

Rathjen, K. (2020). *Det folkelige museum: Mellem oplysning og oplevelse*. Department of History, University of Southern Denmark. In Danish. <https://voresmuseum.dk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Rathjen-phd-afhandling.pdf>

## Abstract

The dissertation examines N.F.S. Grundtvig and the Grundtvigians' part in the development of the landscape of the Danish museums until 1958. This dissertation is part of the research programme Our Museum, which is primarily focused on analyzing Danish museum communication in a historical and contemporary perspective. Our Museum's main hypothesis is that museums are founded and function on a tightrope between enlightenment and entertainment. The theoretical framework of this dissertation is informed by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's reflections on the notion of 'classical enlightenment' and the 'modern experience/entertainment'. However, it also seeks to challenge this notion with inspiration from narrative analysis and conceptual history. The analysis shows that the Grundtvigians were more than indirectly involved – as formerly assumed – in developing the museal landscape. They took part in debates concerning museum communication, and some of them even became museum founders themselves. They created, communicated and debated the idea of a certain “folk museum”, inspired by the ideas of Grundtvig, which not only deviated from, but radically challenged the notion of a traditional museum. The folk museum did not orientate itself towards the typical center in Danish museum history – the National Museum in Copenhagen – but instead looked towards the folk high school movement which had become a “center in the periphery” for cultural history studies in the years following 1864. Besides proving the Grundtvigian involvement, the most notable contribution of this dissertation is showing that the concept of a “museum”, until the second half of the 20th century, was not as static as previously assumed. The first part of the analysis investigates the folk museums' origins, i.e. institutional role models, and highlights a rising Grundtvigian interest in the museums. Romanticism rebelled against the Enlightenment's notion of rationality, which resulted in debates on how to approach, study and communicate the past. In the realm of antiquities, this discussion was emphasized with different approaches by poets and scientists (archeologists). One of the chapter's main arguments is that a third position – between poetry and science – was formulated and most notably expressed by the poet priests St. St. Blicher and N.F.S. Grundtvig. This third position suggested a balance between sense and sensibility, science and poetry, when studying and representing the past, which later formed the basis for the communication of the folk museums. Furthermore, the analysis investigates how the Grundtvigians were essential in promoting and creating the new folk and open-air museums of the 1870s. The second part of the analysis shows how Askov Folk High School became a “center in the periphery” for cultural history studies around the 1890s. The chapter highlights Poul Bjerge, a folk high school teacher and cultural historian, who inspired the coming generations of Grundtvigians to work in the field of cultural history. Furthermore, this chapter examines Herning Museum and its creator Jens Andersen Trøstrup. This part shows how Trøstrup was inspired by the great folk and open-air museums (Skansen and Danish Folk Museum), and how their way of communicating was incorporated into and interpreted by a local cultural history museum. Trøstrup's museum endeavors were backed by a Grundtvigian network that helped secure funds and publicity. Concerning museum communication, Trøstrup prioritized the creation of an open-air exhibition (a peasant home with dramatized interiors), where fiction and history were communicated to the visitor in a dynamic interplay. Lastly, this part of the analysis highlights the critique of the folk museums as presented by Sophus Müller, the director of the National Museum in Copenhagen, who denied the new museums any type of scientific legitimacy. A Grundtvigian response to Müller's critique shows that the concept “museum” was not definitively defined, and that both popular and scientific positions were present in the museum debates. The final part of the

analysis highlights the Grundtvigian involvement in the county-based historical associations, which were founded at the beginning of the 20th century. The role model for these associations was the Historical Association for the County of Ribe, which was created by Ludvig Schrøder, Askov Folk High School's principal, and Poul Bjerge. The associations facilitated a forum, where scientists and Grundtvigians could meet. Furthermore, it is one of the chapter's main arguments that the scientific and popular positions, in this forum, constructed a symbiotic narrative about the necessity of the interplay between poetry and science in relation to acquiring knowledge and communicating the past. This symbiotic narrative was made possible in part due to Sophus Müller's resignation and subsequent replacement by the consensus-seeking Mouritz Mackeprang, but also because of the new generation of Grundtvigians being raised to be more appreciative towards the scientific disciplines. This part of the analysis also examines the new folk museums that emerge from the historical associations, based on Grundtvigian initiatives, where folk high school teacher Anders Uhrskov's work and reflections on creating a historical-poetic museum are highlighted. The fifth chapter concludes the dissertation. Firstly, several reflections on further possible studies are suggested concerning social, geographical and political aspects of Danish museum history. Secondly, the conclusions of the analysis are presented: 1) the Grundtvigians were much more actively involved in the creation and the discussion of Danish museums than previously assumed, 2) inspired by Grundtvig's historical-poetic learning, a Grundtvigian position is identifiable in both museums and the museum debates and 3) that the folk museums challenge the notion of the "classical" museum as a monolithic institution until the second part of the 20th century. Lastly, the chapter concludes by reflecting on today's debates on museums concerning enlightenment and entertainment.