

## Attitudes towards and conceptions of digital technologies and media in Danish museums

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*This paper examines the attitudes and conceptions of digital technologies and media in Danish museum organisations and discusses how the museums understand and prioritise communication compared to formidling (dissemination of knowledge), and to what extent this influences the use of digital technologies and media. The paper argues that digital technologies and media at times are considered digital add-ons to the traditional museum formidling and communication. In order to create a coherent and complete museum experience (both on-site and online), it is necessary to develop integrated and collaborative work processes and structures between the Departments of Formidling and Communication. The paper draws on empirical data and findings from: 1) a mapping of Danish museum organisations in relation to formidling and communication, and 2) expert interviews with four interviewees involved in Danish museum management.*

### Introduction

The possible and potential digital technologies and media available to Danish museums<sup>1</sup> are manifold and for more than a decade have been theorised and examined by researchers and museum professionals. The paradigm shift from the collection as the museum's main focus to a user-oriented museum, and from the authoritarian elitist voice of the museum

to an open, differentiated dialogue with the users, has long been acknowledged in scholarly treatises, journals and anthologies. The museum is now defined as and referred to as *responsive* (Lang, Reeve & Woollard, 2006), *reinvented* (Anderson, 2004), *engaging* (Black, 2005), *constructed* (Hein, 2005 [1998]), *“post”* (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000), *participatory* (Simon, 2010) etc.

In museum studies literature, digital technologies and media are widely accepted and understood as means to appeal to and connect with new audiences by use of approaches based on dialogue, communities, forum and social media, user-generated content and co-creations (cf. Løssing, 2009; Cameron & Kenderdine, 2007). Likewise, democratisation, accessibility and engagement have been emphasised in relation to digital media and technologies (Tallon & Walker, 2008; Simon, 2010). Several museum conferences address the use, limitations and reservations of digital media and technologies both in practice and in theory. However, research regarding how digital technologies and media affect museum organisation, work processes and daily work are still very scarce, and in a Danish context almost non-existent. Darren Peacock has addressed how digital information and communication technologies act as a “catalyst for change” within the museums’ organisation (Peacock, 2008, p. 334). However, Peacock’s approach is entirely theoretical. Other literature focuses on museum professionals and museum organisations, but from a management perspective (e.g., Moore, 1994, 1999; Edson & Dean, 1994; Lord & Lord, 1997).

This paper aims to examine how *formidling* (i.e., the dissemination of knowledge) and communication are understood and prioritised in the Danish museum landscape in order to identify the terms and conditions under which digital technologies and media are used. In order to avoid an unintended interpretation of the word *formidling*, when translating it into English, we will use the Danish *formidling* throughout the paper instead of “dissemination of knowledge”<sup>2</sup>.

Digital *formidling* and communication refer to digital mobile and handheld devices, videos and games, kiosks, websites etc., online as well as on-site. The paper includes excerpts from interviews with four Danish museum professionals from management, and a mapping of *Formidling* and Communication departments in Danish museums, by studying Danish museum websites in order to examine the attitudes and conceptions of *formidling* and communication in relation to the use of digital technologies and media. The point of departure for the paper is the interdisciplinary field of museum studies. Although the paper examines *formidling* and communication in Danish museums, analysing the museum organisations, the paper does not include a particular business or organisational theoretical approach.<sup>3</sup>

The paper is organised as follows. In the first section, we examine the use of digital technologies and media in museums. This is followed by a section in which the concepts of *formidling* and communication are defined in a Danish museum setting. In the third section, the method of the study is introduced. And in the fourth section, we examine attitudes towards and conceptions of *formidling* and communication, drawing on our data. The next

section argues how “the digital” in Danish museums can be considered an add-on. The paper sums up the presented arguments in the concluding section.

## Use of digital technologies and media in museums

Digital technologies and media deal with electronic transmission of information, offering a variety of different portals through which the user can engage and take part in what is communicated (Newbold, Boyd-Barrett & Bulck, 2002). Digital communication then represents a number of different modes of expression and ways of communicating:

*In a technological world, the museum visit no longer begins when a person enters the building, nor need it end when she or he leaves. The museum's space is but one site – albeit a privileged one – in a continuum of the visitor's imaginative universe. (Tallon & Walker, 2008, p. 3)*

As this quote suggests, the possibilities and potential of digital technologies and media for museums are many, and the museum's increased interest in digital technologies and media online and on site is slowly influencing the way traditional *formidling* and communication are carried out. In the “Foreword” to the publication *Digital museumsformidling – i brugerperspektiv*, from 2009, former Minister of Culture Carina Christensen states that it is of utmost importance that museums have the courage to experiment with the new digital technologies and media in order to communicate with their visitors in ways that create new museum experiences. These experiences are to appeal to present, future, and potential museum visitors (Løssing, 2009, p. 3).

Unlike communication by means of traditional media (posters, catalogues, pamphlets etc.), digital media presents the possibility of transferring information from one media to another and thereby separating the information from the media (Tallon & Walker, 2008). Furthermore, digital technologies and media allow *remediation*, meaning an intermedial relationship in which new media refashion and reshape previous media and ways of communicating. This is not for the purpose of replacing the old media, but in order to extend the possibilities within communication (Bolter & Grusin, 2000).

## Defining *formidling* and communication

According to the Danish Consolidated Act on Museums, museums are obliged to collect, register, preserve, research and *formidle* the Danish culture, art and natural history (The Danish Ministry of Culture, 2006). The International Council of Museums (ICOM), however, uses communication and exhibition instead of *formidling* (ICOM, 2007). In the Danish Act, *formidling* refers to a one-way transmission and distribution (of knowledge), whereas the ICOM definition indicates a reciprocal approach by stating both communication and exhibition as core functions of the museum.

*Formidling* is an important concept in the Danish museum landscape and is often translated into English as *communication*. Etymologically, *formidle* in Danish means to act as a link or a connection between two parts. *Formidling* is an ambiguous term covering a broad spectrum of concepts from knowledge, education and learning to communication and is used within several scientific traditions (Gudiksen, 2005). *Formidling* can be understood as one-way transmissions, as reciprocal exchanges and interpretations of meaning and as (inter)actions and change. The heterogeneity of the concept of *formidling* is also reflected within a Danish museum setting; although, it is often translated into and related to a one-way transmission and distribution of knowledge and information. In recent years, *formidling* has received great political, economical and museological attention.

The verb *communication* is in turn derived from the Latin *commūnicāre* – meaning to exchange, share or impart information and messages. Communication is an extensive and contested concept understood in a number of different ways. Among these conceptions is a transmission view of communication or a ritual (or cultural) view of communication (Carey, 1989). The transmission view of communication deals with a one-way perception of communication, transferring and imparting messages to receivers (closely related to *formidling*). The latter is linked to a cultural process of “sharing”, “participation” and “association”, concerned with creating, reproducing and sustaining society, meanings, signs and shared perceptions (ibid.). As such, communication is concerned with a reciprocal way of *communicating* – the willingness to negotiate and enter into dialogue with someone.

## Method

The empirical foundation for the analyses presented in this paper consists of: 1) a mapping of the Danish museum websites on the basis of how the museums are organised in relation to *formidling* and communication; and 2) expert interviews with four Danish museum leaders.

## Mapping of museum websites

In order to examine the Danish museums’ approach to and understanding of *formidling* and communication, a mapping of the state-owned and state-subsidised Danish museum websites has been conducted. The mapping is based on how the museums are organised in relation to *formidling* and communication.

The data were collected and categorised from the Danish museums’ websites (May - June 2010). The categories are divided into departments, job titles and descriptions and have been selected according to the museum’s activities concerning communication and *formidling*:

- Communication
- *Formidling*
- Communication Subdivision,
- Communication and *Formidling*
- Head of *Formidling*
- Head of Communication
- *Formidler*
- Communicator

A museum website is an official and public document in line with printed and published documents from the museum. In this sense, we consider the museum website a valid source for extracting data about *formidling* and communication activities in the Danish museum organisations. The data consist of organisation diagrams, presentations and descriptions of departments, functions and activities, job titles etc. From this, we will analyse how the Danish museums approach, understand, and prioritise *formidling* and communication. We are well aware of the fact that the information given on the museum websites represents the formalised museum organisation and structure and may not represent the most recent organisation processes in every Danish museum.

All of the state-owned and state-subsidised museums have websites; however, the size and purpose of the websites vary considerably. Some are no more than a mediated online business card holding an address and information about opening hours, while others consist of several thousand pages and include blogs, Facebook, YouTube etc. on their websites. Furthermore, not all of the museums have information about their organisations and employees on their websites. For a small group of minor museums, no information on the organisation or employees is present on their websites.<sup>4</sup> This applies to 10 museums (8 pct.) out of the 123 Danish museums; thus, they cannot be taken into consideration in this paper. The remaining 113 (92 pct.) museums constitute the database for this paper regarding the categorisation of the organisations' job titles and competencies. Figure 1 shows how the 113 museums in this mapping are distributed by museum type.

## Expert interviews

In addition, this paper draws on four expert interviews with Danish museum professionals working in museum management. The interviews were conducted during 2008-2009. The interviews were all conducted and transcribed in Danish and then translated into English for the purpose of this paper. Moreover, we have decided to anonymise all interviewees and quotes used in this paper. All of the interviews were carried out with the same overall objective: to explore the use of digital technologies and media in museums, working procedures in connection with digital projects and visitor studies.

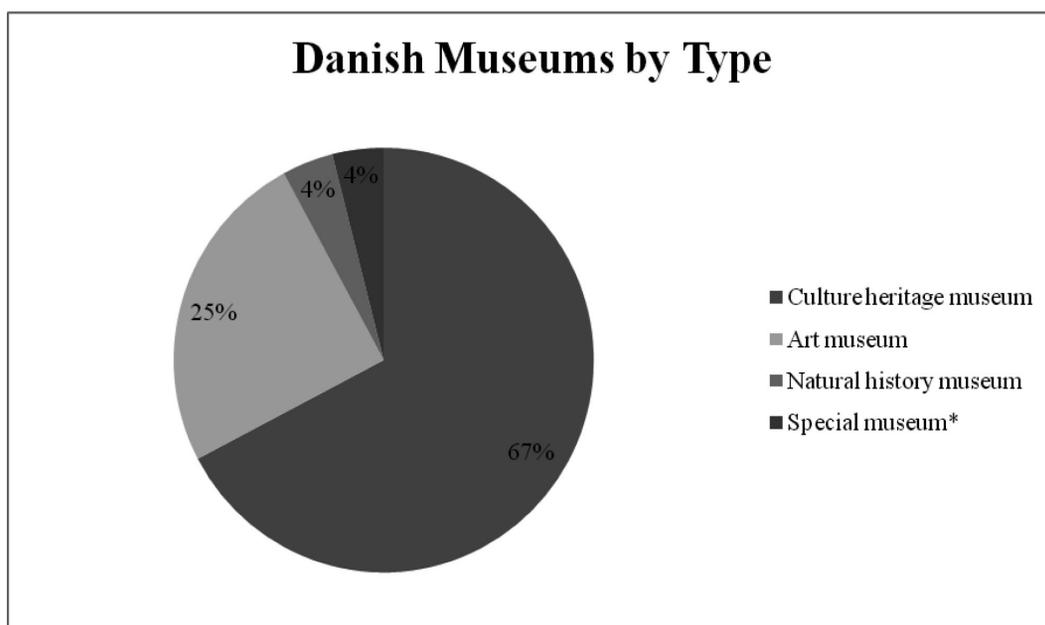


Figure 1: \* "Special museum" refers to museums categorised as both cultural heritage, art, and natural history museums.

The interviewees for this paper were selected in order to fulfil the requirements of an expert interview (Flick, 2009), with a focus on the knowledge and experience of museum work processes and museum organisation in relation to *formidling* and communication. The interviewees are all from Danish cultural heritage and art museums and hold positions as Museum Director, Head of Department of *Formidling* and Head of Communications. They were selected to cover different attitudes and conceptions of *formidling* and communication, from a management perspective, regarding the use of digital technologies and media in Danish museums. The majority of Danish state-owned and state-subsidised museums are cultural heritage and art museums, i.e., only seven out of 123 museums are natural history museums. Therefore, we have not selected any interviewees from natural history museums.

### ***Formidling* and communication in a Danish museum context**

Figures 2 and 3 (below) present the data from the mapping of Danish museum organisations in relation to *formidling* and communication museum activities. Figure 2 presents the number of museums with a Department of *Formidling*, a Department of Communication, a Communication Subdivision or a Department of *Formidling* and Communication, and how these departments are distributed according to specific types of museum.

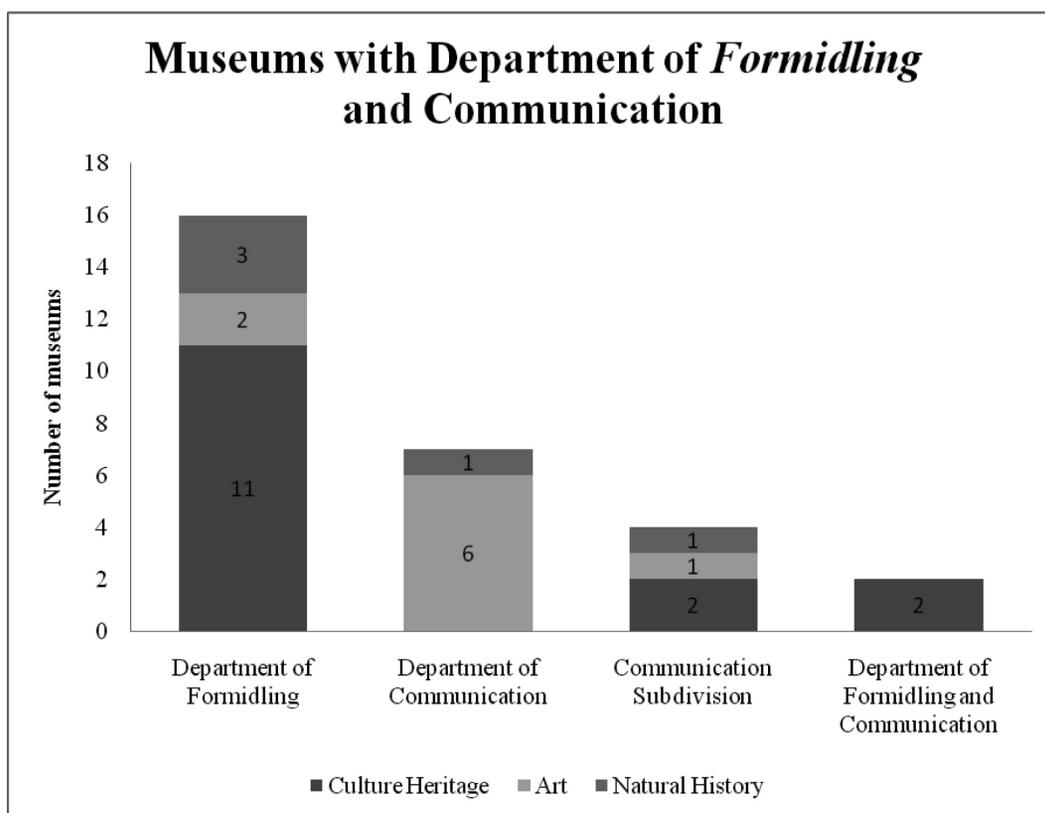


Figure 2

Figure 3 presents information on *Formidling* and Communication employees at Danish museums, including Head of *Formidling* and Head of Communication and the museum type distribution.

### Formidling at the Danish museum

According to the Danish Museum Act, *formidling* is one of the museums' core activities, but only 16 of the museums (14 pct.) have an actual Department of *Formidling* (Figure 2), and only 45 (40 pct.) of the museums have employees specifically assigned to *formidling* (Figure 3). However, this does not mean that 60 pct. of the museums disregard *formidling*. Many of the museum curators have a variety of functions one would not generally consider part of their job description – this is especially true for the smaller museums with a maximum of 12 employees in total.

The various interpretations and translations of *formidling* are visible within the Danish museum field. According to our data, the Danish museums themselves understand and translate *formidling* differently. Of the 16 Danish museums with a Department of *Formidling*, six different translations are present:

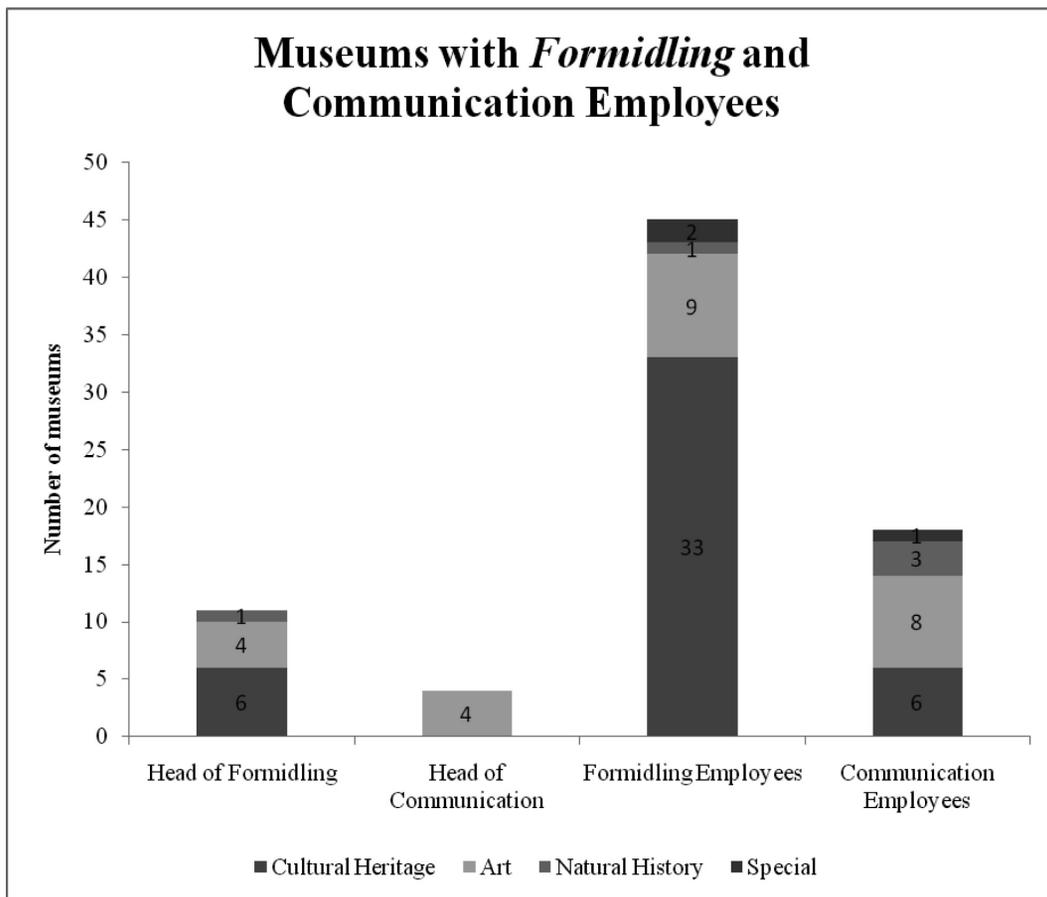


Figure 3

- Education
- Exhibition
- Public outreach
- Press
- PR
- Communication

Even among the three Danish principal museums of cultural heritage, art and natural history there are great divergences. The National Museum of Denmark’s *Formidlingsafdeling* (Department of *formidling*) is translated into “Department of Research and Exhibition”; while the National Gallery of Denmark translates the department into “Department of Education”, and at the National History Museum, *Formidlingsafdelingen* is the “Department of Exhibition and Public Outreach”. The translations are interesting because they each represent a different perspective, understanding and approach to *formidling*. Implied in the

translations are the continuously present transformations in producing translations, including intentional and unintentional discursive strategies.

*Formidling as education* is closely connected to the notion of the museum as a knowledge-based institution. Education has been an important function for museums since the emergence of the institution. The main goal of the nineteenth century public museums was to edify and enlighten the citizens; however, they primarily attracted the elite. Within recent years, museum education has changed immensely. *Formidling* at museums previously had something to do with disseminating the museum exhibitions and objects to children and young people (Head of *Formidling*, 2009). Nowadays, however, it is not limited to educating school children but covers a whole range of different public activities (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999 [1994]).

Both *formidling as exhibition* and *formidling as public outreach* are related to the concept of museums “being for somebody” – in comparison to “being about something” (Weil, 2002). Exhibition is a part of the ICOM museum definition and is one of the five core museum functions, as already stated. From a Danish museum perspective, exhibition is an element of *formidling*.

According to the public service-like commitment, the Danish state-owned and state-subsidised museums cannot exclude any groups or subgroups in society. If a museum is to meet the demands of being a public institution, it needs to engage everyone; this includes and requires constantly reaching out to new groups of visitors (outreach). The term *Formidling as public outreach* emphasises this approach.

*Formidling as press and PR* is about publicity. *Formidling as press* indicates that the department first of all handles the press, writes press releases, and contacts journalists and critics.

The English translation of *formidling* as a term (and not as a concept) is usually communication, and in this respect covers dissemination, to inform, educate, distribute etc. However, communication implies a reciprocal relationship between the museum and the audience, in which the audience has to participate actively in order to engage, answer, learn, experience and so forth, whereas, to disseminate, inform, educate and distribute entails a one-way relationship in which information and knowledge are passed on to a passive audience or receiver. *Formidling as communication* captures the trend of the experience economy where communication is an incontrovertible necessity in order to win over the audience.

## Communication at the museum

At Danish museums, Communication Departments and employees traditionally deal with communication outside exhibitions, such as signposting, websites, marketing, press and so forth. According to one of our interviewees, employees in the Departments of Communication are largely employed to focus on external communication in order to bring visitors into the museums, after which, *formidling* takes over (Head of *Formidling*, 2009). As such,

the ability to reflect and influence society and target future visitors has a particularly high priority and is seen as one of the great qualities in communication.

While 16 museums have a Department of *Formidling*, only seven museums (6 pct.) have a separate department assigned especially to communication. Four museums have a communication subdivision (Figure 2), and 12 of the Danish museums have a communication staff (Figure 3). The museums with Communication Departments or communication subdivisions are generally larger museums (with only one exception). All seven museums with a Communication Department are on the list of the most visited Danish museums in 2008.<sup>5</sup> The four museums that have a Communication Subdivision represent both museums of art and cultural heritage. In more than one instance, Communication Departments or Subdivisions consist of marketing employees and graphical designers. One should consider that *communication as marketing* is in line with the findings of the report *Strategisk kommunikation i den danske museumsverden* (Bysted-Sandberg & Kjeldsen, 2008).<sup>6</sup> The report concludes that Danish museums generally view “*communication as PR and marketing*” (ibid. 52). In doing so, the museums commodify and instrumentalise communication as a delimited object directed towards an audience (museum visitors as consumers).<sup>7</sup> Communication is considered a specific set of practices in the museum organisation and Danish museum communication staff are generally hired for marketing, press, web, graphic design and sponsor and fundraising positions.<sup>8</sup> In this respect, the museums disregard the cultural approach of communication where museum communication is understood as a holistic process of sharing, negotiating and producing coherence at all levels, including the organisation as a whole. The museum communicates in everything it does; every employee is an ambassador for the museum and every text, analogue as well as digital, influences how the museum is experienced and perceived by the public (Wallace, 2006).

In more than one case, the communication subsection is placed under the secretariat of the management (e.g., the Natural History Museum of Denmark). This accentuates the understanding of communication as a transmissive act, where knowledge and information are conveyed from the museum management to the general public (the museum audience) with the communication subdivision as the mediator.

Eighteen Danish museums have a specified communication officer employed (Figure 3). However, as the strategic communication report indicates, communication functions are to be found and shared in numerous positions and departments in the museums. Especially in smaller- and medium-sized museums. Since work with digital media and technologies for education and communication purposes does not have a long history, the use of digital media and technologies is not yet rooted in a specific museum department.

## The digital add-on

As previously stated, communication is not mentioned in the Danish Consolidated Act on Museums, unlike *formidling*. This might be one of the reasons why only seven Danish museums (6 pct.) have a Communication Department (Figure 3). In the Danish report on strategic museum communication, which is based on a questionnaire, the numbers are slightly different.<sup>9</sup> However, in the questionnaire, the museums themselves had to report whether or not they have a Department of Communication and communication employees. They were not asked to state if they have a separate Department of Communication or only communication employees, making it impossible to separate the one from the other. Furthermore, the report does not distinguish between communication and *formidling* as this paper does.

Particularly large Danish museums often have a clear-cut boundary between the different departments. As one informant stated:

*The museum departments are very separate from each other. Often the departments consider themselves as separate units with nothing or very little in common with the other departments. (Head of Communication, 2008)*

Additionally, many Danish museums frequently hire project employees from outside the museum, such as concept developers, web developers, IT consultants, animators and so forth, for projects involving digital technologies and media. When the projects are finished, the accumulated know-how of the project disappears when the people involved in the project disappear. The former Museum Director Carsten U. Jensen of the National Museum of Denmark articulated this concern in 2007 to the Danish newspaper *Politiken*:

*The consequences are that I employ some people who disappear as soon as the project is finished. The people leave the National Museum of Denmark and take their know-how and knowledge with them. And know-how and knowledge are crucial for a knowledge institution such as the National Museum. This is how we improve and innovate. (Strøyer, 2007)*

In terms of Head of Department, only four museums have a Head of Communication whilst in comparison eleven museums have a Head of *Formidling*. It is striking that none of the three state-owned principal museums (art, cultural history and natural history) have a Head of Communication employed (as of August 2010) and therefore, none of the principal museums have a communication professional in their management. Besides the obvious staff problems that stem from lacking a head of communication in the museum management – watching out for the employees' interests, ensuring training and education etc. – the Head of Communication is also expected to ensure quality, innovation and coherence in the department. The importance of having a Head of Communication in the management of an organisation in order to communicate strategically has been stressed numerous times

in the literature (e.g., Petersen, 2000). The Head of Communication should be involved in drawing up the mission and vision of the museum and creating a united museum identity (Head of Communication, 2009).<sup>10</sup>

Neither the National Museum of Denmark nor the Natural History Museum of Denmark have a distinct Communication Department. Instead, they have Communication Subdivisions. Only the National Gallery of Denmark has a specific Communication Department. The museum has one of the largest Communication Departments in Denmark, with 15 employees, including full-time and part-time employees and interns. The Communication Department is responsible for a number of different communication related projects and tasks such as web communications, press contact, marketing, fundraising, museum membership, activities on the museum stage and cinema etc. While the other departments at the National Gallery of Denmark<sup>11</sup> have a Head of Department and are all represented in the museum management, communication has no Head of Department.

### Prioritising of resources

Digital technologies and media have received great attention and financial support in Denmark in order to enhance the museum experience and attract new groups of users and audiences to the museums. However, our interviews with Danish museum professionals still indicate a generally lower prioritisation of mediating the museum experience through digital technologies and media.

*There exists a resistance against communicating and formidling digitally [at the museum]. Because it just means more work on top of all the other things you're supposed to do, right?*  
(Museum Director, 2009)

As indicated by the quote above, work with digital technologies and media at museums is not prioritised enough to employ more staff. The employees are simply expected to do more work. Our data show that one explanation can be found in the (mis)understandings of the technologies and media, especially by the management. Digital media are often regarded as new and fast media that demand less resources and skills compared to older and more traditional museum media such as text labels, wall posters, catalogues, pamphlets etc. This suggests an understanding of digital media as superficial, simple, coarse and lacking refinement. This often leads to implicit and explicit disagreements concerning the prioritisation of resources between, for instance, the management and the Communication Department responsible for developing and maintaining the museum website.

Museum professionals' lack of technological skills is addressed in the publication *The Digital Museum. A Think Guide* (Din & Hecht, 2007). Din and Hecht argue that museum professionals at all levels in the organisation and in all practices must consider technology infusions and how they affect the museum:

*As technology's effect on museums' business processes and strategic planning grows, staff need to understand the role of technology even more urgently. (Din & Hecht, 2007, p. 16)*

Head of the Department of Public Services at the National History Museum of London Roger S. Miles has applied the traditional linear communication perspective to the exhibition making process (Figure 4).

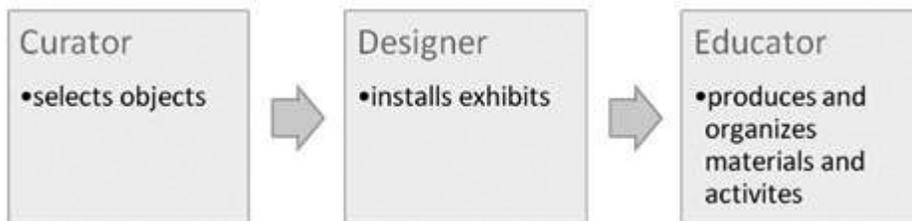


Figure 4

In this model,<sup>12</sup> the curators define the exhibitions and select the objects without any interference from other departments – the designers install the actual exhibition and finally the educators are brought into the process (Hooper-Greenhill 1999, p. 38). The most important part in the exhibition producing process is the curator, without whom the exhibition would never take place in the first place. According to this model, however, the least important in this process is the educator.

In Figure 5, our data is used in relation to the digital technologies and media in exhibitions. We have placed digital technologies and media as the last part of the process. The position illustrates that digital technologies and media often are thought of as an extra remedial layer which can be added or left out, for instance, in cases of budget cut-downs. The model is of course not as simple as depicted; however in overall terms, it shows the complex process of producing an exhibition, which is sequential at many Danish museums.

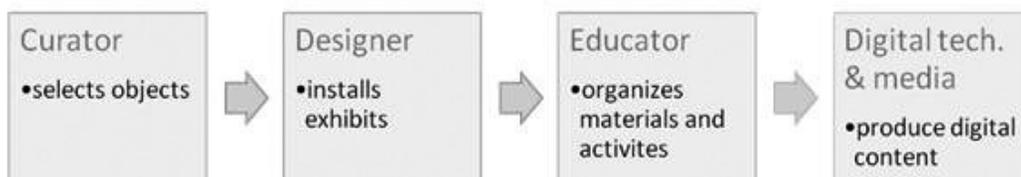


Figure 5

## The multiplicity of museum practices

When working with digital communication and *formidling*, in- and outside the exhibitions, and cross media – transferring information from one media to another, on-site and online – it is not enough to focus on the traditional tasks of the Departments of Communication and *Formidling*. Digital technologies and media emphasise the need for new approaches and further collaboration as well as qualifications found within departments of communication and *formidling*.

*It is interesting, though, to consider whether digital media signifies the end of having separate departments [communication and formidling] as we know them today. (Head of Communication, 2009)*

Drawing from the works of the Dutch ethnographer Annemarie Mol and her concept *multiplicity of reality-in-practice* (Mol, 2002), we regard the two departments not so much as different professions having separate tasks, but rather as different approaches or practices dealing with the same overall objective. This is in order to ensure that the museum reaches both present and potential museum visitors to inform and engage them in exhibitions, new findings and learning activities etc. As a result, the collective work process in itself is multiple and pluralistic. It is not to be regarded as fragmented, but rather in terms of coordination and co-operation, in order to secure a coherent, strong and persuasive result.

In order to utilise the possibilities presented by digital media, as well as to create a joint and persuasive museum experience, making the visitors want to engage and participate in the exhibition on site and online – before, during and after the visit – it is necessary for the Department of Communication and *Formidling* to work together. As the Head of *Formidling* expressed during an interview:

*There is a big difference between the work done by the Communication and Formidlings Department, but there are also a great number of common features and overlap in what they do. The museums still need to figure out where to find the common features and how to work together... Using digital media and technologies in a museum ought to be an integrated part of the overall strategy for Communication and Formidling. (Head of Formidling, 2009)*

It is pointed out that “*the museums still need to figure out where the common features exist and how to work together*” (Head of *Formidling*, 2009). The challenge is to realise this as well as acknowledge the fact that it might be a rather complicated process which will need a focused and strategic effort provided by the management. Once again, we see the problem of not having a Head of Department to coordinate the process of co-operation and ensure consistency and coherence in everything digital or analogue targeted at visitors, members, donors etc.

Digital museum communication heightens the accessibility of various types of objects, knowledge and research results considerably, both inside and outside the museum as well as offline and online. It is absolutely central to this matter that everybody and everything communicated have an impact on how the museum is perceived and experienced (Wallace, 2006).

Imagine a visitor in an art exhibition being able to browse through a considerable amount of archive material about a specific artist and his work by use of a touch screen. If the curators and the staff responsible for the exhibition website have cooperated, the visitor should be able to find the same material in the exhibition as well as on the museum website.

As Head of Communication has expressed:

*The digital is nothing in itself, but is a tool for communication. I see no separation between the two in the future. The digital is to be integrated into our marketing, press and communication ideas and strategies. (Head of Communication, 2009)*

Unfortunately, this is not always the case. It is interesting to consider that despite the fact that curators have been preparing for an exhibition for months or years, digital media is still used as a kind of add-on or a fun gadget, be it a website designed for the exhibition or some kind of digital device placed in the room of the exhibition. As pointed out by Loïc Tallon and Kevin Walker in *Digital Technologies and the Museum Experience*, it is not uncommon for a curator to spend all resources on the traditional tasks in the exhibition, and disregard the importance of having “*listened to the accompanying audio tour*” (Tallon & Walker, 2008).

Use of digital platforms of any kind should not simply be regarded as fancy gadgets made in the last minute with the sole purpose of attracting visitors for the wauw-effect. Online platforms, handheld devices, screens etc. are becoming continually more common and something people expect, and they do not necessarily have a long lasting wow-factor in today's society. Especially young people are used to mobile phones, GPS and online services and it would be a mistake to think that digital technologies and media alone are enough to attract young people to the museums. In other words, digital technologies and media will not make this particular group more or less interested in visiting museums. It still comes down to the museum, the specific subject of the exhibition, the expected museum experience or context of the visit (Holdgaard & Simonsen, 2010).

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed how Danish museums understand and prioritise communication compared to *formidling* and how this influences the work procedures and work processes. Danish museums distinguish heavily between *formidling* and communication. We have also identified a difference in position and prioritisation between the two. Communication is often perceived as secondary to *formidling* which is regarded as one of the

museum's core activities. Secondly, we have identified that digital technologies and media are often considered fast in terms of workload and resources, which means that there is a conception of digital technologies and media demanding less resources and skills compared to traditional museum *formidling* like text labels, wall posters, catalogues, pamphlets etc.

The Danish museums should reconsider and rethink how they engage, reach out and communicate with their users in order to engage the visitors in a more reciprocal way of communicating, rather than merely transfer knowledge to them. The museums increased interest in digital technologies and media online and on-site will generate new possibilities in this respect. This, in turn, presents a need for an increased focus on a strong strategic, coherent and collaborative approach. Both *formidling* and communication should have the same overall objective: to communicate with and engage present and potential museum visitors.

We emphasise that everything a museum does influences how the public perceives and experiences the museum. As a result, the use of digital technologies and media ought to be an integrated part of a combined strategy, collaborative approaches and routines for *formidling* and communication. This is to achieve a strong, successful and coherent identity appealing to existing and future visitors and users. However, as shown in this paper, there is often little or no coherence or overall strategy when working with digital technologies and media in the Departments of Communication and *Formidling*. Our conclusion is that it is necessary to reconsider communication and *formidling* as a multiplicity of practices that work together rather than as separate areas of expertise.

The results of this study should be considered a foundation for understanding how digital media and technologies are articulated, prioritised, and implemented in the Danish museum organisations. However, more research within this field needs to be done in order to grasp if, how and why the museum organisations change or new practices and behaviours emerge as a result of the entry of the digital media and technologies in the museums.

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## Notes

1. In this paper, museums are regarded as the 123 Danish state-owned and state-subsidized museums that refer to The Danish Consolidated Act on Museums. These are categorised into three categories: art museums, cultural heritage museums and natural history museums. Thus, private collections, galleries, experience centres, zoos and aquariums are excluded.
2. None of the largest Danish museums or the three principal museums (The National Gallery of Denmark, The National Museum of Denmark and The National History Museum of Denmark) use the English term “dissemination of knowledge” for the Danish *formidling*. Instead, they use different translations such as education, exhibition and so forth, which all include learning activities. The use of the different translations will be further introduced in the paper.
3. Further research could include theoretical approaches, such as, corporate communication, which is considered useful in further research (Lynch, 2003; Riel & Fombrun, 2007), as well as perspectives offered by neo-institutionalism which points to a sociological view on institutions and the way the departments interact and co-exist (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 2001).
4. Small museums in this paper are considered to be museums with 1-10 full-time employees, medium size museums are museums with 11-20 full-time employees and large museums have more than 21 full-time employees. The categorisation is adjusted according to the report *Strategisk kommunikation i den danske museums verden* (Bysted-Sandberg & Kjeldsen, 2008).
5. The Danish museum statistic from 2009 does not indicate the ten most visited museums. The statistics only indicate the total of museum visits and how the visits are distributed on the different types of museums (art, cultural heritage and natural history) (Statistics Denmark, 2010). According to Statistics Denmark, the museum Brede Værk/Open Air Museum is listed as an independent museum. However, it is a part of the National Museum of Denmark. Thus, it counts as a museum in this paper. The seven museums are: ARKEN, ARoS, Louisiana, The National Museum of Denmark, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek and The National Gallery of Denmark (Statistics Denmark, 2009).
6. The scope of the report is to examine how the Danish museums understand and apply strategic communication. This report includes and defines attractions (zoos) and non state-owned and non state-subsidised museums (like The Danish Jewish Museum and The David Collection). The respondent rate is 56.6 pct., equaling 122 museums. The report’s data base is a questionnaire sent out to the Danish museum managements, which means the answers reflect the museum managements’ conception of strategic communication and not necessarily the entire museums’ understanding.
7. The notion of communication as PR and marketing is based on a very traditional approach to marketing. Marketing is understood as a means to promote and sell a certain products by advertising (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, p. 29). However, other definitions of marketing focus on marketing as a process or activity (e.g., marketing as “a pervasive societal activity” (Kotler & Levy, 1969)).
8. This conclusion is made on the basis of the seven largest Danish museums (in terms of visitors) from our data.

9. Sixty eight pct. of the Danish museums indicate they have neither a communication department nor a communication employee at the museum. Twenty nine pct. of the museums state they have a communication department or a communication employee at the museum. Three pct. state they do not know if they have a communication department or a communication employee (Bysted-Sandberg & Kjeldsen, 2008).
10. In spring 2011, the National Gallery of Denmark started the process of hiring a new Head of Communication. The application deadline was March 28, 2011.
11. Except the newer department Exhibition with only two employees and Administration. Administration is said to get a new Head of Department in the near future.
12. The model is slightly changed compared to the model in *The Educational Role of the Museum*.

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