the 1986 issue of the periodical *Вопросы марийского языка* bears the dedication "К семидесятилетию академика

Б. А. Серебренникова” ‘[dedicated to] the 70th birthday of the academic B. A. Serebrennikov’ (Isanbaev 1986: 3); oftentimes no concrete occasion to celebrate a scholar is given. Does such a dedication make this volume or issue a Festschrift? Was the volume compiled with the honored person in mind, or was the dedication added to a volume which would have been published anyway? Does the content of the volume have the direct personal connection to the celebrant that is a desideratum for Festschriften? Did the authors contributing to a volume even know their work would be dedicated to a specific scholar? Furthermore, anyone anywhere can dedicate a book to a scholar, making such publications “less exclusive” than prototypical Festschriften. For example, I am aware of three distinct volumes dedicated to the 70th birthday of Dmitrij Vladimirovič Bubrih (Hämäläinen & Beljakov 1961; Ščebakova 1962; Serebrennikov et al. 1962) – are all three Festschriften for the same occasion? At times, these dedications can be somewhat vague and amorphous, such as “Посвящается исследователям языков и культур народов Крайнего Севера” ‘Dedicated to researchers of the languages and cultures of the peoples of the Far North’ (Ljubinskaja 2014).

When a memorial conference is a success, it can evolve into a series of conferences. A prominent example here are the conferences held in honour of Tibor Mikola after his death in 2000: at the time of writing, there have been six conferences dedicated to his memory and, to the best of my knowledge, proceedings have been published for four of these (Mészáros et al. 2004; Wagner-Nagy 2005; Szeverényi & Khabtagaeva 2017; Szeverényi 2021). Does every such volume constitute a memorial tome?

Highly prolific scholars are on occasion honoured by volumes consisting of their own writings rather than those of their friends and colleagues (e.g. Honti 2013).

Volumes sorted onto Festschrift shelves at various libraries are often more biographies of the scholar in question, such as the 1980 publication *Akadeemik Paul Ariste* (Rätsep 1980).

As per usual, *the existence of edge cases does not invalidate a classification*; even if it is at times debatable whether a specific publication is truly a Festschrift, the category remains valid. When creating a bibliographical catalogue where the aim is to help people keep an overview of existing resources (see §4 and beyond), free from judgement, an inclusionist approach is preferable: when in doubt, it’s a Festschrift.

## 2. Why are Festschriften bad?

Arguments against the genre of the Festschrift are manifold, and generally speaking, valid.

- One could argue that they contribute to a *Great Man Thinking* in science where individuals are elevated and celebrated due to their structural position, irrespective of whether their personal and professional conduct justified such reverence.
- As Festschriften are built around an individual (only in some cases a research institution or scientific discipline, a teaching subject, etc.), their contents can be quite heterogenous – one could even describe them as discordant. Very rarely does anyone but the jubilarian (if even they) want to read a Festschrift cover to cover.
- They can lead to personally awkward situations as regards who “deserves” to get a Festschrift, when, and who will be responsible for editing it. When an important scholar does not get a Festschrift, it can be unclear to outsiders why this happened (I have personally been on the editorial team of two Festschriften that never happened as the jubilarian explicitly asked not to receive a Festschrift).
- It can be quite difficult to clandestinely carry out a task of this magnitude! This is especially the case when editors and authors report to the subject of the Festschrift.
- Restrictions on funding for Festschriften result in many of them being published through smaller, more obscure publication channels outside of the general point of view of the scientific discipline and with poor integration into library systems and search engines. This can be verified in practice (but hopefully not for long): as of the moment of writing, if one searches for most article titles of the Festschrift published on the occasion of János Puzstay’s 60th birthday (Pomozi 2008) on Google, one receives no hits whatsoever, that is, the contents of this Festschrift are digitally invisible; if one does not happen to have access to a physical copy of this book, there is no way of knowing its contents. This gives Festschriften the reputation of being a place where scholarship goes to die and be forgotten.

### 3. Why are Festschriften good?

The same person-centric nature of the Festschrift that garners the genre justified criticism also yields some opportunities: Festschriften can be an invaluable tool in reconstructing academic activities, not only of individuals but also of researcher networks through the biographical and bibliographical sections of publications, but also the *tabula gratulatoria*: who was interacting and networking with whom, when, where? Which personal correspondences might be worth investigating in literature archives and such?

They also have value as regards their academic content, countering *publication bias*, a long-known and long-fought structural issue in natural sciences and especially medicine: when an investigation into a matter does not produce a positive result, it is less likely to be published. Consequently, from science is withheld the information that the matter in question was investigated and positive results, even those brought about by chance, receive undue weight. Linguists are not generally burdened with stakes as high as those in medical research, consequently meta-analyses and pre-registration of studies and trials (obliging scholars to publish their results irrespective of what they show) have not taken hold in our discipline. We do, however, arguably have one useful tool against publication bias: the Festschrift.

In my eyes this is a direct consequence of the points discussed above. Given the comparatively low prestige of the genre, scholars will only rarely publish key research in a contribution to a celebratory volume (though there are examples of this happening, e.g. Kallio 2007), but a sense of affinity towards a fellow scholar and social pressure puts them in a position where they want to publish *something*. Something that was maybe not “big enough” for a forty-page article in *Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen* but that is nevertheless worth reading: miscellanea from a scholar’s career that did not lead to larger research endeavors, research that did not end up going anywhere, small-scale investigations outside of the scholar’s comfort zone. The Festschrift motivates scholars to clear out their drawers, publish things they might have considered too anecdotal for other contexts and prompts scholars to engage in some history of science.

#### 4. UCB and the LIDIVOKA bibliographical database

A spin-off project of my doctoral studies that I have been maintaining to this day is the Uralic Core Bibliography (UCB)<sup>3</sup> (Bradley 2024), a textual overview of all volumes, updated roughly once a year, where relevant with tables of contents, of the core series and journals of our discipline, currently spanning almost 3000 A4 pages. One huge Microsoft Word document or PDF file is not the optimal format for a bibliography, but it is better than nothing – which was, in many cases, the starting point here: while some journals and series dutifully publish at least their contents online, some do not. Back catalogs in particular were inaccessible, and at the time verifiably “digitally invisible”: one would not get any hits on Google when searching for an individual article. To compile the UCB, I had to digitize (scan and process with OCR software) missing tables of contents of all relevant journals, which took up a significant part of my early summer in 2015. Numerous Festschriften were already captured in that process, namely those that appeared as special issues of important journals in our discipline, or that appeared in important series.

A fitting infrastructure to cover all accessible Festschriften arose later. During the project LIDIVOKA “Linguistic Diversity in the Volga-Kama Region”<sup>4</sup> (2020–2024) at the University of Vienna, my colleagues Johannes Hirvonen, Christian Pischlöger, and I started compiling a bibliographical database of literature pertaining to the (Uralic, Turkic, and Indo-European – i.e. Russian) languages and varieties of the Volga-Kama Region in a more sophisticated manner, using the reference-management software Zotero. This tool allows importing and exporting of libraries in the highly portable BibTeX format. Critically, for every edited volume, we included the table of contents (if available with page numbers) in the “abstract” field, allowing users to search not only for publications but also their contents. Anyone using a reference management program of some sort in their academic writing can directly cite any and all sources contained in this database. This resource will be published online at <https://lidivoka.univie.ac.at> in late 2025 under a Creative Commons license, allowing others to freely use this resource. It would be highly desirable, for example, for the tables of contents captured here to be integrated into library catalogs.

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3. <https://www.copius.eu/tools.php#biblio>

4. <https://lidivoka.univie.ac.at>

Much as during the literature survey I carried out during my doctoral studies, the task at hand quickly spiraled out of control with me integrating sources from inter alia the following channels (where sources were not already contained in the UCB):

- Sources cited in my previous academic research;
- Sources for which I have a scan or digital copy in my personal collection;
- Sources cited in *The Oxford Guide to the Uralic Languages* (Bakró-Nagy et al. 2022);
- Sources cited by the databases *UraTyp*<sup>5</sup> (Norvik et al. 2022), *UTDB*<sup>6</sup> (Havas et al. 2015), and *VolgaTyp*<sup>7</sup> (Havas et al. 2023);
- Sources cited in the *INEL* bibliography (Wagner-Nagy & Arkhipov 2019);
- The Mari, Udmurt, and Mansi publications contained in the Finnish National Library's *Fenno-Ugrica* collection;<sup>8</sup>
- The contents of the page *Электрон книгагудо*<sup>9</sup> 'Electronic Library' on the social-media platform VK maintained by scholars from the Mari Research Institute of Language, Literature, and History in Yoshkar-Ola;
- Online publications by the Ob-Ugric Institute of Applied Research and Development;<sup>10</sup>
- Publications on the *Видзанин*<sup>11</sup> page maintained by the Institute of Language, Literature, and Art of the Komi Scientific Center of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Syktyvkar;
- Any sources mentioned in the Uralic Information Centre's (UIC)<sup>12</sup> monthly newsletter, compiled by Ditta Szabó until 2025 and now by Levente Máthé;
- Any book, paper, or chapter that came across my (virtual and literal) desk;

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5. <https://uralic.cldd.org>

6. <https://utdb.elte.hu>

7. <https://volgatyp.elte.hu>

8. <https://fennougrica.kansalliskirjasto.fi>

9. [https://vk.com/e\\_knigagudo](https://vk.com/e_knigagudo)

10. <https://ouipiir.ru>

11. <http://vidzanin.komikyv.com>

12. <https://nytud.hu/uralic-information-centre>

- A systematic survey of the Finno-Ugric library holdings of the university libraries in Vienna, Munich, Hamburg, Helsinki, and Tartu (with further university libraries hopefully soon to follow), focusing on edited volumes with possibly inaccessible tables of content – many of which are Festschriften.

For every edited volume, I have, if possible, included tables of contents: either by copying them from library catalogs or websites of book vendors,<sup>13</sup> or by scanning and digitizing them myself.

With its currently (as of 15 October 2025) 10,870 items, I believe this freely available resource can serve as a highly useful starting point for bibliographical tasks. Given the nature of this database, there is a strong bias at play here: me. My focal areas and interests are heavily overrepresented in this database (e.g. there is probably better coverage of Mari fiction than there is of Mordvin linguistics), and for many sources contained in the database, the connection to Uralic studies is tenuous. Numerous sources contained in the database pertain to Turkic languages, especially those of the Volga-Kama Region – naturally so given the project that gave rise to this resource. The inclusion of materials pertaining to Pashto – an Iranian language – might be more surprising and is a direct result of the unexpected trajectory my academic career has taken in recent years.<sup>14</sup>

## 5. A compendium of Festschriften and more

The LIDIVOKA bibliographical database initially (only) aimed to be an exhaustive overview of the literature on language contact and language convergence in the Volga-Kama Region, but it has significantly grown beyond that; the mission to capture digitally invisible publications led me to process numerous Festschriften. Eventually, a completionist urge arose in me and I set myself the mission to capture all Festschriften that are possible to capture.

As discussed above, delimiting the Festschrift is a difficult and ultimately futile task and I cast a rather large net: with the dividing line

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13. The websites <https://www.finna.fi>, <https://www.antikvarium.hu> and <http://annales.info> were frequently exceedingly useful.

14. <https://oped.univie.ac.at>

between Festschriften and bibliographies and biographies so fuzzy, I included those, too. If I already have biographies in the mix, why exclude autobiographies and memoirs? So truthfully, the compendium is more one of *person-centric publications* (Online Appendix A) and *celebrations of institutions and subject matters* (Online Appendix B) than one of Festschriften.

The second amorphous boundary is that of Finno-Ugric/Uralic linguistics – and connected with that, that of Finno-Ugric/Uralic *linguists*. As with any classification, there will be clear cases, but there will also be edge cases: we can hopefully all agree that Sirkka Saarinen is a Uralic linguist and that Taylor Swift is not, but what of András Róna-Tas, a renowned Turkologist whose work frequently touches upon Uralic linguistics? What of Rein Taagepera, a political scientist whose work is highly relevant to the study of the recent history of the Baltics? What of Béla Bartók, the famed composer and musicologist who published several contributions in the *Ungarische Jahrbücher*, the direct predecessor of the *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* and its offshoots, in the 1930s? They might not fall into the classification at hand, but their work – and their personas – are relevant to our discipline. Thus, here too, a large net was in order: when in doubt, a scholar is relevant. Inclusion was also on occasion motivated not by the celebrant but by the contents of a Festschrift: if there is something in there relevant to our discipline, I included it. Thus, for example, the Festschrift for Wolfgang Viereck (Ramisch & Wynne 1997), a scholar of English, was included due to one contribution pertaining to Hungarian (by Jenő Kiss) and one contribution pertaining to Mari and Udmurt (by Sirkka Saarinen), rather than due to the jubilarian's scholarly profile.

The online appendices show the currently included publications in the collection Festschriften of the LIDIVOKA bibliographical database, with the first one giving an overview of person-centric publications and the second an overview of publications that pertain to institutions, study programs, subject matters, etc. In the interest of preserving space, only the celebrant (or celebrated matter), the title, the occasion and date, and the place of publication is given in this overview, while the full bibliographical data (and of course critically, where relevant, tables of contents) are found in the database. When there is a deviation between the date of a commemoration and a publication date, e.g. when a Festschrift for an anniversary that happened in 1993 was published in 1995, the date is given as follows: 1995 < 1993. The classification of a volume as a memorial, a biography, or a

commemoration of a posthumous birthday is in many cases arbitrary and based on the framing employed in the front matter of a publication: if it is framed around a scholar's death, the volume is classified as a memorial; if it is framed around a scholar's life, the volume is classified as a biography; if it is framed around a scholar's birthday, the volume is classified as a celebration of this anniversary. If the occasion of a volume is not clear to me, I have classified a volume as "Miscellaneous".

## 6. A call to action: fighting "digital invisibility"

A major concern I had in publishing this contribution is that I would, in failing to include a particular Festschrift, offend a scholar and others in that scholar's orbit. I decided to go ahead anyway, though, for the simple reason that the LIDIVOKA bibliographical database presented here, for the foreseeable future, will be an expandable infrastructure, i.e. if I missed something (or, in the case of Festschriften, someone), send me your amendments and I will include them whenever I next update the database (presumably on a similar schedule as I update the UCB, roughly once a year, dependent on when my schedule allows). The optimal format for amendments is BibTeX: I can import bibliographical data in this format directly into the database and only need to insure that I have not introduced duplicate items. Any other digital format is admissible, however.

This is not restricted to Festschriften: I will gladly include any edited volumes with tables of contents touching upon our discipline (and not already covered by the UCB) in the LIDIVOKA bibliographical database.

Long-term, it would be desirable for the LIDIVOKA bibliographical database to become a modern-day bibliography of our discipline in the lineage of the three-volume *Bibliographie der uralischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Schlachter & Ganschow 1976–1986) or the four-volume *Bibliographia Studiorum Uralicorum* (Häkli & Vinogradov 1988), administered and updated not by one person but by some sort of international structure. At this point in time, however, I do not know what such a structure might look like.

While a completely exhaustive bibliography is not a realistic goal, I hope that the compendium of Uralic Festschriften presented here does illustrate the point that while we cannot realistically capture everything, we can – especially within specific restrictions – aim to capture the critical mass of relevant publications, with a manageable amount of effort.

## 7. A call to action, part 2: celebrate structures

There is one point of criticism against the genre of the *Festschrift* that remains unambiguously valid. Namely, how they contribute to *Great Man Thinking*, how they might on occasion lionize figures whose contributions to the discipline – and to the lives of those around them – were not always unambiguously positive (see Hübinette 2007 regarding fascist and antisemitic attitudes and activities among scholars of Asian, but also Finno-Ugric, languages in Sweden, for example), and how they reinforce hierarchical thinking patterns when we as a discipline are trying to move beyond those.

I do have two thoughts about this matter, however. Firstly, we can celebrate individuals without idealizing them. Secondly, we are not restricted to celebrating individuals but can also celebrate institutions and structures, areas of research, anniversaries of monumental occasions, and other similar matters. Such *Festschriften* – as detailed above, they already exist – serve an additional practical purpose: many of the academic structures we rely on are in a precarious place as regards their funding, oftentimes their mere existence. Whenever some official comes up with the idea of doing away with a department, a publication channel, a study program, etc., those rushing to lobby for its continued existence start compiling dossiers on the activities and output of the matter in question, to reason that the threatened cuts would be to kill the goose that lays golden eggs. A fresh *Festschrift* pertaining to the matter at hand would be such a brochure, ready to be used.

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