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# Mapping presentations of crafts in the Danish heritage industry

## Deliberations on research design and preliminary findings

### **ABSTRACT**

*In this paper, I present the methodological and theoretical deliberations behind a mapping of how crafts are presented in the Danish cultural heritage industry. I trace the historical background of crafts in the Danish heritage industry and present definitions of key concepts such as ‘craft’ and ‘the Danish heritage industry’. I then develop a research design consisting of a questionnaire and ethnographic fieldwork. I consider how research questions about scope and variation can be operationalized in the questionnaire and how theoretical perspectives from critical heritage studies (Smith, 2006) and vital materialism (Bennett, 2010; 2012) can inform the questionnaire and fieldwork. Finally, some preliminary findings are presented along with some comments on the use of questionnaires in heritage research.*

### *Keywords:*

cultural heritage, crafts, critical heritage studies, mapping.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Within critical heritage studies, heritage is understood to be a social process firmly linked to the understandings and needs of the present, rather than simply being preserved elements of the past (Smith, 2006; Harvey 2001). This also applies to crafts. Understanding how crafts are presented as cultural heritage can thus tell us something about how crafts are understood and valued in the present. In the first part of my PhD project *Crafts in the Danish cultural heritage industry: Presentation practices and user experiences*, I set out to investigate how crafts are included and presented as cultural heritage in the Danish cultural heritage industry. To do so, I am currently conducting a mapping consisting of a questionnaire and fieldwork. The preliminary results of the questionnaire show that crafts are included and presented at many heritage sites, ranging from state-owned museums and art museums to small volunteer-run heritage sites. This indicates that the inclusion and presentation of crafts as a part of Danish cultural heritage is happening in a variety of ways and on quite a large scale. Since the data collection is still ongoing, the focus of this paper will be on how the scope and variation of the presentation of crafts in the Danish cultural heritage industry can be mapped and the implications such

a mapping has. Before developing the details of the research design, I will trace a historical outline of how crafts have been included and presented as cultural heritage in Denmark.

### **A historical outline**

The presentation of crafts in the Danish heritage industry began even before public museums existed. In the private collections of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, like Ole Worm's collection of curiosities and the Royal Art Chamber of King Frederik III, products of crafts were exhibited alongside natural objects and art pieces in an encyclopedic endeavour to present a microcosmos (Gundestrup, 2005: 13). Crafts were only represented in terms of craft products, but it was tradition that the Royal Collection was overseen by an academic and managed by a craftsman (Mordhorst, 2009: 50). By the end of the 1700s, scientific ideals shifted and objects from the private collections were reorganized into new collections that formed the basis for the emerging public museums (Gundestrup, 2005, p. 32).

By the beginning of the 1800s, there was a dominating historical interest in prehistoric objects and their potential to contribute to a national identity (Federspiel, 2005: 95). The more recent objects and buildings, especially those that pertained to the lives of ordinary people, were not considered of interest for the museums, but by the end of the 1800s a new kind of museum arose: The folk and open-air museums (Skougaard, 2005: 103). These museums focused on the more recent past and introduced a new way of presenting historical objects: entire buildings were put on display, fully furnished (Ravn, 2020: 13; Jensen, 2015: 124). When Hjerl Hede opened in 1932, the processes of craft were now part of the exhibitions, in the beginning performed by original practitioners but later by museum staff and hobby-practitioners (Jessen & Warring, 2019, pp. 28-30).

In the 1960s, a new field within archeology developed. In *experimental archeology*, prehistoric techniques are tested through practical experiments of scientific precision (Greene & Moore, 2010: 241). Over the years experimental archeology has also developed to include both more humanistic endeavours to learn about the prehistoric ways of life (Petersson & Narmo, 2011: 28) as well as demonstrations of crafts and craft activities for visitors at heritage sites (Juel, 1979).

Hands-on, or full-body, experiences of cultural heritage have grown in number over the past 20 years as the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) has influenced the cultural heritage industry. Heritage sites are now expected not only to present visitors with knowledge about the past, but also to provide them with experiences. Experiences can be characterized by changing the state of the visitor: *moving* them emotionally and physically (Jantzen et al., 2011: 26). This development might have promoted the use of craft activities in the Danish heritage industry, especially as a global 'third wave' of interest in crafts emerged after the economic crisis in 2008, seeing an upsurge in both craft entrepreneurs and the engagement with crafts as a hobby by the middle class (Luckman, 2015: 23–24).

A recent development in the Danish cultural heritage Industry is a focus on how presentations of historic crafts influence visitors' knowledge of and attitudes towards crafts in the present. A recent example is Den Gamle By (The Old Town), which in 2022 tested different formats for communicating the link between historical and modern crafts, such as exhibiting old examples of craftsmen's final exam pieces alongside contemporary ones (Skjernov et al., 2023).

The ways in which crafts have been included and presented in the Danish cultural heritage industry have developed over the years, and crafts are now found at a wide variety of heritage sites and presented in many different ways. In the following I will present the theoretical underpinnings of the mapping before I go on to develop the research design.

## **DEFINITIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

When conducting a mapping, it is imperative to know *what* you are looking for and *where* you are looking for it. Therefore, I begin with a definition of *crafts* and a delimitation of *the Danish cultural heritage industry*.

### **A definition of crafts**

For this project I have formulated the following, rather pragmatic, definition of craft:

Craft is defined as *a process in which a human transforms one or more materials into a product, using their hands/body, specialized skill and, sometimes, tools.*

There are both practical and theoretical considerations behind this definition. Firstly, practical considerations point to a set of basic elements (human, materials, products, hands/body, skill, tools, process) that can be operationalized in the research design. Secondly, by focusing on the process and elements of crafts, the definition moves beyond the discussion of whether a given process carries a socially ascribed status as a 'real' craft or a trade. Instead, the definition focuses on the sort of knowledge that is involved in the process of turning raw material into a product. This knowledge is described by philosopher Gilbert Ryle as *knowing how* (Ryle, 1949) and in a Norwegian context as *handlingsbåren kundskap* (NOU1986, 1986:15) or *knowing in action* (Molander, 2015). What these concepts of knowledge have in common is that they identify a way of knowing which is linked to the body and to processes of craft: a way of knowing which is significantly different from academic knowledge. In the public debate this way of knowing is often described as being at risk of disappearing from contemporary Danish society due to a lack of respect (for example, by Tesfaye, 2013). This way of knowing is also included in the concept of intangible heritage, a heritage category officialized by UNESCO in 2003 (UNESCO, 2003) to counteract a historical focus within world heritage management on European heritage and material concepts of heritage (Blake, 2016). The definition thus reflects the project's theoretical grounding in cultural studies, where a key understanding is that academia is obligated to make a difference and give voice to those perspectives which are marginalized in society (Hall, 1992). Finally, the definition points to the importance of the materials and objects of the craft process by explicitly including them in the wording. This reflects the project's theoretical understanding, stemming from *vital materialism* (Bennett, 2010, 2012), that materials and objects can act in the world (Bennett, 2010: 9).

Following this definition, presentations of crafts in the heritage industry can range from a display of old or ancient tools, demonstrations of historical or modern crafts to digital representations of craft and craft workshops. All of these can be more, or less, historically correct. Consequently, in this mapping I am not trying to identify which Danish craft traditions can be termed immaterial cultural heritage as defined by UNESCO or trying to pinpoint who is presenting crafts in the most historically correct ways. Nor am I setting out to identify best practices for presenting craft as cultural heritage. Instead, this mapping *is* about understanding which practices are out there.

### **A delimitation of the Danish heritage industry**

There is no predefined group of organizations that collectively form the Danish heritage industry. Deciding on the limits of this group is a methodically important question when attempting a mapping. My theoretical standpoint within critical heritage studies means that I do not consider heritage a privileged activity reserved for museums. Rather, I see it as a social practice undertaken by a variety of organizations, visitors and volunteers (Smith, 2006). Therefore, I have chosen a broad definition of the heritage industry.

I have worked to compile a respondent list for the questionnaire consisting of *organizations that present Danish cultural heritage to an audience at a specific geographical place*. This broad definition means that the respondents range from large, state-owned museums to small, privately-owned or volunteer-run organizations. I have incorporated museums, experience centres, learning centres, volunteer-driven historical buildings (windmills, smithies, railroads). I have left out small contemporary art galleries, and I have left out historical sites which function solely as a business, with no structured communication of the site's heritage. This wide selection is chosen in order to uncover the many ways in which crafts are presented and included in Danish cultural heritage.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

In trying to understand the role of crafts in the Danish heritage industry, I started by asking basic questions about where, how much, in what ways, by whom and for whom craft is presented as heritage in Denmark. I then followed up with more theoretically informed questions, such as what discourses are

activated when presenting crafts as heritage? And how is the material aspect of the craft process included in the presentations of crafts?

These questions led me to design a mapping strategy consisting of two steps: A questionnaire and fieldwork from visits to 10–15 examples of presentations of heritage crafts, chosen so that they mirror the variety of presentation methods and organizational type that is identified through the questionnaire. The purpose of the fieldwork was to deepen the understanding of different presentations of crafts, especially regarding the discursive, emotional and material aspects.

### **Designing the questionnaire**

The usefulness of questionnaires has been debated within the humanities, as it has been argued that they are easily manipulated in favour of dominant knowledge and social structures (Deacon, 2008: 91). Yet in determining the scope of a given phenomenon, a questionnaire can be a useful tool, and when it is used in combination with qualitative methods it can produce strong arguments (Deacon, 2008: 101).

Putting together a useful questionnaire is not easy. The quality of the data depends on who the questionnaire is sent to, how many of the respondents reply and the quality of the replies. Low quality replies are most often the result of a question being understood in varying and contradictory ways by the respondents (Olsen, 2006: 7). A central issue in developing questionnaires is thus to formulate the questions so that they are understood as uniformly as possible by the respondents (Olsen, 2006, 12). To ensure the quality of the questions, the first step is to define and operationalize the concepts presented in the research questions, thereby making them *measurable* (Olsen, 2006: 13). In the context of this survey, it is relevant to operationalize the terms *scope* and *variation*.

*Scope* is understood as both *number of sites* and *number of visitors*, as well as the *amount of time the presentation is available to visitors*. The latter includes questions of whether the presentation of crafts is available to the visitors whenever the museum is open, or only at special times/occasions. In addition to this, the heritage sites are asked *how central* the presentation of crafts is. This question is not a factual question about scope but a tentative question about importance.

*Variation* is understood within several parameters. The questions enquire about *which crafts* are presented, *what presentation forms* are used, *who is doing the presentation* and *what audiences* the presentations are intended for. They also address *the ways in which the visitors are expected to interact* with the presentation: for example, *which senses* the visitors are expected to employ.

In order to formulate questions and answer categories for the scope and the variation of the presentation of crafts, I rely on insights from existing research, the historical outline presented above, as well as interviews with heritage practitioners performed as part of a pilot test of the questionnaire.

In addition to these questions of scope and variation, some background questions (Olsen, 2006: 21) were also included about the size and type of organization, number of opening days per year and so on, of the heritage sites.

### **Designing the fieldwork**

Based on the findings from the questionnaire, 10–15 examples of presentations of crafts will be further investigated through ethnographic fieldwork (Pink, 2011; 2021). The data collection framework for this part of the mapping will be informed by the theoretical perspectives of critical heritage studies and new materialism.

### **Addressing the discursive aspect of heritage in the fieldwork**

Critical heritage studies provides some important pointers on how the fieldwork can be conducted and what should be given attention.

Within critical heritage studies, heritage is understood as a social process in which people use the past in response to challenges or understandings in the present (Harvey, 2001; Smith, 2006; 2021). This means that heritage is discursive, taking shape through the way it is presented and used by both heritage sites, heritage professionals and visitors. The presentation of crafts at heritage sites can be many things at once: the site may present crafts as part of the story they tell, and they may use craft activities to provide visitors with experiences; volunteers at the site can use crafts as a leisure activity

and visitors can use presentations of craft and craft activities as a way to connect with their family or engage with aspects of their own past.

Acknowledging the discursive and emotional nature of heritage means that during the fieldwork I will pay attention to the ways in which the presentations of crafts are discursively shaped by the heritage sites. Discourse is understood broadly to include both spoken and written presentations of crafts, the visual organization of presentations of crafts as well as what functions the presentation of crafts fulfill at the heritage site.

### ***Addressing the materiality of heritage in the fieldwork***

Intrinsic to crafts is the interplay between human, material and objects: The craftsperson must choose, and use, raw materials, they may use tools and they will create a product in close interaction with these. Thus, it can be useful to incorporate a theoretical perspective on how materials, things and humans interact, as well as a strategy for detecting these interactions in the mapping.

One way in which humans interact with materiality in crafts is through assessments of the mechanical and aesthetic qualities of materials: for example, when a craftsperson evaluates the properties of a given material and decides on its use within their craft production. But often one gets the feeling that *something more* is going on, some way in which the objects and materials add to the craft process and the experience of it: for example, when materials inspire, or resist, the craft process in such a way that the product changes significantly. One way of conceptualizing this ‘something more’ is formulated by political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett as *thing-power* (2010; 2012), a concept which Bennett invented to direct attention to the ways in which things and materials have traces of liveliness and agency, that is, the ability to interact with humans and other objects/materials (Bennett, 2010: xvi). The concept is part of a *vital materialism*, in which Bennett formulates an approach to the material that recognizes the material as living and connected, inspiring humans to treat the material more intelligently and respectfully (Bennett, 2010: 12).

In the mapping, I use the concept of thing-power as a theoretical lens to guide my questions and observations and to sharpen my attention to those aspects of the presentations of crafts in which materials and things are involved. Drawing on Bennett (2012: 259-260), I pay specific attention to the ways in which the mechanical, the aesthetic and the thing-power-like qualities of materials, tools and products are invoked in the presentation of crafts at heritage sites. This is reflected in the questionnaire in the questions about variation. In the fieldwork, video recordings will be used in addition to written field notes and photos, as existing research has indicated that video recordings of craft can be useful in documenting aspects of craft processes that are not easily vocalized (Almevik, 2016; Ho, 2021).

## **PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

The research outlined above is currently ongoing. The questionnaire was issued via email to 725 respondents over the course of May and June 2023. The field visits will be carried out in July and August 2023.

As of the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 2023, 497 heritage sites have filled out the questionnaire (70% of the total number of respondents). Out of these, 270 (54%) of the respondents report that they present crafts as part of Danish cultural heritage, which means that at least 5.8 million visitors encountered presentations of crafts as cultural heritage in 2022 (Table 1). The questionnaire indicates that presentations of crafts are more frequent amongst the smaller heritage sites than the larger ones (Table 1) and that, for example, volunteer-run heritage sites are more likely to present crafts than state-owned heritage sites (Table 2). Whether there are also differences in terms of how crafts are presented at these heritage sites will be a topic for further analysis.

The questionnaire shows that crafts are being presented at a range of different heritage sites and that a variety of craft processes are presented, including carpentry, smithing, pottery, production of honey, calligraphy, milling, production of bricks, production of paper, dyeing with plants, weaving, boatbuilding, dairy production, cooking, gardening, making of instruments, historical farming techniques, sewing and more. The replies also indicate that the ways in which crafts are communicated

can be roughly categorized into the categories listed in Table 3, with the addition of the categories listed in Table 4, which I established following an analysis of the the comments from respondents.

**TABLE 1.** Number of visitors.

Number of visitors in 2022	HERITAGE SITES present crafts: YES (frequency within the category)
0-500	34 (51%)
500-1000	29 (64%)
1000-5.000	60 (55%)
5.000-10.000	43 (56%)
10.000-25.000	47 (52%)
25.000-50.000	25 (52%)
50.000-100.000	19 (46%)
100.000-150.000	3 (30%)
150.000-200.000	1 (20%)
200.000-300.000	3 (50%)
300.000-400.000	1 (100%)
400.000-500.000	3 (60%)
500.000+	2 (67%)

**TABLE 2.** Variation in organization type.

Organization type	HERITAGE SITES present crafts: YES (frequency within the category)
<i>Museum under the museum law (receives state funding)</i>	114 (53%)
<i>State-owned museum</i>	5 (36%)
<i>Organization that receives state funding but not under museum law</i>	5 (50%)
<i>Museum/activity centre/other owned by a municipality</i>	33 (60%)
<i>Independent institution</i>	96 (56%)
<i>Volunteer-run/non-profit organization</i>	67 (59%)
<i>Privately owned institution</i>	29 (62%)
<i>Art centre (kunsthall)</i>	2 (25%)
<i>Activity/teaching centre financed in part by the state</i>	4 (80%)
<i>Other</i>	16 (39%)

**TABLE 3.** Variation in presentation style.

Presentation styles	HERITAGES SITES (use this presentation style to some, high or very high extent)
<i>Object displays</i>	152
<i>Displays of entire interior and exterior milieu</i>	164
<i>Digital exhibitions elements at the heritage site</i>	87
<i>Presentations of ongoing building and restoration projects at the heritage site</i>	75
<i>Demonstrations of crafts</i>	145
<i>Presentations of crafts as part of reenactments at the heritage site</i>	144
<i>Try-it-yourself activities for visitors at the heritage site</i>	100
<i>Guided tours</i>	182
<i>Teaching activities for schools</i>	131
<i>Workshops and courses that require signing up</i>	60
<i>Online communication on webpages and social media</i>	83
<i>Other</i>	55

**TABLE 4.** New categories of presentation style.

Presentation styles (deduced from the respondents comments)
<i>Out-of-the-house activities (presentations at schools, retirement homes and festivals)</i>
<i>Ships presented in harbour</i>
<i>Written communication (pamphlets, info-boards etc.)</i>
<i>Collaborations with institutions for higher education</i>
<i>Presentations of crafts in relation to works of art/artistic processes</i>
<i>Academic papers</i>
<i>Lectures/artist talks</i>

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although the results from the questionnaire are still coming in and a detailed analysis awaits, I can conclude that including a questionnaire in the mapping proves useful in terms of getting an overview of the scope and variation in the presentations of crafts in the Danish cultural heritage industry. The questionnaire has succeeded in reaching a large number of respondents, and the replies give a good indication of the variety of crafts and styles of presentation that are prevalent in the Danish cultural heritage industry, as well as indicating tendencies that can be investigated further in the fieldwork.

In addition to providing numerical data, the questionnaire also supplies a wealth of qualitative data, as many respondents use the options given for written responses. For example, 73 of the respondents chose to comment on which different presentation styles were used at the heritage site. These comments provided examples of presentation styles that could then be included in the overview presented here (Table 4), but in several of the comments the respondent provided more detail about how the heritage site made use of the different styles of presentation. This points to one of the weaknesses of using questionnaires: presentations of heritage are rich in nuance and detail and a presentation style can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the site and the crafts that are presented, which cannot fully be captured in a questionnaire. While questionnaires can help to identify overall patterns and the scope of the presentation of crafts as cultural heritage, they can only trace a rough outline of what is happening at the different sites. To understand the inclusion and presentation of crafts in the Danish heritage industry in more depth, further research should include qualitative methods such as planned fieldwork, case studies and a focus on the visitors' experiences.

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