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CONTEMPORARY SCANDINAVIAN LAMs AND LEGITIMACY

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Intensification of legitimation work in LAMs

Today, arts and culture organizations are faced with increased pressure to communicate the worth of their work to a broad public (Larsen 2016; Kann-Rasmussen 2019). This helps politicians prolong their support to publicly funded organizations, such as libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs), and it leads to an intensification of organizational legitimation work. While “organizational legitimacy refers to the degree of cultural support for an organization” (Meyer and Scott 1983, 201, cited from Scott 2014, 72), organizational legitimation work concerns the work done by various actors seeking to achieve and maintain organizational legitimacy. As legitimacy is never fixed once and for all, there is a constant need to engage in legitimation work on the part of the managers of publicly funded organizations in the culture sector. They need to perform legitimacy in the public sphere (Larsen 2016, 2017b, 2017a), and show that their organizations are open (Kann-Rasmussen 2016; Kann-Rasmussen and Tank 2016; Anderson et al. 2017) and in search of collaborations (Kann-Rasmussen 2019, 2016) with community actors. They need to be perceived as worthy of public support.

That libraries, archives, and museums need to be considered legitimate to receive public support is, of course, nothing new. However, due to technological changes related to digitalization, and societal changes related to increased literacy and mass education, these institutions are constantly rethinking their societal mission to stay relevant and be worthy of public support. Professionals whose main job market is in the LAM sector are also in need of active legitimation work on the part of their professional organizations, to secure a continued outflow of graduates and a steady job market for their employment.

In addition to technological and social changes leading to an intensification of organizational legitimation work, these changes are also pushing for convergence between libraries, archives, and museums (see Chapter 1, this volume). Taken together, these processes lead to LAMs facing similar challenges related to legitimacy and renewal of their societal missions.

Performances of legitimacy in the culture sector

In his theoretical model for organizational legitimation work of arts and media organizations, Larsen (2016) conceptualized the audiences for the legitimation work of organizational actors to be threefold, consisting of content producers, funders, and community (see Table 13.1). His model was developed on the grounds of studies of opera houses, symphony orchestras, and public service broadcasters. The role of content producers is more obvious for these types of organizations than is the case with LAM organizations in general. However, the importance of external content producers will vary depending on the type of organization we are talking about – contemporary art museums, for example, will rely on their standing in the art world as part of their legitimacy (e.g., Solhjell and Øien 2012, Chapter 12) to a much larger degree, for example, than public archives will rely on their standing in the field of historians.

Kann-Rasmussen and Tank (2016) adapted Larsen's model in a study of libraries, where they refer to the content producers being both authors and librarians, in that dissemination of literature is a form of content production. As for the other audience groups of libraries' legitimation work, the funders, and the community, these are as important for LAM organizations as for other organizations in the culture sector. Publicly funded LAM organizations in Scandinavia receive part of their funding via the state, regional, or municipal budgets. Although the funding of these organizations is quite stable once established as part of public budgets, whether state, regional, or municipal, budget cuts do occur and may be easier to pass once the organizations are suffering from failures in their public performances of legitimacy. With regard to the community as an audience for public performances of legitimacy, it is as important for LAM organizations as it is for performing arts organizations and public service broadcasters. As is the case for other publicly funded organizations in the culture sector, LAM organizations rely on social support from their communities as part

TABLE 13.1 Audience for public performances of legitimacy

	<i>Content producers</i>	<i>Funders</i>	<i>Community</i>
Type of support	Artistic	Economic	Social
Societal sphere	Art	Market/State	Civil society
Type of legitimacy	Artistic credibility	Financial stability	Widespread approval

Larsen (2016, 10).

of the process of being perceived as legitimate. As such, they ground much of their legitimacy in the civic world (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), although they also need to relate to other common worlds (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) in their ongoing legitimation work (Kann-Rasmussen 2016; Larsen 2016).

The LAMs in Scandinavia differ somewhat from LAMs in other parts of the world in terms of their comparatively heavy dependence on public support. Nevertheless, the issues discussed in this chapter will be of relevance for understanding LAMs in most liberal democracies, as a large part of the legitimacy of LAMs rests on them being perceived as trustworthy, open, and inclusive organizations by the community that they serve, whether the financial support comes from private or public money (Larsen 2016).

In the remainder of this chapter, we will discuss a range of issues related to ongoing legitimation work in Scandinavian LAMs. We will investigate the role societal missions play in LAM organizations' public performances of legitimacy, how worth is ascribed to LAM organizations, what role the professionals play in the legitimation of contemporary LAMs, and how notions of "the national" play into legitimation processes related to LAMs. Through this analysis we get to understand key aspects related to the legitimation work of twenty-first-century Scandinavian LAMs.

Societal missions and the legitimacy of LAMs

Since the turn of the millennium, publicly funded organizations in the culture and media sector have all defined and communicated what their societal missions are. In Norway, it is even suggested in official policy documents that culture organizations should use the notion of societal missions as part of their legitimation work (NOU 2013:4, 298–303).

The museum sector was the first part of the Norwegian culture sector where the concept of societal missions was employed in policy discussions (NOU 2013:4, 300). Other parts of the culture sector followed suit. An increased focus on societal missions does not mean that publicly funded cultural organizations in earlier times operated without such missions (e.g., Audunson 2005a). However, it does mean that societal missions during the twenty-first century have become important tools in organizational legitimation work for libraries, archives, and museums, as well as other organizations in the culture sector (Remlov 2012; Larsen 2014). Such missions are typically communicated in organizational documents like annual reports and strategy documents but may also be employed by managers performing legitimacy in mediated public spheres (e.g., see Larsen 2014).

Societal missions have become a useful concept, both for the organizations themselves and their funding bodies. Such a concept is meant to summarize the mission and worth of the organizations vis-à-vis funders and citizens, and effectively communicate the legitimacy of individual organizations to various audience groups. Being deeply rooted in values stemming from the Age of

Enlightenment and playing parts in nation-building processes and democratic practices (see Chapter 1, this volume), LAMs have, of course, served communities prior to the twenty-first century. But, as the pressure to perform legitimacy increases with technological and social changes, explicating one's societal missions has become a dominant way of proving one's contribution to society (Kann-Rasmussen 2016).

The societal mission of a particular cultural institution can also be institutionalized through law, which in the Nordic countries has been quite successful. The societal mission of public libraries is institutionalized through law in Denmark, Finland, and Norway, while this has been achieved for all libraries in Iceland and Sweden (Audunson et al. 2020b, 4; Rydbeck and Johnston 2020, 26–27). The societal mission of archives is institutionalized through law in Denmark, Finland,¹ Iceland, Norway, and Sweden (Rydbeck and Johnston 2020, 37–38), and the societal missions of museums have been institutionalized through law in Denmark, Iceland, and Sweden (Rydbeck and Johnston 2020, 31–32).

These laws have been subject to change over time. In Sweden, the second Library Act, which has been in force since 2014, differs from the first Library Act, among other things, in specifying a democratic mission in its preamble (SFS 2013:801, §2). In the second version of the Act, the societal mission is more explicitly expressed, with an emphasis on the institutions' fundamental role in democratic society. Furthermore, this democratic mission is prominently included in steering documents. Contemporary LAMs are governed through an increasing number of steering documents, which reflects the significant impact of New Public Management (NPM) on all segments of the public sector (Buschman 2003; Harvey 2005; Kann-Christensen and Andersen 2009; Greene and McMenemy 2012; Goulding 2013).

Such documents exist on different levels of governance and have varying weight. The Swedish Library Act stipulates library plans on both regional and municipal levels (SFS 2013:801, §17), and there is a national requirement that public libraries governed at a municipal level develop library plans that take into account both regional and national steering documents. Extensive work is therefore required to produce such documents. Nevertheless, this activity is highly valued, especially in times of political turbulence in municipalities, as the libraries find support for their legitimation work in steering documents. The Library Act, and in particular its democratic mission, is highlighted by library staff and civil servants as significant arguments at times when library activities and priorities are questioned (Rivano Eckerdal and Carlsson 2018). Such debates are often related to the contemporary focus on the importance of the national.

In March 2019, a Swedish government-commissioned group proposed a national library strategy in response to several contemporary challenges in the library sector (Fichtelius, Persson, and Enarson 2019).² The strategy included one aspect of the societal mission that attracted specific attention, namely

the library sector having a crucial role in efforts related to national defense, both military and civil. It particularly emphasized that libraries are places that ensure that correct information is available to everyone. With this suggested new task, the decision of a number of municipalities to close their libraries during the coronavirus pandemic became especially problematic (Biblioteksbladet 2020; Dahlin 2021). The proposed strategy has not yet been formalized through political processes, and the question has been raised as to whether it ever will be.

In Danish LAM legislation, the term “societal mission” is not explicitly employed, and there have as yet not been any public discussions concerning new societal roles for LAMs. As Rydbeck and Johnston (2020) state, Danish LAM legislation emphasizes “informed citizenry” (27) and “interconnectedness” (33) and is as such only indirectly focused on societal issues. However, Kann-Rasmussen (2016) has shown that managers of cultural organizations in the Scandinavian countries all point to a need for LAM organizations to be “relevant for society” as part of their quest for legitimacy. The managers interviewed in 2016 focused on two forms of societal relevance: The first was related to education and “bildung,” pointing to traditional tasks of providing access to, and mediating, art and cultural heritage, a form of societal mission that is present in today’s legislation. According to the managers, a second type of relevance could be achieved if LAMs sought to contribute to solving major issues in society related to climate change, health issues, or migration. However, Kann-Rasmussen also shows that the managers were unsure how to practically implement such forms of societal relevance. Nevertheless, in 2021, societal issues were present in the “framework agreements” of major national LAMs in Denmark. Framework agreements are policy documents linking the mission, vision, and objectives of publicly funded national cultural organizations. They are a certain type of contract between the organizations and the Ministry of Culture. These agreements state that, for example, the Danish National Archives (Rigsarkivet) must secure the memory of Denmark in a manner that *makes it valuable for society* (Kulturministeriet 2019 our emphasis), and that the Danish National Gallery (SMK) must be visible in Danish society and seek to improve creative and reflective abilities in Danish society (Kulturministeriet 2018). In Sweden, the National Archive is entrusted by the government to support democracy through its activities. It is even stated in the document accompanying the budget allocation from the Ministry of Culture to the Archive for 2021 that the Archive in its programming is to play a part in the national celebration of 100 years of women’s suffrage (Kulturdepartementet 2020).

As can be seen from the above description of societal missions, societal issues are now integrated into organizational strategy documents, cultural policies, and framework agreements, which indicates that simply leaning on a high number of users, high quality, or excellence does not suffice as a source for legitimacy. Today, LAMs must also continuously prove their relevance and worth for society to secure widespread legitimacy.

LAMs and the concept of value

An ongoing trend in legitimating organizations in the culture sector is emphasizing the value of culture, narrowly defined. Several researchers have related the growing interest in the value and impact of culture to a legitimacy crisis in the culture sector. Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) and Phiddian et al. (2017) view demands for quantitative user surveys, research interest in the value of culture, and an increased interest in these topics from national and local cultural agencies as indicators of a legitimacy crisis. Others emphasize the lack of public discussion as a sign of declining legitimacy (Holden 2006; Hvenegaard Rasmussen 2018). A legitimacy crisis means that cultural organizations, such as LAMs, cannot maintain their legitimacy just by providing access to high-quality art and culture (Kann-Rasmussen 2019); they must do “something more,” which can be related to societal missions or manifested in legitimation work striving to render their societal value more visible. In the following, we will present two theoretical contributions stemming from cultural economics and studies of public value, both of which have relevance for legitimating the public value of LAMs.

The underlying basis for cultural economics is that the value of culture and cultural institutions cannot be expressed in monetary or market value alone. Consequently, an important term is “nonmarket value.” Market value is determined in the market and expressed as a price. Culture, along with most environmental goods and services, is characterized by their nonmarket value. They are not traded in markets. However, studies have shown that people are willing to pay for these nonmarket values through their taxes – even cultural activities that they never use themselves (Bille, Grønholm, and Møgelgaard 2016). LAM institutions, their collections, and practices are primarily defined by nonmarket values, such as option value, existence value, prestige value, education value, and bequest value (Frey and Pommerehne 1989). Cultural economist David Throsby (2001) furthermore introduces cultural values such as aesthetic value, spiritual value, social value, historical value, symbolic value, and authentic value. In the LAM field, it is reasonable to claim that nonmarket values are considerably higher than market values. Even so, contemporary LAM organizations need to navigate between the two sets of values in their legitimation work.

John Holden (2006) developed an influential analysis of how value is determined in different ways by different actors in the culture sector. He pinpoints three different types of values that cultural institutions represent. The first is the intrinsic value of art and culture. Here, value is created in the meeting between the user/consumer and the cultural artifact, e.g., in reading a book or contemplating a piece of art. Intrinsic value regards the individual and can be measured through personal accounts, qualitative assessments, and reviews. The second type of value in Holden’s framework is institutional value. Institutional value regards the organization. We know, especially through Scandinavian research into LAMs, that the presence and activities of public cultural institutions

create value for a community and for society because they create trust and cohesion and function as public spheres (Audunson 2005b; Audunson et al. 2020a). According to Holden, institutional value is measured via feedback from users and audiences, but research on LAMs as places and public spheres shows that this value can also be measured through studies of the use and physical layout of particular LAM organizations. Institutional value is nevertheless difficult to measure. The same can be said for the third type of value, instrumental value, which regards society. This value is in focus when a cultural organization is used to achieve purposes outside of its artistic fields, e.g., for economic or social purposes. These types of values are measured in terms of output, outcome, and impact. But Holden, as well as a number of cultural policy researchers (Duelund 2003; Belfiore 2004), demonstrates that it is difficult to show a causal connection between investments in cultural institutions and economic or social improvements. Using an argument from welfare economics, Bille (2016) notes that using economic impact as a legitimating argument for investments in LAMs is flawed: Although some cultural activities have economic impact (e.g., in the form of job creation), it should not be used as an argument in itself, because all economic activity has an economic impact to varying degrees. Instead, if economic impact is to be used as an argument for cultural subsidies, the effects must be compared with the effects of alternative uses of the money. If the purpose was to create jobs, it would no doubt be better for the municipality to support something other than a library, an archive, or a museum.

The typologies of values can be regarded as languages that different actors can employ in their legitimation work. By looking into how these languages are employed by legitimation actors, we will enhance our understanding of organizational legitimation work in contemporary LAMs. As an illustration of how notions of value influence legitimation work, we discuss below two recent reports on Danish public libraries.

The first report, “The Economic Value of Public Libraries” (Folkebibliotekernes samfundsøkonomiske værdi) (Jervelund et al. 2015), was part of a project led by the Danish Library Association and supported by the Danish Agency for Culture in 2015. The authors of the report are under the impression that libraries too often are measured only in outputs (such as lending figures). Instead, the authors of the report argue that libraries should emphasize their economic value. Through an analysis of citizens’ willingness to pay for libraries, they conclude that Danish libraries are worth DKK2.5 billion more than actual costs. Furthermore, the authors estimate that the “true” economic value of Danish public libraries is close to DKK2 billion of annual GDP. This economic value is primarily linked to a strengthening of children’s reading skills. Upon publication, the authors of the report received heavy criticism from researchers and cultural workers. The critique focused on how such legitimation work could be counterproductive, in that the report appeared to inflate all the positive effects of the libraries.

A more recent report, “The Significance of the Public Library for the Citizens of Denmark” (Folkebibliotekets betydning for borgerne i Danmark) (Seismonaut

and Bibliotekerne 2021), focuses on the intrinsic and institutional value of public libraries. The report takes departure in citizens' first-hand, individual experience of the library, and criticizes the growing focus on the social impact of cultural institutions. The report goes on to conclude that libraries create values across four dimensions: (1) by being a space for contemplation; (2) by providing perspectives on life; (3) by stimulating creativity; and (4) by stimulating community and togetherness. The authors try to highlight the value of public libraries differently than through economic value. However, even this report might be criticized for its one-sided presentation of public libraries, along the same lines as the report using cultural economics.

This section has shown how emphasizing different types of values related to public libraries can be of benefit to library actors engaging in legitimation work. Values constitute a language to be employed in organizational legitimation work, but legitimation work is difficult, and it can result in unintended consequences if one does not strike the right balance when relating to the various audiences for the legitimation work. In the following sections, we will show how even professionals and "the national" are key elements in contemporary legitimation work.

The role of the professionals in legitimating LAMs

Over time, formal requirements for working at a library, an archive, or a museum have changed and evolved. The history of the professionals serving the three institutions differs in the timeline of changes and the emphasis on the requirements, as described in the first part of this book. However, a connection to science and university disciplines has always been important for the legitimacy of libraries, archives, and museums. Within the three institutions, a hierarchical division has often been drawn between curating and managing collections on the one hand, and serving the users on the other, with only the former requiring academic qualifications. The relevant academic training for working at LAMs has traditionally been offered in various academic disciplines such as history, archaeology, ethnology, art history, or literature. This landscape is changing due to the establishment of archival studies, library and information science (LIS), and museology as academic disciplines. Today, academic training is required for most LAM positions, even though there are differences between the library sector, the archival sector, and the museum sector when it comes to professionalization.

Recent developments related to school libraries in Sweden reveal these tensions: The Swedish Library Act (SFS 2013:801) has been criticized for not mentioning staff or their training, which has been problematized when seen in the light of the poor results of Swedish pupils in international school measures. As a consequence, the government launched an inquiry on school libraries with a view to investigating how school libraries could be strengthened to provide equal access to all pupils, and to have trained school librarians (Dir. 2019:91). The inquiry proposed the School Act to state that all school libraries be staffed,

and that staff should, as far as possible, have a degree in LIS (SOU 2021:3, 29–30). This proposition was welcomed by the professional sector (Andersson et al. 2021), including universities offering degrees in LIS. The inquiry suggested a model of supplementary training in LIS (60 ECTS) targeted at schoolteachers, who would then be qualified for working as school librarians (SOU 2021:3, Chapter 5). The suggestion relates to an ongoing debate on, and criticism of, teachers staffing school libraries. The proposition has not yet made its way through the political system, leaving open the question of whether the legislators are convinced that the proposal is a viable and fruitful development.

The Swedish Library Association has been involved in several actions directed at putting the issue of staffed school libraries on the political agenda and seeking to change the legislation for school libraries. These initiatives include supporting and hosting the interest group the National School Library Group (Nationella Skolbiblioteksgruppen) and promoting 27 October as School Library Day in Sweden.³ In 2021, the day was celebrated by the two organizations at Linnaeus University, one of the Swedish universities with an LIS program. A short film targeting students to make them aware of the potentials in working as a school librarian was launched as well as the hashtag #skolbiblioteketsdag21.⁴ These are all examples of how the professional organizations engaged in legitimization work targeted politicians and future librarians to raise awareness of the importance of trained librarians staffing school libraries.

The national and contemporary LAMs

As mentioned on several occasions in this book, notions of the national have played an increasingly important role in legitimating contemporary LAMs. In Norway, the national has gained importance since the 1990s in cultural policies (St.meld. nr. 61 (1991–92)), and it has become a tool for local and national policymakers, as well as LAM managers, when legitimating the establishment of buildings for national culture organizations in the nation's capital (Takle 2009, 183–184, 2010, 765–767). Since the turn of the millennium, a range of new buildings for art and culture have been established along the waterfront of Oslo. It all started with the construction of the opera house, which opened to the public in 2008. This was supposed to be, and became, a motor driving the city development in the harbor areas of the city (Sauge 2005, 76; Butenschøn 2013, 371, 380–381). As the opera house became a massive success, both among Norwegians and tourists, and a key element in the successful legitimization of opera and ballet in Norway (Larsen 2014), other cultural organizations, such as the National Museum of Art, Architecture, and Design (the National Museum), looked to its success as an inspiration when seeking to develop their own organization within a new building (Berg and Larsen 2020). The new National Museum, the most expensive house of culture ever built in Norway, and the largest art museum in the Nordic region, opened to the public on 11 June 2022.

In addition to the opera house and the National Museum, a range of other houses of culture have been established along the harbor in recent years: In 2021, a new Munch Museum opened for the public; in 2020, a new main building for the Deichman public library opened; a new museum building for the Astrup Fearnley Museet (contemporary art) opened in 2012; and there are discussions on building a new concert hall for the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra as well as a photography museum in the harbor area. Even though some of these are owned by the municipality or a private foundation, they are all examples of the increased focus on houses of culture as important drivers for city harbor developments (Carlberg and Christensen 2005; Evjen 2015) and the creation of major tourist attractions in capital cities.

This increased focus on the national also demonstrates an element of state patronage in cultural policies, in terms of displaying the value of one's national culture both internally (to its own citizens) and externally (to citizens of other countries) (Abbing 2002, 240–247). This is explicit in the cultural policies of far-right political parties like the Danish People's Party, the Sweden Democrats, and the Norwegian Progress Party, which all have conservation and promotion of national culture as key parts of their cultural policies (Lindsköld 2015; Harding 2022). Since the turn of the millennium, the national has also become an important element for politicians and managers when legitimating the construction or establishment of national cultural organizations, such as national museums (Berg and Larsen 2020; Meld.St. nr. 23 (2011–2012), 163) or national libraries (Takle 2009, 2010). LAM organizations are important not only for preserving national history and culture but also for displaying for the world the worth of one's nation, its history, and artifacts (Aronsson and Elgenius 2015).

Conclusion

As seen through this chapter, societal missions, values, the professionals, and the national are important elements in the contemporary legitimation work of LAMs. Societal missions and values are important for demonstrating the worth of LAMs to society, as is the notion of the national for legitimating the construction of new buildings for national libraries, archives, or museums. The professionals, on the other hand, play an important role in demonstrating the worth of skilled staff at LAMs to politicians, universities, and managers at LAM organizations. All elements are important for maintaining and developing professional LAM organizations. As some see digitalization rendering LAM organizations less important, legitimation actors strive to prove differently. The future support of LAMs is dependent on continuous legitimation work on the part of key legitimation actors, such as professional organizations, LAM university departments, LAM managers, and cultural politicians. Despite their historical relevance and worth, LAMs cannot take their legitimacy for granted in the twenty-first century but should instead seek to actively convince society of their continued relevance and importance.

Notes

- 1 <https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/1244/file/d79f42a78c20ace1b22935d4971e.pdf> (last accessed 22.6.2021).
- 2 The Government delegated to the National Library of Sweden to develop a library strategy, and the library decided to commission a group to write the report.
- 3 <https://www.biblioteksforeningen.se/nyheter/skolbibliotekets-dag/> (last accessed 31.1.2022).
- 4 <https://vimeo.com/623456029> (last accessed 31.1.2022).

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