

Jensen, S.K. (2019). *From generalist to specialist: The professionalization of the Danish museum occupation, 1958-2018*. Department of Communication, University of Copenhagen.
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Abstract

This thesis is an empirical mixed-methods study on how professionalism has been defined in the Danish museum field throughout the past six decades. Based on an extensive empirical material consisting of archives, job advertisements and interviews with museum professionals and university professors, I track museum-professionalism as an ongoing discourse between three selected stakeholders namely regulators, practitioners, and educators, from the end of the 1950s until today. In 1958, the Danish Parliament passed the first comprehensive Museum Act for local and regional history museums, establishing a subsidiary system, which enabled the employment of a professional workforce in local museums and defined a set of criteria for what constituted professional museum work in Denmark. Since then, Danish museums have developed from single-curator institutions to diverse professional workplaces with a number of cooperating specialists. Likewise, the museum field has become a coordinated system characterized by a more or less systematic division of topics. In my dissertation, I study what has been defined as professionalism, how this definition has changed, and what has influenced the changes from 1958 until today by examining three specific discursive fields; an organizational, a practical and an educational. Moreover, I explore the development of professional museum mediation in order to understand the specialization of professional museum work, which has marked the period of my study. Applying a theoretical framework inspired by historical institutionalism, I first identify three phases in the definition of professionalism based on an analysis of the Danish museum legislation and influenced by internal discussions within the field as well as by external events such as shifts in political agendas and economic trends. Second, I study the practical discourse on professionalism by tracking how the museum institutions have described the tasks to be performed and the skills required in professional museum work, analyzing advertisements museum positions from 1964 to 2018. Third, I study the development and discussion of the content and organization of education for museum professionals throughout the period. Finally, inspired by the sociology of professions, I characterize museum-professionalism as a hybrid form of professionalism, whose specific features and development over time I map. With this thesis, I collect and interpret an essential part of contemporary, Danish museum history, and I develop a characterization of museum professionalism as a distinctive occupational field, thereby offering an empirical case study on museum work as a specific form of professionalism.