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## Professional identity of public librarians, archivists, and museum professionals in five European countries

### Abstract

**Purpose:** To investigate the professional identity of Public Library, Archive, and Museum (LAM) professionals in Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Norway, and Sweden by administering three questionnaires.

**Methodology:** The data has been gathered via online questionnaires. A comprehensive analysis is conducted to explore the variations in the professionals' perceptions of their professional proximities to the other LAM professions and related professions, considering demographic factors such as age, education, gender, and immigrant background of participants.

**Findings:** Through a lens of micro- and macro-professional identities, the findings underscore both perceived role separation between the LAM professions and notable points of convergence, suggesting opportunities for collaborative efforts. The implications of these discoveries are discussed, offering a foundation for future research endeavors.

**Originality/value:** The study highlights the professions perceived to have the most and least similarity to LAMs based on questionnaire responses, providing valuable insights into the interplay between various professional domains.

**Keywords:** professional identity, role perception, public librarian, archivist, museum professional, LAM

## Introduction

Professional identity, referring to individuals' perceptions and representations of their roles within their specific field (Hicks, 2014, p. 252), constitutes a central dimension of the work environment (Duan et al., 2021). In the Library, Archive, and Museum (LAM) sector, professionals are adapting to a shift from collection to connection, impacting their roles in both social and digital dimensions (Audunson, Hobohm, & Tóth, 2020; Johnston et al., 2022). Role perception, influencing professional identity, appears to play an important role in shaping trends in the LAM sector. Multi-country research suggests that LAM professionals' role perceptions impact their understanding, execution, and collaboration within the sector (Johnston et al., 2023; Tóth et al., 2024). Furthermore, and contrary to the prevalent view that LAM professionals have complementary or even overlapping roles, recent findings indicate that LAM professionals perceive little alignment between their roles, suggesting potentially distinct professional identities (Audunson, Hobohm, & Tóth, 2020; Johnston et al., 2022; Tóth et al., 2024). These findings necessitate a more in-depth investigation into how LAM professionals perceive their roles, the implications for their professional identities, and the convergence or divergence of the LAM professions, providing critical insights into broader trends within the sector (Rydbeck & Johnston, 2020).

Gaining a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of how LAM professionals view their roles is necessary, as compelling evidence indicates that a deficient professional identity may contribute to job burnout (Edwards & Durette, 2010), heightened stress levels, and conflicts in role expectations (Lloyd & King, 2001). Additionally, professional identity appears to affect collaboration (Miller, 2004). Previous research shows that LAM cross-sectoral collaborations have not consistently proven successful (Tóth et al., 2024), and the way that LAM professionals' approach cultural policy goals, such as participation, is related to how they perceive their roles, which can lead to very different outcomes (Johnston et al., 2023). Therefore, acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the perceived roles among LAM professionals is essential to fostering seamless cross-LAM collaborations, a topic that has long been a subject of discussion within the LAM community (Tóth et al., 2024; Vårheim et al., 2020). However, this research has

not specifically examined sectoral distinctions or variations. The article addresses this gap, and aims to explore the following questions:

*RQ1: How do LAM professionals perceive their professional roles in relation to each other and related professions?*

*RQ2: If there are unified professional cultures across countries, what implications are there regarding the respective professional identities, and what are the implications for the convergence and divergence of the LAM professions?*

Our study analyzes questionnaire responses of European LAM professionals' perceptions of their professional roles in relation to each other and other professions. This study significantly advances our understanding of the professional identity of LAM professionals in several ways. Firstly, it takes a cross-country approach, examining role perceptions in five European countries—Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Norway, and Sweden. This expansive perspective enhances the research's comprehensiveness. Secondly, the study employs a large-scale sample, encompassing a diverse group of professionals from multiple countries, capturing a broad spectrum of perspectives and practices. By combining a cross-country approach with a large-scale sample, the study offers valuable insights into the professional identities of librarians, archivists, and museum professionals. These findings can inform the development of policies, strategies, and practices in these professions, both nationally and internationally.

## **Literature review**

### ***Professional identity and role perceptions of LAM professionals***

There is a small, but growing body of research on LAM professionals' role perceptions and related skill sets. Tóth et al.'s (2024) research findings suggest that LAM professionals perceive limited alignment or similarity in their roles in relation to each other. However, it was also found that perceived similarity in roles can, in a few cases, increase the likelihood of LAM professionals engaging in cross-sectoral collaborations. These findings imply a direct link between perceived professional roles and inter-sectoral collaborations.

Johnston et al.'s (2023) study on Norwegian and Swedish LAM professionals' perceptions of their roles in relation to other professions reveals associations with LAM professionals' conceptualization and their subsequent approach to user participation —a concept emphasized in Scandinavian cultural policy documents and institutional missions since the turn of the century.

Surprisingly, Audunson, Hobohm, & Tóth's (2020) investigations conducted in Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Norway, and Sweden unveil that librarians and archivists often perceive their professional duties as demanding critical reflection rather than adopting a neutral stance in disseminating cultural heritage-related materials and documents. In contrast, museum professionals tend to gravitate towards the role of impartial custodians of cultural heritage. These findings highlight significant divergences in ideological stances toward cultural heritage work within the LAM sector.

The subsequent examination delves into the research surrounding the individual professional identities of librarians, archivists, and museum professionals. As the literature will demonstrate, a shift appears across the three professional fields toward an increased focus on the social aspects of professional roles, including community, inclusion, participation, and collaboration. This shift is characterized by transitions from collection-oriented practices to those emphasizing connection and from passive to active roles. These changes may have implications for professional identities. Consideration will be given in the analysis and discussion as to whether what is indicated in the literature is reflected in LAM professionals' role perceptions.

### ***Professional identity and role perceptions of public librarians***

In Johnston et al.'s (2022) multi-country study, librarians' perceptions of their professional roles were examined in the context of two social change processes: the social and digital turns (Söderholm & Nolin, 2015). The social turn emphasizes libraries as community hubs and inclusive spaces supporting diversity, while the digital turn involves the extension of libraries into the digital realm. Findings reveal that librarians embrace practices associated with the social turn, however, challenges persist in specific areas, such as working with youth, immigrants, and the more social work-oriented aspects of their role. Notably, librarians report facing greater

challenges due to insufficient competencies related to the digital turn, suggesting a pronounced social orientation in their professional roles with potential implications for their overall professional identities.

Previous studies also discuss the evolving identities of public librarians in response to technological changes (Borbély & Némethi-Takács, 2023) and global events such as the pandemic (Kulikauskienė & Šaparnienė, 2022). These changing roles and competencies for public librarians are documented as storyteller/moderator of storytelling (Peng & Chuang, 2020), social reading facilitator (Rydbeck et al., 2022; Vivarelli, 2022; Tveit & Johnston, 2023), health information advisor (Alvarez, 2023; Kiscaden et al., 2021; Luo & Park, 2013; Williams, 2016), information literacy expert and learning facilitator (Khatun et al., 2015; Nielsen & Borlund, 2011; Pietikäinen et al., 2017; Pinto & Tirado, 2012), community engagement (Casper & Lopez, 2018; Kim & Copeland, 2020), financial information advisor (Yap et al., 2022), integration and inclusion coordinator (Grossman et al., 2023; Igarashi, Koizumi & Johnston, 2023; Johnston, 2018), youth service expert (Sullivan, 2022), and social media agent (Vanwysberghe et al., 2015).

The perceptions of roles and competencies and professional identity of librarians have been influenced by factors such as age and gender (Borbély & Némethi-Takács, 2023), professional education (Pierson et al., 2020), socialization and identity negotiations (Pierson, 2023; Pierson et al., 2020), and involvement in professional associations (Vallejo, 2018). Overall, the mentioned studies highlight the need for librarians to adapt to new technologies and societal changes, and to develop new professional identities that reflect their evolving roles and responsibilities.

### ***Professional identity and role perceptions of archivists***

Archivists' professional roles have undergone significant historical shifts over the last 150 years. Cook (2013) traces this transformation, noting the archivist's evolution from a passive curator to an active appraiser, societal mediator, and, more recently, a community facilitator. The advent of community archiving and digital realities is seen as offering opportunities to reconcile sometimes conflicting discourses within the profession. Additionally, Johnson (2008) identifies a

major identity shift, highlighting that archivists increasingly perceive themselves as shapers of the past rather than neutral keepers.

Examining the relationship between archivists and historians, Nesmith (2004) reveals a historical shift where archivists considered themselves historians until the mid-twentieth century. However, Nesmith argues for the resurgence of historical knowledge within the emerging archival profession. Gelting (1990) emphasizes the integral membership of archivists in the historical research community, citing a study from the Danish State Archives where historical research was considered part of the archivist's duties.

MacNeil (2011) explores the influence of information technologies on the relationship between trust and professional identity within the archival field. Roussain (2020) underscores the increasing importance of the archivist's role as an educator, and its continued weak integration into the professional identity. Analyzing Australian job advertisements for records and archives positions, Gibbons and Douglas (2021) question the awareness of records professionals' specialist skills, knowledge, and attributes.

Finally, Orchard et al. (2019) highlight persistent gender limitations experienced by female archivists, impacting leadership and professional development issues, and consequently influencing professional identity. These studies offer valuable insights into the multifaceted aspects of archivists' professional identity, addressing historical shifts, interdisciplinary collaborations, technological advancements, and societal challenges.

### ***Professional identity and role perceptions of museum professionals***

Reid (2013; 2014) highlights challenges for museum educators, torn between educational goals and the traditional curator-centric model, leading to conflicting role perceptions. Zeller (1984) and Uyen Tran (2008) explore challenges faced by educators establishing professional identity amidst roles like curators. Inspired by the contemporary emphasis on identity and diversity, Kletchka (2021) examines factors like gender, ethnicity, education, and career paths for art museum educators. The research emphasizes recognizing diversity concerns in museum work,

spanning staffing, policies, and practices. The article suggests adopting a participative approach within museums and externally through collaboration.

In another study, Hakamies (2017) investigates the self-perceptions of Finnish museum professionals identifying as "museum people." This concept represents a community of practice significantly influencing identity and practices within museums. Engaged in "proper museum work" like collections management, conservation, and curation, they strongly shape the perception of being part of a museum community.

Tlili (2016) and van Mensch (1992) examine the evolving museum landscape for museologists and museography professionals, noting the growing recognition of these fields. However, they acknowledge the challenges of integrating with established museum professions. In McCall & Gray's (2014) study, they explore the complexities of transitioning to "new museology" practices, encompassing hierarchies, implementation issues, uncertainties in policies, and individual values of museum workers. The authors conclude that none of the 23 studied museums fully adhere to new museology principles; instead, they serve as a rhetorical tool to maintain the legitimacy of existing daily museum work practices.

Saunders (2014) explores the role of non-professionals in museum conservation, advocating for the inclusion and representation of diverse identities. Through non-professional collaboration in conservation efforts, museums move towards an inclusive approach, countering traditional exclusivity in conservation roles, embracing diversity to enrich the conservation process, and fostering inclusivity within museums.

Wintle (2022) explores the shift in Second World War (WWII) UK museum exhibition design, marking a transition from curatorial dominance to inclusive and creative approaches. Post-war challenges, including an overflow of objects, limited staff, insufficient funds, and curatorial apathy, prompted museum technicians to assume more prominent and creative roles in exhibition design. This shift facilitated experimental and inclusive approaches, involving collaboration within museums and partnerships with artists and local communities. These studies

collectively illuminate the dynamic evolution of professional identity in museum contexts through ongoing negotiations between traditional roles and contemporary paradigms.

### **Theoretical framework**

A *profession* is a dedicated group of individuals who adhere to moral principles and are acknowledged by the public as possessing distinct expertise and abilities (acquired through extensive research, education, and training) in a specific field of knowledge. The *professionals* are those individuals committed to applying this knowledge and skills to benefit others (Australian Council of Professions, 2003). In contrast to debating the nature of professional identity as a form of self-identity versus social identity (Gibson et al., 2010) or explicating its constituent elements, many recent studies of professional identity, including those specific to LAM sector, have tended to emphasize its processual nature and how it is enacted as a practice (e.g., Trede et al., 2012; Pierson, 2023; Pierson et al., 2019; 2020). However, when investigated at a particular moment of time, the object of inquiry is necessarily a snapshot of particular elements or attributes rather than a continuum (cf. Sachs, 2001). Studying snapshots, we approach professional identity accordingly as a set of facets consisting of “the ability to perform the functions of the profession; knowledge, as evidenced by education and/or certification; identification with a community of practice and with the values and ethics of the profession; and personal identification as a professional within an identified professional group.” (Fitzgerald, 2020, p. 470).

Understood as a social and contextual entity (Ashcroft & Mael, 1989) rather than a form of self-perception (cf. e.g., Ibarra, 1999), professional identity has both internal and external dimensions. Wachterhausen (2009) whose theory of professional identity has been used in multiple contexts (e.g., Sato & Cárcamo, 2024; Lau et al., 2022), including earlier research on individual LAM professions (e.g. Hedemark & Lindberg, 2017; Perini, 2016; Fraser-Arnott, 2019; Galili & Skov, 2023) makes from a societal perspective a distinction between micro and macro levels of professional identities. Comparable distinction has been included also in some profession-specific models (e.g. Pierson et al., 2019).



In contrast to complex profession-specific models (e.g., Pierson et al., 2019; Sare & Bales, 2014), as a broadly applied theory Wacherhausen's framework provides a practicable starting point for the present study to inquire into the micro and macro dimensions of professional identities in different professions across the LAM sector. According to Wacherhausen (2009, p. 459), *the macro-level of professional identity* represents the public image of a profession, shaped by factors like official recognition, regulations, public perception, and the promotion efforts of leaders. It is not determined solely by the profession alone but influenced by various external factors, leading to continuous formation and transformation. *Negotiations* occur at different levels, such as within workplaces and between neighboring professions, where competition and self-interest can impact the allocation of roles and responsibilities. *The micro-level of professional identity* refers to the essential qualities and prerequisites an individual must possess to be acknowledged as a legitimate member of a specific profession, such as nursing, physiotherapy, or medicine. While formal qualifications, including educational attainment and examination success, are important, they alone do not guarantee full acceptance within the profession. In addition, one must internalize and abide by the cultural dimensions of the profession, which are akin to unwritten guidelines or customary practices. To attain complete recognition and integration within the profession, it is crucial to exhibit behavior that aligns with the established norms and expectations of the professional community (Wacherhausen, 2009, p. 459).

Importantly, as noted concerning the macro-level of professional identity, various external factors can result in the continuous formation and transformation of professional identities. Of particular relevance here is Söderholm and Nolin's theorization that public librarians have had to adapt to two profound environmental change processes: the digital and social turns. (Söderholm & Nolin 2015) The digital turn pertains to the digital extension of libraries. The social turn centers on libraries serving as community hubs and inclusive spaces, supporting diversity and building social relations. Accordingly, LAM professional roles and identities may reflect and/or be influenced by these two environmental change processes. Concerning the micro-level, professional roles and indicators of unified professional fields may provide insights into the established norms and expectations of the respective professional communities, such as those related to education, community development, technology, and diversity.

The present article extends Wackerhausen's notions of macro-level and micro-level professional identities to inquire into different levels in how identities are directed to the outside of the profession (macro) as its "public image" and inside as "a joint designation of the qualities (whatever they might be) that a person must possess to be a fully acknowledged member of a given profession" (Wackerhausen, 2009, p. 459). The macro-level identity explicates professional identity outwards toward other professions. The micro-level refers to an intra-professional understanding of qualifications belonging to the same professional group.

Wackerhausen's categorization has similarities with other external-internal classifications including Goffman's (1956) notions of backstage (without an audience), frontstage (for an audience involved in the performance of social life), and off-stage (for an audience not part of the performance) performing one's identity. A comparable division is between internal (how people perceive or identify themselves) and external (how others categorize an individual) categorizations (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003).

The earlier theorizing suggests that people might not accept or be aware of categorizations and within which framework they operate at a given moment. The development and performance of a given identity are influenced by multiple factors including social norms, intended and actualized audiences, and how a particular individual or group chooses to identify itself (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003; Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Goffman, 1956). Besides broader social norms, on a collective level, a central underpinning of a particular professional identity and how it is acted upon is the culture within a profession (Pierson et al., 2019). This has led to the theorization that it is plausible to find differences between librarians' externally (macro-level) and internally (micro-level) experienced and performed professional identities depending on the professional cultures exhibited in different countries.

While acknowledging the inherent complexity and interrelated nature of professional identity and role perceptions, it is essential to recognize that role perceptions serve as a foundational element within the broader construct of professional identity. It is imperative to note that role perceptions do not singularly equate to professional identity but contribute as integral building

blocks. This acknowledgment is crucial for a nuanced interpretation of the study's data and findings.

## Methodology

The data for this research was collected through online questionnaires administered to public library, archive, and museum professionals as a part of a three-year, international research project The ALM Field, Digitalization, and the Public Sphere (ALMPUB). The project was funded by the Norwegian Research Council's KULMEDIA program. To recruit study participants, the researchers contacted directors in local governmental libraries, archives, and museums and requested them to distribute questionnaires to their employees. Additionally, professional mailing lists and social media were utilized for distributing the questionnaire. Three separate questionnaires were developed for the three professional groups: public librarians, archivists, and museum professionals. The questionnaires were culturally and linguistically translated into major languages in the participating countries. They were distributed during the winter of 2018 and the spring of 2019. A comprehensive overview of the research conducted across multiple countries has been published by Audunson et al. (2020).

Due to the variation in who is considered a librarian, archivist, and museum professional in the participating countries, inclusive definitions were used and included in the questionnaires to increase the likelihood that the respondents belonged to the intended target group. The definitions for each profession were as follows:

- *Librarian*: An employee of a public library with professional responsibilities in developing and providing library services to the public.
- *Archivist*: Any employee at an archive with professional responsibilities relating to archives management and outreach.
- *Museum professional*: Any employee at a museum with professional responsibilities relating to collections and work towards the public.

The professional identity of LAM professionals was explored by querying respondents on their perceptions of roles and responsibilities considered significant and representative of their

professional roles. Respondents were presented with the following question: 'The role as a librarian/museum professional/archivist is complex. How do you personally perceive your professional role compared to the roles listed as...?' The alternative responses (listed in the appendix) were scaled 0-5, where 0 = does not correspond at all with the roles I have (least similar); 5 = corresponds very well with the roles I have (most similar).

Each questionnaire featured a core set of 10 common roles, including Agent for Enlightenment, Communication Officer/PR Agent, Event Manager, Moderator, Social Media Specialist, Editor, Social Worker, Youth Worker, Teacher, and Web Designer. Additionally, profession-specific roles were incorporated based on earlier literature (e.g., Huvila, 2012; Huvila et al., 2013; Huvila, 2016; Kallberg, 2012) and feedback from LAM professionals regarding roles associated with each discipline. The public librarians' questionnaire encompassed roles such as Agent for Freedom of Expression and Information, Interior Architect/Decorator, Literary Critic, Psychologist, Security Guard/Surveyor, Literary Mediator/Counselor, Technical Supporter/IT Consultant, Information Systems Manager, and Information/Knowledge Manager. The archivists' questionnaire delineated roles like Curator in Museum, Documentalist (a professional who focuses on gathering, structuring, and facilitating access to documents and data pertaining to a particular subject or discipline), Librarian, Researcher, Storyteller, Caseworker, Lawyer, and Restorer/Conservator. Meanwhile, the museum professionals' questionnaire encompassed Documentalist, Librarian, Researcher, Storyteller, Art Collector, Handicraftsman, Interior Architect/Decorator, and Marketing Expert, tailored to their distinctive domain. The interpretation of the findings should be approached with caution given the inherent variation in the roles encompassed by the three questionnaires (see Appendix 1 for details).

Acknowledging the presence of unknown biases in our convenience sampling approach, we recognize the potential inclusion of professionals from different sectors and diverse work roles within the LAM across countries. Consequently, caution should be exercised in making direct cross-country comparisons, considering the significant variations in sectors and the nature of work roles among LAM professionals. Despite these considerations, our study offers a meaningful

exploration of professional perspectives within the LAM sector, paving the way for future research to explore the specificities of professional roles and identities across diverse contexts.

### **Findings and Analysis**

The findings from the questionnaires administered among LAM professionals are presented below, offering an exploration into the varying degrees of professional proximity. Commencing with an insightful depiction of the professions perceived as most and least proximate to LAMs, this section ends with highlighting the influences of demographic factors such as age, education, gender, and immigrant background in shaping these proximity perceptions.

#### ***Public librarians' questionnaire***

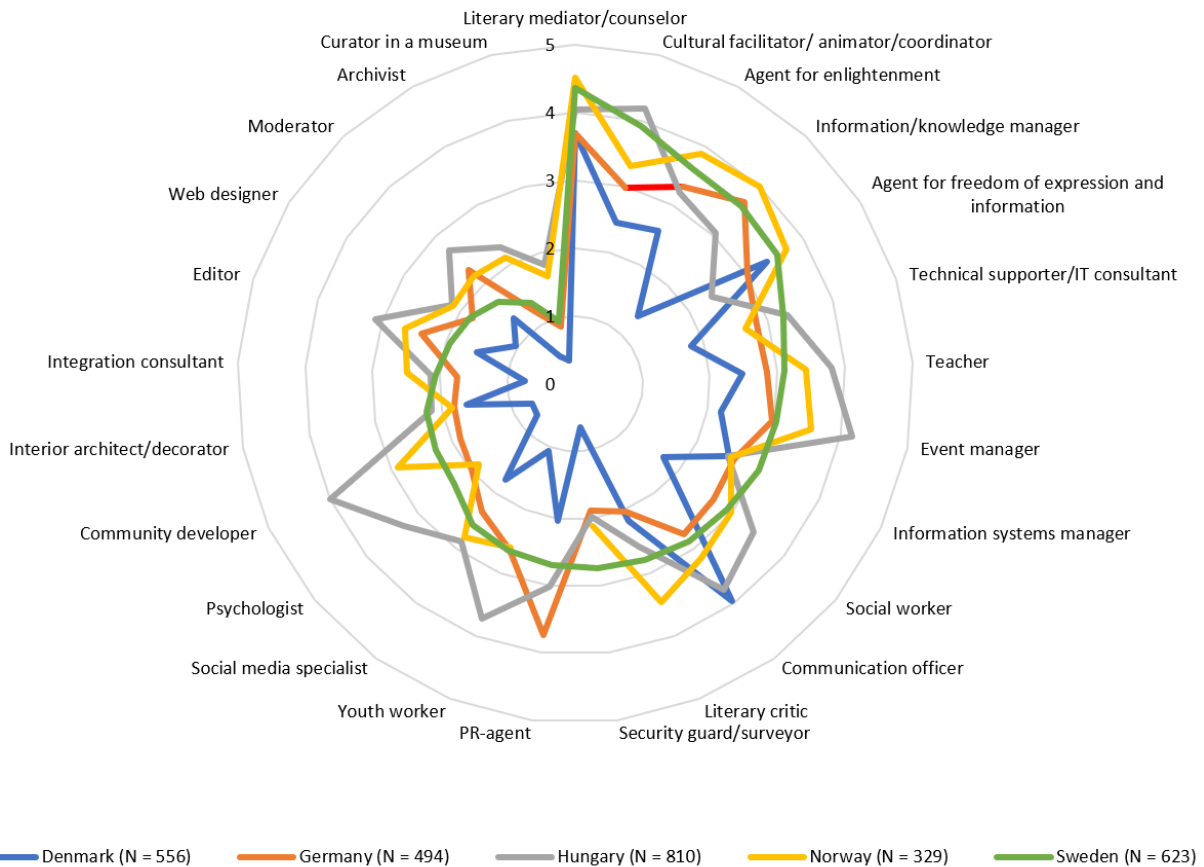
The participants (N=2812) in the public librarians' questionnaire (appendix) were from Denmark (556), Germany (494), Hungary (810), Norway (329), and Sweden (623), and they were mostly female (84%), aged 30-59 (about 80%), with a relevant LAM education (79.2%), and mostly non-immigrant (89.8%).

The public librarians' perceptions towards the similarity/dissimilarity of their roles to other professions is depicted in Figure 1 (for details, see Appendix 3). Because of the multi-country scale of the questionnaires, some roles were missing for some countries. The missing data have been clearly highlighted in each table/figure and taken into consideration in later interpretations.

The figure underscores notable distinctions among public librarians across the five countries. For example, the role perceptions of the Swedish public librarians are quite balanced across the different roles being measured as the responses are relatively shaping a circle in the graph. It shows that in the Swedish context, the public librarians don't see significant disparities or variations across different role perceptions.

The positioning of the Danish sample towards the inner layers of the radar graph implies conservative role perceptions, though with subtle distinctions. This clustering suggests that while Danish public librarians typically uphold the roles mentioned, they may prioritize certain roles as more pivotal or foundational than others. The Hungarian sample is clustered towards the outer

layer of the graph which indicates a progressive or diverse role perception, perceiving significant variations in the importance or impact of different roles. The role perceptions of Norwegian and German public librarians seem relatively aligned, albeit with some small deviations.



**Figure 1.** Role perceptions of public librarians across countries

*Note for Figure 1. The data for the role as PR-agent was missing for the Norwegian sample.*

The public librarians’ perceptions towards the most/least similar roles to their professional roles are depicted in Table 1. As it is shown, the public librarians in all included nations in this study have regarded literary mediator/counselor as a very similar one to library profession. The next similar professions to a library profession in all countries (except Hungary) are Agent for freedom of expression and information, agent for enlightenment, and information/knowledge manager (except Denmark). In Denmark and Germany, the communication officer role (and its alternative public relation - PR - agent) is ranked as the most similar one to the librarian role.

The public library professionals of all included countries in the study have selected the role of curator in a museum as the least similar role to a librarian. The public library professionals in Denmark, Germany, and Sweden have regarded the archivist role as the second least similar role to a librarian. Public librarians of all countries (except Hungary) have mentioned the archivist role among least similar roles to what they do.

**Table 1.** The perceptions of public librarians towards similarity of their professional roles to other professions

	Denmark	M	Germany	M	Hungary	M	Norway	M	Sweden	M
<b>Most similar</b>	Communication officer	4.0	PR-agent*	3.7	Cultural facilitator/ animator/ coordinator	4.2	Literary mediator/ counselor	4.5	Literary mediator/ counselor	4.4
	Literary mediator/ counselor	3.7	Literary mediator/ counselor	3.7	Event manager	4.2	Information/ knowledge manager	4.0	Cultural facilitator/ animator/ coordinator	3.9
	Agent for freedom of expression and information	3.4	Information/ knowledge manager	3.7	Literary mediator/ counselor	4.0	Agent for enlightenment	3.9	Agent for enlightenment	3.6
	Agent for enlightenment	2.6	Agent for enlightenment	3.3	Community developer	4.0	Agent for freedom of expression and information	3.7	Information/ knowledge manager	3.6
	Information systems manager	2.5	Agent for freedom of expression and information	3.0	Teacher	3.8	Event manager	3.6	Agent for freedom of expression and information	3.5
<b>Least similar</b>	Psychologist	0.7	Interior architect/ decorator	1.8	Web designer	2.2	Security guard/ surveyor	2.1	Editor	1.9
	Community developer	0.7	Web designer	1.8	Interior architect/ decorator	2.2	Archivist	2.1	Web designer	1.8
	Security guard/ surveyor	0.7	Integration consultant	1.7	Integration consultant	2.1	Psychologist	1.9	Moderator	1.7
	Archivist	0.5	Archivist	1.2	Security guard/ surveyor	2.0	Interior architect/ decorator	1.9	Archivist	1.4
	Curator in a museum	0.4	Curator in a museum	0.9	Curator in a museum	1.8	Curator in a museum	1.6	Curator in a museum	1.0

Note for the table 1:

Most similar: Five professions with the highest similarity mean scores.

Least similar: Five professions with the lowest similarity mean scores.

M: Mean

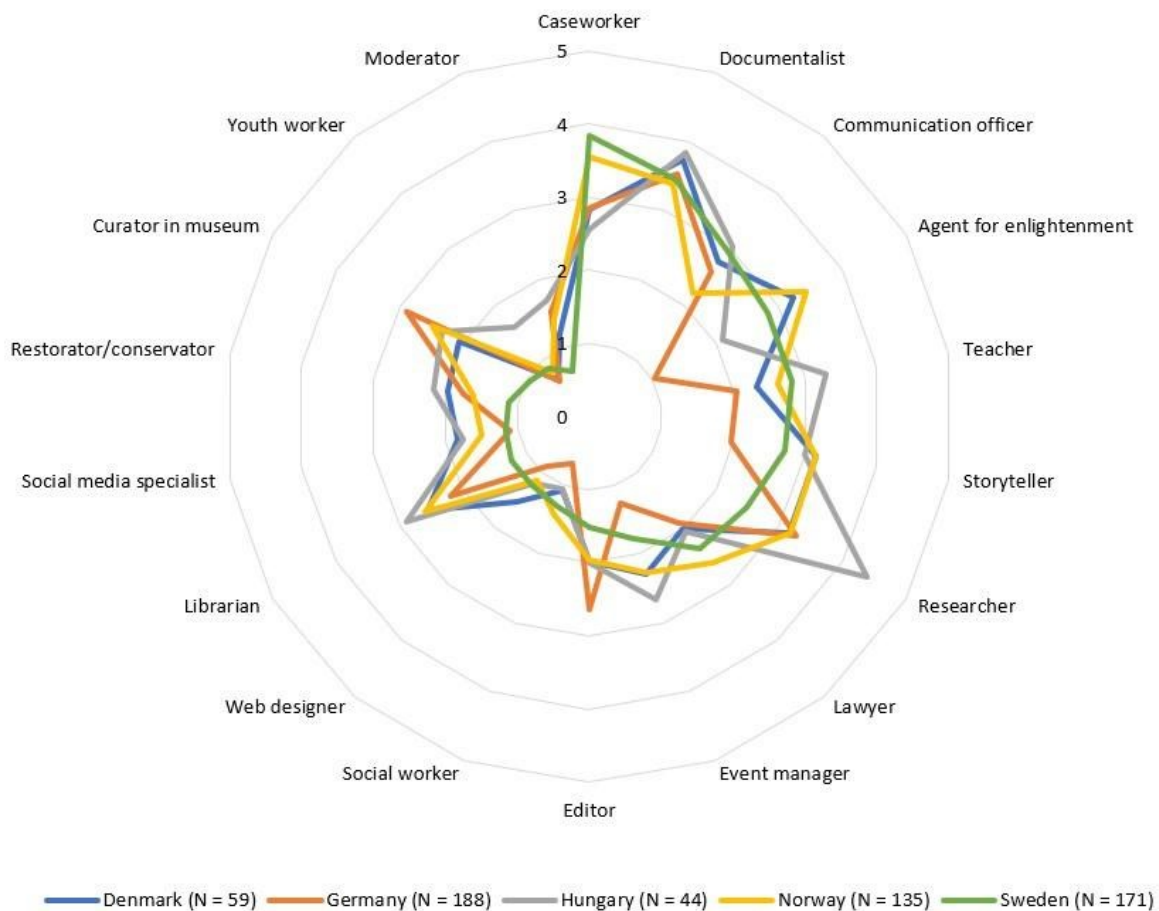
\*The data for role as PR-agent is missing for Norwegian sample.

### ***Archivists' questionnaire***

The participants (N=597) in the archivists' questionnaire (appendix) were from Denmark (59), Germany (188), Hungary (44), Norway (135), Sweden (171), and they were mostly female (56%), aged 40-59 (55%), with a relevant LAM education (60%), and non-immigrant (90.5%).

The archivists' perceptions towards the proximity of their professional roles to other professions are depicted in Figure 2 (for details, see Appendix 5). As depicted in Figure 2, archivists across different countries show a greater consensus in their perception of other professions than librarians do. It is important to note, however, that archivists generally perceive less similarity with the other professions than librarians do: with the exception of Hungary, where the profession of Researcher was highly rated. Additionally, akin to the Swedish public librarians, Swedish archivists exhibit a tendency toward conformity and equilibrium in their perceptions of roles.





**Figure 2.** Role perceptions of archivists across countries

The five most/least similar roles to an archivist are shown in Table 2. The archivists of all five nations in this study have perceived the archivist role similar to the roles of documentalist, caseworker (except Hungary), researcher (except Sweden), and storyteller (except Germany and Sweden). The archivists of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden have perceived the archivist role similar to the role as the agent for enlightenment.

The archivists of all five countries have regarded roles such as social media expert, youth worker, social worker (except Sweden), web designer (except Sweden), and moderator (except Germany) least similar to what the archivists do. Interestingly, the data indicate that public librarians view archivists as one of the least similar professions. However, there does appear to be some perceived professional proximity to librarians among archivists.

**Table 2.** The perceptions of archivists towards similarity of their professional roles to other professions

	Denmark		Germany		Hungary		Norway		Sweden	
<b>Most similar</b>	Documentalist	3.7	Documentalist	3.5	Researcher	4.4	Caseworker	3.6	Caseworker	3.8
	Agent for enlightenment	3.2	Researcher	3.3	Documentalist	3.8	Agent for enlightenment	3.4	Documentalist	3.4
	Researcher	3.2	Curator in museum	2.9	Teacher	3.3	Documentalist	3.4	Communication officer	3.0
	Storyteller	3.2	Caseworker	2.9	Communication officer	3.0	Researcher	3.2	Agent for enlightenment	2.8
	Caseworker	2.8	Editor	2.6	Storyteller	3.0	Storyteller	3.1	Teacher	2.8
<b>Least similar</b>	Social media specialist	1.8	Social media specialist	1.1	Social media specialist	1.8	Social media specialist	1.5	Social media specialist	1.2
	Web designer	1.5	Agent for enlightenment	1.0	Moderator	1.7	Social worker	1.4	Restorator/conservator	1.1
	Moderator	1.2	Web designer	0.9	Youth worker	1.6	Moderator	1.4	Curator in museum	0.9
	Social worker	1.1	Social worker	0.7	Web designer	1.2	Web designer	1.1	Youth worker	0.9
	Youth worker	0.7	Youth worker	0.6	Social worker	1.0	Youth worker	0.8	Moderator	0.7

*Note for the table 2:*

Most similar: Five professions with the highest similarity mean scores.

Least similar: Five professions with the lowest similarity mean scores.

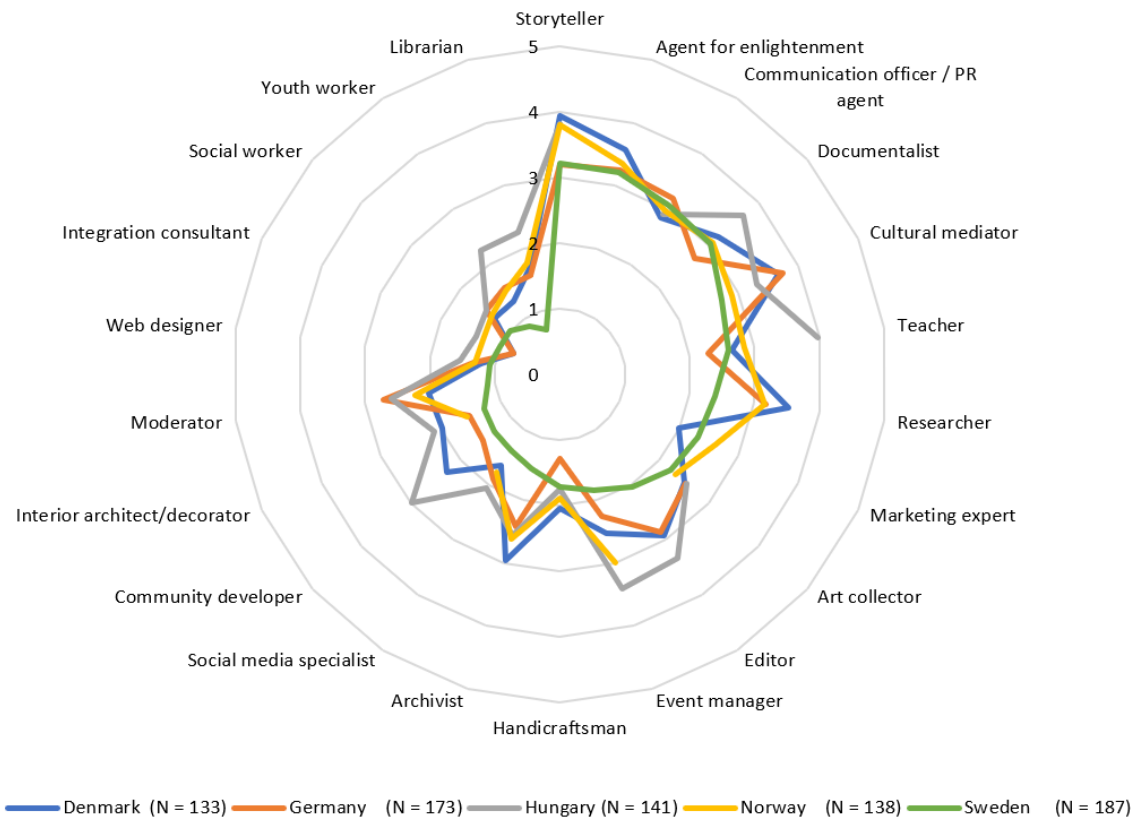
M: Mean

### ***Museum professionals' questionnaire***

The participants (N=772) in the museum professionals' questionnaire (appendix) were from Denmark (133), Germany (173), Hungary (141), Norway (138), and Sweden (187), and they were mostly female (62%), aged 30-49 (54%), with a relevant LAM education (43%), and non-immigrant (84%).

The perceptions of museum professionals towards the proximity of their roles to other professions is presented in Figure 3 (for more details, see Appendix 7). As illustrated in Figure 3, museum professionals from various countries exhibit a consensus in their perception of other professions akin to that shown by archivists and public librarians. The views of museum professionals from Denmark, Germany, and Norway are particularly aligned. Moreover, similar

to their counterparts in Swedish libraries and archives, professionals in Swedish museums demonstrate a propensity for conformity and balance in their role perceptions.



**Figure 3.** Role perceptions of museum professionals across countries

*Note for Figure 3: The data for roles as Researcher and Agent for enlightenment (in Hungary), Marketing expert (in Germany and Hungary), and Editor, and Community developer (in Norway) are missing in current datasets. This is visible in the figure as missing bars.*

As shown in this Table 3, the museum professionals of all nations in this questionnaire perceived roles such as storyteller, documentalist (except Germany), agent for enlightenment as the most similar ones to what museum professionals do. The role as storyteller was the most similar profession to what museum professionals do in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. The Hungarian

museum professionals regarded the teacher role as the most similar one to what they do in museums.

The least similar roles to what museum professionals of five nations do were the integration consultant, social worker, and the web designer. The other professions within the LAM sectors are neither perceived as highly similar nor highly dissimilar.

**Table 3.** The perceptions of museum professionals towards similarity of their professional roles to other professions

	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Norway</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Most similar</b>	Storyteller	3.9	Cultural mediator	3.7	Teacher	4.0	Storyteller	3.8	Storyteller	3.2
	Cultural mediator	3.7	Agent for enlightenment	3.3	Storyteller	3.8	Agent for enlightenment	3.4	Agent for enlightenment	3.2
	Agent for enlightenment*	3.6	Storyteller	3.2	Documentalist	3.7	Researcher	3.2	Communication officer / PR agent	3.1
	Researcher	3.5	Communication officer / PR agent	3.2	Event manager	3.4	Documentalist	3.1	Documentalist	3.0
	Documentalist	3.2	Researcher	3.2	Editor	3.3	Event manager	3.0	Cultural mediator	2.7
<b>Least similar</b>	Social media specialist	1.6	Interior architect/ decorator	1.5	Social media specialist	2.1	Interior architect/ decorator	1.6	Web designer	1.1
	Social worker	1.3	Social worker	1.5	Handicraftsman	1.8	Youth worker	1.5	Integration consultant	1.0
	Youth worker	1.3	Web designer	1.3	Web designer	1.5	Social worker	1.4	Social worker	1.0
	Web designer	1.2	Handicraftsman	1.3	Social worker	1.5	Web designer	1.3	Youth worker	0.9
	Integration consultant	0.8	Integration consultant	0.8	Integration consultant	1.4	Integration consultant	1.3	Librarian	0.7

*Note for the table 3:*

Most similar: Five professions with the highest similarity mean scores.

Least similar: Five professions with the lowest similarity mean scores.

M: Mean

\*The data for roles as Researcher and Agent for enlightenment (in Hungary), Marketing expert (in Germany and Hungary), and Editor, and Community developer (in Norway) are missing in current datasets.

## **Demographic factors and role perceptions of LAM professionals**

In the data from public librarian professionals, younger librarians saw their roles as more similar to various professions such as teacher, technical support, social worker, and web designer, while older librarians perceived their roles as agents for freedom of expression and information, and agent for enlightenment higher than their younger counterparts. Female librarians generally perceived their roles as more similar to various professions compared to male librarians. Those with relevant LAM education had more similar perceptions to roles such as teacher, technical supporter, PR-agent, and literary mediator.

Among archivists, age did not show a statistically significant difference in role perception. However, male archivists viewed their roles as less similar to social worker and caseworker compared to female archivists. Those with relevant LAM education saw their roles as less similar to storyteller, event manager, agent for enlightenment, and librarian compared to those without such education. Archivists with an immigrant background perceived their roles as less similar to teacher, editor, and agent for enlightenment compared to non-immigrants.

Among museum professionals, age influenced role perceptions, with older professionals seeing their roles as more similar to teachers. Male museum professionals perceived their roles as more similar to storyteller and art collector, while females saw their roles as more akin to documentalist and cultural mediator. Relevant LAM education positively influenced the perception of roles such as documentalist, researcher, storyteller, and archivist. Museum professionals with an immigrant background perceived their roles as less similar to various professions compared to their non-immigrant counterparts.

## Discussion

The discussions presented below are organized in alignment with the three research questions that guided the inquiry.

### **RQ1: How do LAM professionals perceive their professional roles in relation to each other and other related professions?**

#### *Public librarians*

Distinct patterns emerge when examining the self-perceived roles of public librarians in relation to other professions. Public librarians perceive their role as very similar to that of "Literary Mediator/Counselor," "Agent for Freedom of Expression and Information" (excluding Hungarians), and "Agent for Enlightenment" (excluding Hungarians), suggesting a common emphasis on facilitating reading and literary activities in libraries and a commitment to promoting access to information and intellectual freedom. Furthermore, public librarians' perceived proximity to the role of "Information/Knowledge Manager" in Germany, Norway, and Sweden reflects the importance of organizing and disseminating information resources. The perceived affinity towards roles such as communication officer and PR-agent in Denmark and Germany indicates a strong inclination towards information provision and exchange. Collectively, these roles share a common focus on facilitating access to information, promoting communication, and advocating for the dissemination of knowledge, all aimed at fostering enlightenment and informed decision-making.

Public librarians generally indicated that their professional roles were very dissimilar to the roles of archivists and curators in museums and vice versa. This perceived lack of similarity on the part of public librarians might be connected to the storytelling aspect and the shaping of historical narrative inherent in the other roles, which could conflict librarians' orientation to contemporary literary mediation. Additionally, as will be discussed in relation to archive and museum professionals, public librarians tend to lean more towards roles focused on enhancing quality of life and advocacy, perhaps in ways not commonly associated with the other two professions. This aligns with the ethos of libraries being for all and the professionals' fundamental principle of

inclusivity, as evidenced by public librarians' dedication to assisting vulnerable and marginalized individuals and groups (Hvenegaard Rasmussen & Jochumsen, 2003). The other role perceived to be least similar is that of Security Guard/Surveyor, which may also conflict with the professional ethos of intellectual freedom. Surveillance is generally viewed as a direct threat to a person's ability to seek and receive information without restriction, which, once more, may relate to the advocacy aspects of public librarians' work.

On the macro-level, when considering the external factors continuously shaping and transforming professional identities, these findings regarding public librarians' perception of their professional role suggest their adaptation to the social turn. This adaptation demonstrates a strong orientation towards ensuring access to information, enriching expressive freedom, and promoting the well-being of individuals and groups in the communities they serve through user engagement and dialogue. These findings corroborate and expand upon Johnston et al.'s (2022) findings, indicating that public librarians have more strongly adapted to the social turn than the digital turn, possibly in response to increased digitalization in society.

On the micro-level, regarding the established norms and values associated with professional identities, the responses reflect librarians' professional ethos of upholding democratic ideals such as neutrality, equality, and freedom of expression, as well as the deeply held belief that libraries are for all (Johnston et al., 2024). This also aligns with Rydbeck & Johnston's (2020) writings on the centrality of democratic ideals within libraries' guiding missions and legal frameworks and resonates with Hvenegaard Rasmussen et al.'s (2022) assertions of an advocacy orientation within the LAM professions. Furthermore, this advocacy orientation may also be linked to Audunson, Hobohm, & Tóth's (2020) finding that librarians perceive their professional duties as requiring critical reflection rather than adopting a neutral stance in disseminating cultural heritage-related materials and documents; as well as highlights a point of tension in professional values related to advancing social equity versus maintaining neutrality.

*Archivists*

When examining the five most and least similar roles for archivists, certain patterns and generalizations can be observed across the countries. Being a “Documentalist” is a recognized role among all archivists, suggesting the importance of expertise in organizing and managing historical records and documents for archivists. Archivists in this study also perceive their role very similar to “Caseworker” (except Hungarians), and “Researcher” (except Swedes) too. The Danish, Hungarian, and Norwegian Archivists in this study perceive their roles very similar to “Storyteller”, suggesting the importance of narrating historical narratives and making the past accessible and engaging. The Scandinavian archivists have perceived the role as “Agent for Enlightenment” similar to their roles, highlighting their commitment to preserving and disseminating knowledge and historical information. Collectively, these roles all involve the management, dissemination, and utilization of information, with an emphasis on provision of evidence in the form of documents and cases. The roles share a common purpose of facilitating knowledge acquisition, preservation, and application; each centering around advancing connection understanding and promoting learning.

The indication by archivists that roles such as youth worker, social worker, and moderator are least similar to their own roles points to a clear preference away from roles with pronounced social or welfare aspects and engagement components, which appears to be more aligned with public librarians. The roles of Social Media Specialist and Web Designer also suggest that archives may prioritize digital collection and research support, such as online services for genealogical research, over the more socially-engaged online dissemination activities. Consequently, these findings suggest that community archives and the roles of archivists as societal mediators and community facilitators, as theorized by Cook (2013), primarily focus on documenting lived realities. Accordingly, these documented realities can then be utilized to raise awareness and advocate for various groups.

On a macro level, these findings indicate that archivists are inclined toward the social turn, though this is likely characterized by their roles within scholarly and research communities. For instance, archivists in Denmark, Hungary, and Norway, along with museum professionals, perceive their roles akin to storytellers, possibly rooted in their backgrounds in history, art



history, or archaeology. As Spencer (1983) suggests, archivists are viewed as historians who contribute to scholarly discourse and community engagement. On a micro level, respondents demonstrate a strong commitment to stewarding knowledge and cultural heritage, reflected in their documentation, preservation, and research efforts. This aligns with the evolving perception of archivists as "shapers of the past," influenced by changing understandings of history and social movements, as noted by Johnson (2008).

### *Museum Professionals*

As previously stated, all museum professionals in this study have regarded the role of "storyteller" as similar to what they do. In addition, the museum professionals perceive the roles of "Agent for enlightenment" (except Hungarians), and "Documentalist" (except Germans) as similar to their roles. The museum professionals of Denmark, Germany, and Sweden have selected the role as "Cultural mediator" very similar to what they do, and the museum professionals of Denmark, Germany, and Norway have selected the "Researcher" role as very similar to their roles. Collectively, these roles center on facilitating access to information, fostering understanding, and promoting knowledge dissemination. They can all be seen to support the cultivation of informed societies, promote intellectual growth, and facilitate connections between individuals and ideas.

The data suggest a commonality of roles between archivists and museum professionals. Interestingly, while they do not perceive their roles as similar to each other, all archivists and museum professionals in this study (except those from Germany) view their roles similarly to what a "documentalist" does. Museum professionals (from Denmark, Germany, and Norway) and archivists (from Denmark, Germany, Hungary, and Norway) are more likely to perceive themselves as "researchers". This discrepancy between perceived dissimilarity in roles and similar role perceptions may lie in archivists' strong focus on documenting lived realities, while museum professionals adopt a more socially oriented approach with perceived similarity to roles such as Agent for Enlightenment and Cultural Mediator, indicating a greater inclination toward

engagement. However, their engagement does not seem to transcend into the promotion of quality of life and support, as may be seen a little more in the responses from public librarians. All museum professionals in this study regarded the roles of "Social worker" and "Integration consultant" as least similar to their professional roles, as well as the role of "web designer", which may indicate less emphasis on the digital turn. On the macro level, these findings suggest museum professionals have an orientation toward the social turn in the sense of more socially engaged research and dissemination activities and a role in shaping narratives. On the micro level, the Cultural Mediator and research emphasis may be indicators of a value base oriented to inclusion and representation of diverse identities as stated by Sanders (2014).

### *Demographic Factors*

Looking at the demographic factors in this study, younger public librarians identified their roles with several professions, reflecting a multidisciplinary approach to their work. In contrast, older librarians emphasized traditional librarian roles such as freedom of expression and information agents, and agents for enlightenment. This may suggest a generational shift in the perception of the librarian role, which could influence how library services are delivered and evolve over time.

Across all professions, there were notable differences in how male and female professionals perceived their roles. This could have implications for how different genders approach their work and interact with their users or patrons. However, it is not clear, for example, whether preferences influence role perceptions or the types of positions made available to men and women. Is occupational or vertical segregation at play, or implicit bias? Recognizing these differences could aid in creating more inclusive work environments and services.

Among librarians and museum professionals, those with relevant LAM education identified more with more professional roles. This could highlight the potential value of a LAM education in broadening professionals' perspective of their roles. However, among archivists, those with LAM education identified less with certain roles, suggesting that the impact of LAM education may vary between professions.

Archivists and museum professionals with an immigrant background perceived their professional roles differently compared to their non-immigrant counterparts. This underscores the potential influence of various factors on those role perceptions. For example, fewer assuming roles such as agent for enlightenment, teacher, and editor among archivists with an immigrant background could be connected to their level of spoken language skills in the receiving country. However, considering that all three roles involve a degree of authority and are geared towards facilitating understanding, growth, and/or self-improvement, it prompts inquiry into why positions of authority may not be as readily offered to/perceived by immigrants. Instead of solely examining immigrants' cultural backgrounds and language skills, the hiring practices need to be scrutinized as well as the organizational culture within the archival field. What barriers exist that hinder immigrants from accessing positions of authority, and what implications does this hold for the inclusivity of archives?

### *Summary*

From the perspective of theorizing individual comparisons to non-LAM professions as LAM professionals' views as expressions of their professional micro-identities, the findings point to both continuities and shifts from the traditional conceptions of what makes an individual a legitimate professional in the different parts of the LAM sector. Across the sector, the micro-identities emphasize social responsibility and broad commitment to enlightenment — even in Hungary where the concept of agent for enlightenment might have been experienced as problematic — albeit in varying terms in different countries and professions. The professional identity of public librarians is constituted of interacting with people (e.g. acting as Counselor or Mediator) rather than of managing collections (e.g. acting as Curator or Archivist). In contrast, archivists' professional micro-identity is focused on working with documents (e.g. Documentalist, Researcher, Caseworker) and empathetically not acting, for example, as a social or youth worker. Museum professionals identify themselves with storytelling whereas roles relating to reciprocal interactions with audiences are considered as least relevant. Correspondingly, the micro-identity of public librarians can be attributed to *engagement* with audiences, archivists' to acting through

*management and curation* of societally important assets, and museum professionals to *mediation* of knowledge and culture.

When projected to the implication of the identified micro-identities to macro-identities, i.e. the public image of the LAM professions, public librarians' work role emerges from the analysis as conspicuously clearly linked to books and reading. It goes against the striving to broaden the professional scope of librarianship (see for example, Lankes et al., 2007; Huvila, 2014) but is perhaps at the same time telling of the real professional niche and competitive advantage of librarians in contemporary society. With archivists, it is possible to sense a shift from the traditional researcher macro-identity in Scandinavia whereas among German and especially Hungarian respondents the traditional identity is still prevailing. Here a likely explaining factor is also that in Scandinavia many archivists work in records management whereas in Central Europe archivists are by definition working with historical records. Finally, the museum professionals' responses express a clear distancing from the traditional curatorial identity (cf. Kavanagh, 2005) in favor of what could be perhaps described besides storyteller in a broader sense also as cultural mediator.

***RQ2: If there are unified professional cultures across countries, what implications are there regarding the respective professional identities, and what are the implications for the convergence and divergence of the LAM professions?***

LAM professionals' perceptions towards each other diverge, however, the role separations among LAM professionals (at least between public librarians and the other two professions), and the uniqueness of Scandinavian context are visible in this study.

This role separation of LAM professionals in this study could have various reasons/explanations. One reason could be the proximity or distance between the academic fields of Library science, Archival Science, and Museum Studies in investigated countries. Our data shows that the proximity of LAMs' education might influence the role perceptions of LAM professionals. For example, in Hungary, the proximity of the LAM professions is very clearly suggested by the classification of the fields on a ministry level, where public collections are usually grouped into

very close departments. Currently all three fields are directed by the Ministry of Culture and Innovation where both the joint Department responsible for Libraries and Archives and the Department for Museums are managed by Deputy State Secretary of Public Collections. It suggests that these professions (all subfields of public collections) are closely related to each other. Our finding partially supports the influence of closeness of LAMs' education in role perception similarities of Hungarian public librarians and archivists. Hungarian public librarians perceived their roles as less distinct from archivists compared to their counterparts in other countries.

Our findings indicate the popularity of identifying as an agent for enlightenment among the queried LAM professionals in Scandinavian countries, and the unpopularity of this role perception among studied Library/Archive professionals in Hungary. Public enlightenment work has deep-rooted traditions in the Scandinavian countries and was considered important from a societal perspective during the establishment of the modern welfare state. Thus, the mission of public enlightenment has been highlighted in the culture and education Policies of all three countries in different ways since the 19th century and in connection to several cultural and educational institutions, including LAMs (Hylland, Kann-Rasmussen, & Vårheim 2022). The fact that Scandinavian public librarians, archivists, and museum professionals perceived "agent of enlightenment" as an important role in their professional identity, is therefore not particularly surprising.

As the agent of enlightenment concept is not as strong in recent professional discussions in Hungary as in Scandinavian countries, the respondents might have linked this role to the former experiences of literary advice and the lack of neutrality.

From the perspective of theorizing LAM professionals' views of how their work roles are associated with other professions in terms of macro-identities, it is possible to see clear patterns and a general orientation towards communication and working towards the public, however, with differences in the constituents of the identity between the professions. The macro-identity of museum professionals appears most uniform across the studied countries, whereas there is some variation among librarians, especially with Danish librarians having a more focused identity

relating to communication, literature counseling and freedom of information, and Hungarian archivists being more inclined to identify themselves as researchers.

The tensions among professional values regarding social equity, equality, and neutrality are evident throughout the study. Kann Rasmussen, Hvenegaard Rasmussen, and Blomgren (2022) highlight these tensions within the LAM sector, where opinions on the problematic nature of neutrality vary, with some advocating avoidance of controversy and others advocating for social equity. Audunson, Hobohm, and Tóth's (2020) study underscores these tensions, showing public librarians and archivists prioritize critical reflection over neutrality, contrasting with museum professionals who emphasize impartial custodianship. While variations exist within each field, the broad leanings apparent in this study's findings appear to corroborate those of Audunson et al. (2020), offering insights into the underlying tensions. Public librarians prioritize access for all, thus necessitating critical reflection on social inequalities and advocacy for marginalized groups to promote social equality and equity. Archivists' focus on historical research and evidence collection, dealing with incomplete or biased documents, may have led to a greater emphasis on critical interpretation for achieving social equity. Museum professionals' research focus may serve as a counterbalance to the historically biased narratives they were central in shaping (Johnston, Jochumsen, & Edquist 2022), thereby ensuring social equity through impartial custodianship and scientific process. These speculations provide plausible explanations for how professional fields, shaped by their ideological underpinnings, epistemological foundations, and social contexts, have formed distinct macro-level identities encompassing contrasting leanings toward neutrality, equity, and equality. If this assertion holds true, suggesting that professional role perceptions significantly influence how LAM professionals generally approach tensions related to neutrality, equity, and equality, it would align with the findings of Johnston et al. (2023), who concluded that professional role perceptions shape how LAM professionals perceive participation.

While the limitations relating to the study sample make it impossible to draw definite conclusions of the variety of identities and their underpinnings in this study, the approach of characterizing

macro-identities through comparing professional work roles shows promise and could be developed further in future studies.

## **Conclusion**

Professional identity perceptions are contextual, and influenced by surrounding institutional history and traditions, and national policies.

When we look at our findings in light of evidence on successive LAM collaborations (e.g., Wintle, 2022), and the very long convergence-divergence debate (e.g., Hvenegaard Rasmussen & Hjørland, 2023), it could be concluded that LAM professionals have relatively clear role separations but there are points of convergence and opportunities to collaborate with each other. An implication of the present findings to the debate is that while the three (broad and diverse) categories of institutions have had separate societal roles and can be expected to thrive having separate roles even in the future, also the three professions have at the present and have opportunities in the future to benefit from and nurture their respective identities both internally (micro-identities) and externally (macro-identities). Being a public librarian implies both inwards and outwards something different than being an archivist or a museum professional even if the professionals would work across the LAM sector in different institutions. Libraries and librarianship could benefit from being framed more explicitly around engagement or facilitating discussion and knowledge exchange, as Lankes et al. (2007) suggest. The archival profession could focus on documentation and records management, while the museum profession could emphasize the development of stories and narratives through research and dissemination in the form of storytelling. However, public libraries are complex institutions (Evjen & Audunson, 2009); librarians have a varied menu of tasks, and they need to adapt to the specific circumstances of their local communities and to embrace technological and social innovation implying change and new tasks.

The potential limitations of this study in terms of generalizability due to the non-representative convenience sample across countries are duly acknowledged. Despite this limitation, it is noteworthy that our study benefits from a robust and sizable sample, encompassing a substantial

number of LAM professionals across five European countries. The breadth and diversity of this sample offer valuable insights into the perspectives of professionals within the LAM field, contributing to a richer understanding of the intricate dynamics at play.

It is important to highlight that the ALMPUB surveys were distributed to all types of archives and museums, and exclusively public libraries. This constrains the applicability of findings of this study to other library types, such as university libraries. It could be interesting to explore the role perceptions and professional identity of other types of librarians (such as academic librarians) to see if the perceptions differ across various librarian types. The current literature (see for example, McCluskey, 2013) shows that university librarians have a strong role perception as researcher, and it could be hypothesized that academic librarians are more likely to perceive themselves as researcher (than public librarians). On the other hand, because of the importance of social roles to public librarians in our study, it could be hypothesized that public librarians are more likely to perceive themselves similar to social professional roles than academic librarians.

We do not have data on the types of investigated archives or museums in the surveys. The type of archive or museum can contribute to the archivist's or museum professional's professional identity. For example, the nature of the collections in an archive could guide the required expertise, skills, or roles of an archivist. The institution's mission and vision, the institution size, as well as the community it serves, can influence professionals to identify themselves with certain roles.

Our questionnaire responses shed light on some reasons behind individuals perceiving their jobs as similar or different. This variance may stem from the specific daily tasks or the overall nature of their professions. For instance, within the diverse role of a public librarian, variations exist, including digital librarians, children's librarians, and those involved in reference work. A digital librarian might identify more with a web developer than a teacher, while a children's librarian might feel the opposite. In essence, individuals perceive similarities or differences in their jobs based on various aspects of their professional duties. This insight serves as a valuable cue for future researchers to explore the multifaceted dimensions influencing perceptions of professional proximity among individuals in distinct roles within the LAM sector.



ALMPUB surveys' data were collected in 2018-2019 and it may not fully capture the later shifts in professional identity or role perceptions of LAM professionals, particularly considering the transformative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the technological changes (including Artificial Intelligence (AI)), and recent international crises (such as wars). These events could alter the way Libraries, Archives, and Museums (LAM) deliver their services and could have significant influences on professional roles within these institutions. We plan to conduct a follow-up study to explore how these professional roles may have evolved due to these global events. The data from the current study will serve as a vital baseline for comparison, enabling us to track changes and trends over time.

The roles of demographic factors in role perceptions among three studied LAM professions deserve more research. For example, our data shows that older public librarians are more in favor of roles such as agent for enlightenment, and agents of freedom of expression than younger counterparts; and female librarians have broader and more inclusive perception of their professional roles than males. More research is needed to corroborate or refute those patterns.

While our study explores LAM professionals in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) contexts (Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan, 2010), the absence of representation from non-WEIRD countries limits the full grasp of diversity in experiences, challenges, and contributions. Future research endeavors should actively incorporate non-WEIRD contexts, enriching our understanding of the global professional dynamics among LAM professionals and fostering a more inclusive knowledge base.

### **Supplementary Data**

The supplementary data and appendices for this study is available via this link: <https://doi.org/10.18710/SCNNMR>

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