

The creation of a museum system

Professionalizing Danish museums 1958–2018

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Abstract: *Since 1958, legislation has regulated the Danish museum field, describing the role of museums, structuring the field and defining museum work. In this article, I analyse the Danish museum legislation and the related discussions since 1958 in order to track the development of the Danish museum field. Drawing on the tradition of historical institutionalism, I identify three phases of professionalization delimited by critical junctures in 1958, 1976 and 2001. Each phase is characterized by specific aims conveying a specific understanding of professionalism. Finally, I relate the current debate about the museum field to the historical context, asking whether a new critical juncture is imminent.*

Keywords: Professionalization, legislation, institutional development, history.

In June 2017, the Danish Minister of Culture formed two working groups to suggest new models for the structure and subsidiary system of the state-supported museums in Denmark to replace a system that was argued to be unjust, lacking transparency and based on historical conditions.¹ In this paper, I analyse the Danish museum legislation since 1958, asking how historical conditions and different agents have affected the development of the professional museum field.

Until the Danish Parliament in 1958 passed the first Museum Act for history museums (the term covers all cultural heritage museums as defined in the act), a limited number of museums had been subsidized

by appropriations under the Finance Act and specific legislation had been limited to institutions such as the National Museum. The Museum Act of 1958 introduced a model for structuring a professional museum field through addressing the role and responsibilities of museums as parts of the Danish welfare state, and by defining a set of criteria triggering subsidies that enabled museums to hire professional staff.

Throughout the period, there has been a strong tradition for museum professionals to participate in the legislative process, discussing the structure of the museum field, the definition of museum work and the role of museums in society. Thus, the legislation and

the debates reflect the ongoing processes of organizing the professional Danish museum field, and constitute a significant source for identifying the so-called historical conditions of the current Danish museum structure.

Denmark is one of the only countries in the world with a long tradition of regulating public subsidies for museums by law. In other countries, legislation has often been related to named museums (e.g. the British act for subsidizing the Imperial War Museum from 1920) or it has focused on the general preservation and protection of cultural heritage (e.g. Law 107/01 on Cultural Heritage in Portugal from 2001). Only a small number of countries have passed specific museum acts that regulate coherent museum fields. Among these countries are e.g. Poland (1996), Iceland (2001), Latvia (2007), Japan (2008), Estonia (2014) and Sweden (2017).² Several of these pieces of legislation (e.g. the Baltic Museum Acts) have been directly inspired by Denmark, and therefore the Danish legislation provides a unique empirical case for studying the development of a legal structure for a professional museum field over an extended period of time.

The study is based on textual analysis of 10 Danish Museum Acts from 1958, 1964, 1969, 1976, 1984, 1989, 2001 and 2012,³ as well as on relevant archival material related to the legislation and the accompanying debates. The materials used include ministerial reports on the cultural field and on museums from 1956, 1969, 1975, 1995, 2011 and 2017, relevant archives from the Ministry of Culture, parliamentary committees and museum associations, containing correspondence, responses to public hearings, minutes from meetings and posts in the professional journals *Stof fra Danske Museer*, *Museumsmagasinet* and *Danske Museer*. Furthermore, I have

interviewed a number of museum professionals who have been active in the debate throughout the period.⁴

In the following, I start by setting up a theoretical framework for analysing institutional development. Then, I analyse the Danish museum legislation and the ongoing debates from 1958 to 2017, seeking to identify if, how, when and by whom the structure of the museum field has been negotiated, and finally I discuss how the present debate can be seen in relation to the historical development.

HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM, PATH DEPENDENCE AND CRITICAL JUNCTURES

Analysing the current structure of the museum field as a product of historical conditions, I am inspired by the research tradition known as historical institutionalism that is prominent within the fields of political science and sociology. Historical institutionalists perceive development as a chain of interdependent variables connected over time rather than as isolated events (Steinmo 2008), and they traditionally argue that institutional change follows path-dependent, evolutionary ways (Kangas & Vestheim 2010:273). Path dependence was introduced into political science in order to explain the resilience of institutions and the different, not necessarily efficient, development of institutions under similar circumstances (e.g. Pierson 2004). In this research tradition, development is characterized as a punctuated equilibrium in which so-called critical junctures represent points in time “in which major changes are triggered primarily by exogenous forces, and new institutional arrangements and new developmental pathways are created.” (Sorensen 2017:25, see also Capoccia 2016). In the analysis of the museum legislation, I seek to identify and characterize such critical

102 junctures in the development of the Danish museum field.

During the last decades, several researchers working with historical institutionalism have stressed the importance of endogenous processes in institutional change as a supplement to path dependence, critical junctures and exogenous or external drivers of change. Thus, in 2010, the American political scientists Kathleen Thelen and James Mahoney introduced a conceptual framework for analysing institutional change focusing on institutions as inherently dynamic entities that develop as power shifts between agents within the institutions (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Pursuing this line of thought, I look at the development of the Danish museum field both as an incremental process affected by endogenous drivers and as a punctuated equilibrium influenced by exogenous events.

Overall, the history of the Danish museum field can be described as an ongoing professionalization. As a concept, professionalization is often only vaguely defined and related to the development of controlled occupational groups within a specific field of work (e.g. Abbott 1991, Evetts 2011). In this article, I regard professionalization as a multidimensional process in which different phases in the development promote different aspects of making an occupation professional.⁵ To the best of my knowledge, using such optics for studying museums has not previously been done. Over the years, the development of professional museum work has been studied by a number of scholars in the field of museology and museum studies (e.g. van Mensch 1992, Weil 2002, Davis *et al.* 2010). Furthermore, the historical development of the Danish museum legislation has been analysed several times (e.g. Lundbæk 1985, Banke 1992, Dam Christensen 2007, Harnow 2017, Nørskov 2018). However, in 2010 cultural scientists

Anita Kangas and Geir Vestheim advocated the use of path dependence as a lens through which to analyse the resilience of Nordic cultural policy, calling for further empirical studies in the field (Kangas & Vestheim 2010). This paper constitutes such an empirical study with a focus on the museum field and thereby contributes to the existing body of research, providing an overview of the recent Danish museum history as well as a new perspective on museums as a public, institutional field.

1958–1976: POLITICAL PROFESSIONALIZATION

In 1956, the Danish Ministry of Education published a report identifying 116 history museums and 24 special museums outside the city of Copenhagen.⁶ Of these, only 38 received state subsidies specified in the Finance Act at a tariff unchanged since 1941. Local subsidies were described as varying, and the condition of the collections as critical. In March 1958, the Minister of Education therefore presented the first museum bill concerning subsidies to local, history museums, arguing that:

[...] the old generation of museum founders is dying out, the collections have multiplied and the requirements for their preservation have grown, so that most museums today find themselves in a very difficult situation both concerning their financial basis and concerning their management (Folketingets Forhandlinger (hereafter FF) 1957–58, column 2903; all quotes have been translated from Danish by the author).

As such, the first Danish Museum Act was the result of a critical juncture brought on by an incremental decline in human capital in the museum field, a decline in the condition of the collections and a lack of sufficient funding. The



Fig. 1. In January 2018, the Danish Minister of Culture, Mette Bock, invited 300 museum professionals and stakeholders to discuss visions for the Danish museum field. Photo: Thomas Rahbek, The Agency for Culture and Palaces.

resulting act aimed to establish a subsidiary system in order to distribute public funding for museums between local and national budgets by allotting state subsidies in an amount equal to the local.

DEFINING MUSEUM FIELDS

Different perceptions of the purpose and affordances of history and art museums led to two specific Museum Acts passed in 1958 and 1964. Both acts defined specific financial and professional standards as well as accessibility as criteria for obtaining state subsidies (Act 166 (1958), § 3, sec. 1.d, 1.e, and Act 118 (1964), § 3, sec. 1.d and 1.f). While history museums were organised hierarchically, with up to 17 regional museums (*landsdelsmuseer*) required to have professional staff overseeing and consulting other subsidized museums in the region (Act

166 (1958), § 2), the 20 art museums were all supervised by the National Board of Art Museums (*Kunstmuseumsnævnet*). In 1963, a report by the National Inspectorate for Local Museums (*Statens Lokalmuseumstilsyn, SLT*) explained the hierarchical structure by way of stating that the same requirements did not apply to small and big museums: while the purpose of small museums was to register, maintain and present the collections with an educational aim, more information and scientific effort was expected of big museums (FF 1963–64, appendix A, columns 485–494). In other words, the hierarchical position of the individual museum determined the definition of the work required to fulfil the criteria in the legislation. This structure has been debated several times over the years and most recently resurfaced in the debate in 2017.

The museum professionals in both history

and art museums were given considerable influence over the supervision and development of the field. In both supervisory bodies, the SLT and the National Board of Art Museums, museum professionals had considerable representation. Thus, five out of the seven members in the SLT represented the National Museum and the Association of Danish History Museums (Dansk Kulturhistorisk Museumsforening, DKM Act 166 (1958), § 7), and two of the 3–4 members of the National Board of Art Museums represented the National Gallery and the Association of Danish Art Museums (Foreningen Danske Kunstmuseer, FDK, Act 118 (1964), § 3, sec 1.e, §4 and §7). Especially the members of DKM were very active in drafting the legislation. Mogens Bencard, the former director of Ribe Museum from 1961 to 1980 and secretary of DKM during the 1960s and 70s, commented: “We made the laws [...] we came in and submitted a bill to the minister – a finished bill with all the sections” (Interview Mogens Bencard). These bills often provided a significant part of the final museum acts.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND THE RELEVANT MUSEUM

Initially, the museum legislation defined only vaguely the professional standards required in museums. During the political debates, the non-professionals’ past efforts were praised and politicians expressed the concern that too strict educational requirements could damage citizen initiatives. To that effect, the representative from the conservative-liberal party, Venstre, said in 1958: “I don’t think that we shall be too strict [...], since the job hitherto has been done, even if the contributing agents have not been absolute professionals” (FF, 1957–58, column 3033).

In practice, the skills of the museum professionals who were hired were also relatively broad. Thus, some of the most active participants in the development of the professional museum field were the author, literary historian and director of Viborg Museum (1960–1993) Peter Seeberg and the architect and director of Vendsyssel Historical Museum (1960–1997) Palle Friis, and although the art museums were more monodisciplinary, two of the most prominent figures in the field were the attorney and head of the private art association in Esbjerg (1956–1986) Torben Permin, and the businessman and founder of the contemporary art museum Louisiana Knud W. Jensen. In other words, the necessity of academic credentials was disputed and the definition of the required skills was vague during the 1950s and 60s.

Instead, the debate about the museum field focused on defining the role of museums as public institutions. In 1958, the Minister of Education stated:

Museums are not just a matter of entertainment. It is at the history museums that ordinary people have the best opportunity to gain an understanding of the background to the situation we live in today, and the awareness that we are not isolated neither in space nor in time (FF 1957–58, columns 2904–2905).

Similarly, in 1964 during the parliamentary debate about art museums, a Member of Parliament from the Social Democrats said that ‘society must strive to give the eternal values of culture first priority in order to prevent the banishment of human values under the mounting pressure of technology’ (FF 1963–64, column 2113). Thus, the stakes were high, and even though the definition of museums as educational institutions was not new, the articulated stress on their relevance

and public benefit was a new political agenda assigned to the museums – representing a political professionalization of the field.

During the 1960s, the political ideals related to museums were increasingly linked to the field of mediation. Both the 1958 and 1964 acts stressed accessibility by requiring subsidized museums to have fixed opening hours and free access for schoolchildren (Act 166 (1958), § 3.1.e and Act 118 (1964), §3.f). In 1969, the Ministry of Culture published a report identifying ‘the relationship with the part of the population that does not have any special interest in museum collections’ as the main issue for museums. The museums were asked to learn from the new media – i.e. radio and TV – and to become “dangerous museums” and “arsenals, from which arguments could be collected to criticise the existing order of society” (Report 517, 1969:155). Thus, political ideals about the museums as relevant through mediation were articulated – constituting a political professionalization of the field.

This ideal was subsequently operationalized in the 1969 Museum Act, which specified that both history museums and art museums could apply for additional funding if they arranged presentations of cultural movies, music or literary readings etc. (Act 272 (1969) and 273 (1969), § 1.2, § 5.1.3 and FF, app. A, 1968–69, column 4207). In addition, the acts introduced the title of Museum Educator (*museumpædagog*) as professional staff dedicated to working with mediation. In practice, also the new museum professionals took a special interest in mediation. Leila Krogh, the former director of J.F. Willumsens Museum (1973–2006) explained: “[mediation] was my own personal approach to museum work – that was what I wanted with my subject” (Interview Leila Krogh).

As shown, the introduction of a legal framework for museums in Denmark can be seen as a result of a critical juncture created by the endogenous development of the Danish museum field existing prior to 1958. The legislation constituted a juridical professionalization by providing museums with a comprehensive ruleset, setting up two parallel museum fields with different structures for cultural historical museums in 1958 and art museums in 1964.

The museum acts focused on defining the role of the museums as public institutions, and during the 1960s the related debates centred on political ideas about the relevance of museums for a wider public, rather than on defining professional educational standards for the employees.

1976–2001: INSTITUTIONAL PROFESSIONALIZATION

The subsidiary system led to the hiring of a growing number of paid professionals in museums that had previously been run by volunteers. In 1967, DKM counted a total of 213 paid employees in state-subsidized history museums (Archive of DKM: *Museumsstatistik 1967–70*), and in 1980, this workforce had grown to 1007 permanent full-time positions (Gregersen *et al.* 1980:31). Furthermore, in 1972 the sum allotted to state-recognized museums was more than six times higher than in 1958 in constant prices (Report 727, 1975:204)⁷ due to the equal allocation of subsidies between the local and national level, the growing financial engagement from local authorities and the increase of subsidized museums. The success of engaging local finances made it difficult for the state to control its mounting expenses in the field. Moreover, recession replaced the economic optimism

of the 1960s. This contributed to creating another critical juncture in the development of the Danish museum field – originating from the intrinsic development of the field and the exogenous change – i.e. the international economic downturn.

In 1976, a new Museum Act, including history, nature and art museums, was passed and it significantly restructured the museum field and its subsidiary system. The hierarchical structure of the history museums was replaced by regional museum councils with the purpose of co-ordinating the work between the museums in the regions (Act 304 (1976), ch. 3). According to the Minister of Cultural Affairs, the new structure aimed at promoting ‘a desired decentralization of the museum administration while at the same time upholding a central coordination’ (FF, 1975–76, column 3642–3645). Thus, organization, coordination and consolidation of the field became central topics in the museum debate during the 1970s, 80s and 90s.

‘THE MUSEUMS WANT DUTIES’

Interestingly, the need for coordination was formulated by the museum field during the beginning of the 1970s, underlining the dynamic development of the museum field as well as the influence of the museum professionals. In 1972, Peter Seeberg, who was chair of DKM at the time, claimed that the museum field was facing a new phase of professionalization, advocating a new, necessary focus on coordination between the museums as the best way to live up to the role expected of the museums (Bro-Jørgensen *et al.* 2001:63–71). A decade later in 1982, the director of Odsherred museum, (1976–1988) and then chair of DK Ole Strandgaard, explained to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs:

The museums want duties. They want both the right and the duty to do research, collect, preserve and mediate. When this is desired to be expressed in the law, it is because it can be difficult for small local museums to be allowed to do the less popular tasks. With the law in hand, this could be easier (Archives of the Ministry of Culture j.nr. 215000-1-83: letter to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 20 August 1982).

In other words, the museum professionals wanted a statutory role in order to secure their bargaining position facing different local and national political agendas. This desire tied into a debate during the 1970s and 80s between the Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry for Cultural Affairs about the jurisdiction over the preservation of heritage sites and archaeological investigations. As a result, nine of the 44 paragraphs in the Museum Act of 1984 regarded the organization of archaeological work, including penal provisions for the violation of the duty to report possible archaeological findings during construction work (Act 291 (1984), ch. 8). Furthermore, in 1989 local authorities were instructed to inform ethnological museums about physical planning in the geographical area (Report 584, 1989, §36a). Thus, during the 1970s and 80s, the administrative role of the museum institutions concerning heritage was defined in increasing detail.

DEFINING THE FIELD

As part of the ongoing coordination, the legislation and the debate from the 1970s focused on defining professional museum work, the skills required and the internal division of labour in the field. In 1975, a brief written by SLT to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs stated that museum work consisted of three phases – collecting, preservation and mediation (FF,

1975–76, appendix B, column 1301–1302), a definition which in the 1984 act was expanded into the five so-called ‘pillars’ of museum work – collecting, registration, preservation, research and mediation (Act 291 (1984), § 2). Also, the definition of educational skills for museum directors was included in the legislation in 1984. The Act specified that the director of the museum should be a professionally educated, full-time employee (Act 291 (1984), § 11.1.7). Professional education was specified as ‘a university degree in a subject relevant for the museum such as archaeology, ethnology, ethnography, history, art history or natural history’ according to the topic of the museum (FF, 1983–84, Appendix A, column 891).

Finally, the division of labour between the individual museum institutions was organized. In 1984, each museum was required to claim responsibility for a specific part of the Danish cultural heritage or for a specified topic (Act 291 (1984), § 11.1.3). Furthermore, the National Museum and the National Gallery were included in the Museum Act as the main museums for cultural history and art with the task of further developing and keeping central, national records of archaeological work and art collections in state-recognized museums (Act 291 (1984), ch. 2, Act 291 (1984), §11.1.11). Thus, a centralized, hierarchical structure of the museum field was introduced and the previous responsibilities of the regional museums were placed with the main museums and newly formed supervisory body – the National Board of Museums (abbreviated SMN for *Statens Museumsnævn*). Such ongoing definitions of the museum field attest to its dynamic nature.

INFLUENTIAL PROFESSIONALS

Formally, the museum professionals continued to hold considerable influence over the

development of the field during the 1970s. In 1976, the new supervisory body, SMN, was introduced, consisting of 16 members of which eight were elected by the regional museum councils – i.e. museum professionals. The influence of museum professionals was evident, for instance, in discussions about restructuring the subsidiary system and introducing block grants – a political strategy which museum professionals managed to block several times during the 1970s and 1980s. However, the influence of the professionals declined towards the end of the 1980s. Whereas SMN initially approved or rejected applications for state subsidies, oversaw budgets and work plans, and approved the employment of professional staff (Act 304 (1976), ch. 2), in 1989 the council was reduced to 12 members without political representation, and the task of reviewing budgets was transferred to the local contributors (Act 380 (1989), § 1.6 and 1.13), thereby reducing the political influence and economic control of SMN considerably. In addition, in 1989 the state subsidies became subject to an annually set maximum, fixed on the state budget (Act 380 (1989), § 1.12). This meant that the annual state subsidies to the individual museums could vary according to the annual number of subsidized museums and local funding, making it impossible for the museums to budget with fixed state subsidies.

Accurately, Ole Strandgaard describes the development of the museum field as a transition from a museum world to a museum system (Interview Ole Strandgaard). The economic recession of the 1970s constituted an exogenous driver leading to significant changes in the subsidiary system of the museum field. However, as shown, the need for consolidation and coordination of the field was brought on by its massive growth and voiced by museum

professionals. In other words, the shifting focus of the legislation and the creation of a museum system was the result of endogenous developments as much as of the exogenous economic downturn.

The ongoing attempt to define the museum field, museum work and the skills required became key elements in the developments of the 1980s. In other words, the museum field underwent an institutional professionalization with a focus on defining the key properties of the field. Simultaneously, the museum professionals gradually lost influence over the supervision of the field, leading up to a critical juncture that developed during the 1990s and caused a structural break at the beginning of the new Millennium.

2001–2017: ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALIZATION

During the 1990s, the debate about the structure of the museum field in Denmark resurfaced (e.g. Banke 1991, Selmer 1991). The Minister of Culture asked a number of museum professionals to describe their visions for the future of the field. In one of the resulting essays, the director of Odense Bys Museer, Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen, envisioned a museum field consisting of state-financed central museums, 14 state-subsidized regional museums and a number of locally financed museums (Grøngaard Jeppesen 1995:28), thus reintroducing a hierarchically structured field. Even though this idea was heavily criticized by the museums (Harnow 2017), and the revision of the legislation was postponed due to the lack of agreement and ongoing regional experiments with co-operation and decentralization in the cultural field (Act 1085 (1995)), it reveals an emerging will to rethink the structure of the museum field.

In 2001, a new museum act was passed, continuing the focus on organizing the museum field – e.g. defining a parallel structure for cultural history, art and natural history museums, introducing the zoological, geological and botanical museums as the main museums for the natural field (Act 473 (2001), chs. 2, 3 and 4). Furthermore, the act reintroduced the focus on mediation by defining mediation for children and accessibility for the disabled as prerequisites for receiving state subsidies (Act 473 (2001), §4.1.12-13).

POWER STRUGGLE

Following an increase in the number of museums working with both archaeology, ethnology and history, the Museum Act of 2001 required not only an educated director but also educated staff covering the topics of the museum (Act 473 (2001), §14.1.7). This was facilitated by a program, introduced during the 1990s by SMN, subsidizing the employment of new permanent curatorial positions for a three-year period. This program, which existed until the middle of the 2000s, enabled a number of small museums to hire additional academic personnel.

In the remarks for the proposed bill, it was argued that the requirements for the director varied according to the size and the character of the institution, and therefore they were difficult to define (Bill 152 (2000-2001), remarks §14.1.7). As opposed to the previous legislation, the bill did not specify the academic qualifications of the director, but in the adopted Act this requirement was not changed, and the director was still required to have a 'relevant' education (Act 473 (2001) §14.1.7). This discrepancy between the bill and the act can be seen as a result of the resilience of the field and of the ongoing influence of the

museum professionals, but it also attests to the power struggle between the regulators – i.e. the ministry – and the practitioners.

The most significant change introduced by the Museum Act of 2001 was the replacement of the elected council SMN with a professional agency, the Heritage Agency of Denmark (abbreviated KUAS: Kulturarvsstyrelsen, Act 473 (2001), § 38). The first director of the agency was the former director of the National Museum from 1996 to 2002, Steen Hvass, who he describes the establishment of KUAS as an administrative manoeuvre in order to merge the field of cultural heritage from offices in several different ministries into one agency (Interview Steen Hvass).

However, in a speech given at the DKM annual meeting in 2000 the Minister of Culture stated: “The [...] council for the museums is characterized by being a collegial body, seeking consensus on all evaluations and opinions. This is not always appropriate when counselling a ministry” (Gerner Nielsen 2000). In other words, the structural change represented both a bureaucratic professionalization of the public administration but also a political showdown with the influence of the museum professionals.

CHANGING STRUCTURES

In 2007, a comprehensive reform of the Danish administrative structure resulted in the dissolution of the regional counties and mergers of a number of municipalities. Although the regional funding for museums transitionally was continued by the State, in practice the reform upended the organizational structure and the subsidiary system, which had been tied to the counties since 1976. Thus, the structural reform of 2007 constituted an exogenous event, which significantly affected

the development of the Danish museum field.

The Heritage Agency advocated and facilitated mergers between museums in order to create sustainable institutions (see e.g. Vinther 2010), and in 2010, the Ministry of Culture set up a working group to analyse the museum field and to make recommendations about its future structure, collaboration and co-ordination, core tasks, local anchorage and the implementation of new technologies (Kulturministeriet 2011:42–44). The group consisted of a representative from the Ministry and the directors of the Heritage Agency, the National Museum and the National Gallery, representing a centralized, top-down process that was directly opposed to the previous legislative debates in which the museum associations had been directly represented. After massive pressure from different stakeholders, a reference group was formed, including the Association of Danish Museums, which was created by a merger of the previous museum associations in 2005, and a number of other relevant stakeholders. The concluding report, which formed the basis for the subsequent revision of the Museum Act, recommended that the structure should be continued but with a focus on enhancing quality, coordination and professionalism (Kulturministeriet 2011). Thus, the envisaged showdown with the previous museum structure did not happen – probably due to the continuous influence from the practitioners and other stakeholders in the field.

SUSTAINABILITY, RELEVANCE AND SIMPLIFICATION

The current Museum Act, which was passed in December 2012, maintains the definition of museums as public institutions with five in-

110 terdependent tasks – namely collection, registration, preservation, research and mediation. However, it also reintroduces the value-based mission of the museum field by focusing on ‘professional and economic sustainability’, the cooperation between museums and the outside world (Act 1391 (2012), § 1.1), as well as actualization of knowledge and relevance for citizens and society (Act 1391 (2012), § 2).

The Museum Act simplified the regulations by abolishing the definition of specific qualifications for museum directors, arguing that both academic and managerial skills are required (Bill L 24 (2012) § 1.11). The Association of Danish Museums endorsed this argument during the legislative process in August 2012. Nevertheless, in practice a museum-related, academic education is still valued for museum directors. A survey of the staff listed on the websites of state-recognized museums in 2019 shows that only three of the 97 state-recognized museums have directors with education not directly related to the topic of the museum – in one case, the museum director is educated as a librarian, in the second the director is educated within the field of sociology of religion and in the third the director has a degree in political sciences. The former director of Roskilde Museum 1977–2017, Frank Birkebæk, furthermore explained the significance of academic professionalism within the traditional museum-related disciplines by saying:

The most important thing is that you are an educated professional – with a professional museum-related education – when you are a museum director. [...] If you do not have the professionalism, you do not understand the institution and then you are not capable of developing it (Interview Frank Birkebæk).

Thus, Frank Birkebæk is maintaining an academic museum education as a prerequisite

for working in museums at least at managerial level. In other words, the deletion of the definition of skills in the Museum Act of 2012 attests to the increasing power of the regulative part of the museum field. Nevertheless, the importance of academic training within museum-related disciplines has been maintained – indicating a certain resilience in the field related to connecting the definition of museum professionalism to certain disciplines within the humanities.

Another way in which the Museum Act of 2012 changed the museum field was by changing the subsidiary system for awarding research grants – in practice requiring applicants to hold a doctoral degree (Bill 24 (2012), point 3.4.4.4). For museums that had predominantly employed candidates with the *Magister Artium* degree, an academic degree between the Master and the PhD existing in the humanities in Denmark until 2007, this constituted a challenge. The PhD degree had been introduced in the humanities in 1993 and the candidates had initially been rejected by the museums as too theoretical for practical museum work (Danske Museer 1996, SMN’s annual report:12). The new rules excluded most curators from research grants. The enforcement of the rules represented a professionalization and thereby a specialization of the field of research in museums.

Even though the Heritage Agency initiated programs to accredit existing museum researchers and to subsidize the education of new PhDs at the museums, the change has significantly influenced the organization of work within the museum institutions, leading to increasing division of labour and specialization.

To sum up, since the 1990s the museum field has been characterized by an endogenous power struggle between the Ministry of Culture and museum professionals – characterized

by the declining influence of the practitioners. The introduction of a professional, supervising agency in 2001 marked a critical juncture in the development of the Danish museum field. Due to the strong resilience of the field, the Museum Act of 2001 continued the previous focus on both coordination and organization of the field, maintaining the definition of academic professionalism. However, facilitated by the administrative changes in Denmark in 2007 as an exogenous event, the Museum Act of 2012, reformulated the role of museums, changing the legal framework for the Danish museum field from predominantly defining a professional institutional field to defining the ideological value of museums – thereby subjecting the museums field to a new political professionalization.

THREE PHASES OF PROFESSIONALIZATION

In my analysis of the Danish museum legislation since 1958, I have identified three critical junctures, which can be seen as historical conditions for the current museum field – namely the introduction of specific museum legislation in 1958, the restructuring of the museum field represented by the Museum Act of 1976 and the introduction of a professional supervision in 2001.

On the one hand, each of the junctures was formed by intrinsic developments in the museum field, creating perceived instabilities in the form of a lack of resources during the 1950s and 60s, rapid growth and the need for the consolidation of political bargaining power during the 1970s and 1980s and the power struggle between the Ministry of Culture and the museum professionals during the 1990s and 2000s.

In addition, the analysis has shown how

changing aims in the legislation have contributed to different dimensions of professionalization – namely legal/political professionalization, institutional professionalization and administrative professionalization.

On the other hand, the junctures were promoted by exogenous events namely as the formation of the welfare state during the 1950s, the economic downturn during the 1970s and the administrative reform in 2007. Thus, in some ways, the development of the Danish museum field confirms the theory of punctuated equilibrium; however, it also accentuates a dynamic process in which intrinsic developments form critical junctures. In other words, the current museum field is conditioned by specific events as well as by intrinsic developments determined by the power relation between regulators and practitioners.

A NEW CRITICAL JUNCTURE?

In 2017, the debate about the museum fields was reopened, motivated by the need for further sustainability in the institutions and the perceived inscrutability of the existing subsidiary system. Two working groups, each consisting of a former museum director and three consultants from outside the museum field, were asked by the minister to consider the need for equality in the requirements for museums, the future distribution of responsibility between the local and national level, future incentives to the museums and future possibilities for re-evaluating and revoking state recognitions (Mission statement, 30 June 2017). The mission of the groups thus suggested a significant showdown with central parts of the existing structure, e.g. the distribution of tasks and the equality throughout the museum field.

In December 2017, the two groups handed in their reports, both suggesting a significant restructuring of the field and a redefinition of central concepts – both to some degree returning to previous ideas and debates. The first report (Birkebæk & Bak 2017) underlined the relevance of museums as public institutions, suggesting a subsidiary system based on performance and reducing the definition of museum work to preservation and mediation – thus doing away with the time-honoured five pillars of museum work. The second report (Nielsen & Nissen 2017) proposed a hierarchical system in which only the state-owned museums and 5–10 regional knowledge centres should be state-subsidized by performance contracts, while financing the rest of the museums locally based on block grants.

Adhering to the tradition of public debate among stakeholders, no proposal for a new Museum Act has been introduced as of the beginning of 2019. However, the general political willingness to renegotiate the basic structures organizing the museum field, the relative radicalism of the proposed solutions and the relatively weak position of the museum practitioners suggest that we are at a new critical juncture, and a fundamental renegotiation of the structure of the Danish museum field is possible in the near future.

NOTES

1. Mission statement for vision groups concerning the distribution of tasks and subsidies in the museum field, 30 June 2017. https://kum.dk/fileadmin/KUM/Documents/Nyheder%20og%20Presse/Pressemeddelelser/2017/Kommissorium_for_visionsgrupper_om_museer.pdf (accessed February 2019).
2. Source: <https://en.unesco.org/cultnatlaws/list>

(accessed February 2019). However, the Japanese Museum Act dates back to 1951 and the Swedish Museum Act is not mentioned in the UNESCO list.

3. In 1958, the Museum Act only included history museums, and in 1964 and 1969 separate legislation was passed for art museums and history museums.
4. The study is part of my doctoral research on the development of the museum profession in Denmark since 1958, which is included in the large, national, Danish research program *Our Museum*.
5. For this perspective, I thank one of the anonymous referees of this paper.
6. The museums in the Copenhagen area were not part of the initial analysis.
7. The number of subsidized history museums grew from 38 in 1958–59 receiving 354,000 dkr (i.e. about 736,000 dkr. in 1972) to 75 museums receiving 4,874,600 dkr. in 1972–73.

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