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Libraries, Archives and Museums as Democratic Spaces in a Digital Age is amongst the outputs of the ALMPUB (The ALM-Field, Digitalization and the Public Sphere) research project financed by the Norwegian Research Council’s KULMEDIA Programme. This impressive anthology is edited by eight scholars and in the introduction, written by Audunson, Andresen, Fagerlid, Henningsen, Hobohm, Jochumsen, and Larsen, the stage is set in structural, theoretical, and methodological terms. The editors provide a short historical account of libraries, archives, and museums as institutions and further explain the theoretical perspective which the book leans towards. Concerning the latter, and aligned to the book’s overall objective of investigating libraries, archives, and museums as democratic spaces in a digital age, the editors frame them within theories of the public sphere; theories that focus on viewing LAM institutions as arenas for the formation of a culture of civility, and as arenas for the formation of community. The editors further explain the main objectives of the book by referring to the following research questions:

• How is the balance between the digital and analogue roles of LAM institutions, as meeting places and providers of knowledge and information? Is it useful, or even possible, to distinguish between the digital and the analogue, or do they constitute one socio-material reality?
• To what extent do LAM institutions in their policies and practices open for forms of digital user participation?
• What political visions of LAM-institutions as democratic public spaces are currently articulated by European governments and how does digitalization feature in these visions?
• How do professionals in the LAM fields perceive their institutions’ roles as democratic public spaces in a digital age?
• What characterizes the public’s uses of libraries, archives, and museums in the digital age? What roles do these institutions play in the different life spheres of their users? How do modes of usage shape and form for example libraries and how do new trends in design of libraries change, shape, and form use?

As participants of a large-scale research project, the contributors have carried out different studies in the Nordic countries, as well as Germany, Hungary, and Switzerland. Participants use different methods to collect impressive quantitative and qualitative empirical data, and these methodological approaches inform the chapters in different ways. While some are based on surveys which allow for cross-national comparisons, others use different forms of textual and document analysis, interviews with experts, LAM professionals, and users, group interviews, observations, participative observations, and task-centred approaches. Yet others apply a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative elements. This variety of methodological approaches allows for different analytical takes and some of these are quite innovative and experimental. One of the book’s most important contributions is therefore that it provides solid empirical evidence of the current state of LAM organisations (both onsite and online), and further anchors these findings in different analytical approaches that focus on policies, LAM professionals, and users.

After the introductory chapter, the book is organised as follows: Part 1: Policies; Part 2: Professions; and Part 3: Users and consists of 17 chapters which are subsequently outlined. Part 1: LAM Institutions: a Cross-Country Comparison of Legislation and Statistics on Services and Use (Kerstin Rydbeck and Jamie Johnston); The Digitalization Imperative: Sacralization of Technology in LAM Policies (Erik Henningsen and Håkon Larsen); The Institutions Go Digital (Roger Blomgren); Norwegian National Policies for Digitalization in the LAM Sector: Imperative and Implementation (Sigrid Stokstad); Organization and Funding of Digitization in the Visegrád Countries (Máté Tóth); Institutional Convergence and Divergence in Norwegian Cultural Policy: Central Government LAM Organization 1999-2019 (Andreas Vårheim, Roswitha Skare, and Sigrid Stokstad).

Part 2: LAM Professionals and the Public Sphere (Ragnar Audunson, Hans-Christoph Hobohm, and Máté Tóth); Perceptions and Implications of User Participation and Engagement in Libraries, Archives and Museums (Herbjørn Andresen, Isto Huvila, and Sigrid Stokstad); Like, Share and Comment! The Use of Facebook by Public Libraries and Museums: A Case Study from Tromsø, Norway (Roswitha Skare); Reading Between the Shelves: The Library as Perspective in Life and Profession (Kjell Ivar Skjerdingstad).

Part 3: The Use of LAM Institutions in the Digital Age (Andreas Vårheim, Henrik Jochumsen, Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen, and Kerstin Rydbeck); Libraries and Democracy in Germany: As Perceived by the Public in Contrast to the Professionals (Hans-Christoph Hobohm); Democratic Coexistence, Tiny Publics, and Participatory Emancipation at the Public Library (Cicilie Fagerlid); Being, Learning, Doing: A Palace for the Children? (Tonje Vold and Sunniva Evjen); Libraries and the Sámi Population in Norway: Assimilation and Resistance (Geir Grenersen); The Joys of Wiki Work: Craftsmanship, Flow and Self-Externalization in a Digital Environment (Erik Henningsen and Håkon Larsen).

As this somewhat lengthy overview of the book’s chapters and its authors indicates, it is composed of diverse topical, methodological, and analytical approaches some of which focus on the different types of LAM institutions separately, while others treat them collectively. The chapters thereby both demonstrate the institutions’ specific functions and charac-
teristics, as well as what combines them as democratic spaces in a digital age. While the book certainly lives up to the promise of providing studies grounded in the aforementioned countries and institutions, there is still a slight leaning towards Norwegian studies in a geographical sense and libraries in an institutional sense. The book’s structure focussing on policies, professionals, and users, is suitable to demonstrate specifics, as well as transitions from policy to practice, or from imperative to implementation. As separate studies, the chapters thus provide most welcome snapshots, innovative analytical takes, and case studies on LAM institutions which are methodologically and empirically comprehensive. This is most welcome as it clearly informs and contributes to ongoing discussions on the current state of LAM institutions in the digital age.

In theoretical terms, it would however have been useful if the authors had carved out a clearer conceptual thread from the different chapters towards the theoretical notions which are put forward in the introductory chapter. It would therefore be beneficial to anchor the different analytical approaches and case studies further within the notion of public sphere(s), cultures of civility, and how LAM institutions contribute to formations of communities in the current digital age. For instance, how does a promising concept like “tiny publics” relate to the current state of LAM institutions, online and onsite, and how does this further transmit to the theoretical angle proposed by the editors in the first chapter? This is just one example of how the theoretical propositions in different chapters could have further contributed to evolving the theoretical vocabulary proposed by the editors and the book’s overarching research questions. This is perhaps asking a lot, but an epilogue written by the editors would have been useful in further collecting the theoretical snapshots of the chapters provided by the authors to further stimulate and evolve these empirically grounded insights within the proposed theoretical framework.

On a final note, it is worth mentioning that the book is published as open access, both as a collected pdf and individual chapters. While this is of course significant in terms of general access to novel research perspectives within the LAM sector, this is also a suitable format for readers that want to access separate chapters. To conclude, this anthology contributes significantly to ongoing research within the LAM sector. In particular, its ambitious methodological design and production of a wide range of empirical evidence will be welcomed by scholars, professionals, practitioners, students, and users alike.