Strategic stakeholder communication in a dynamic perspective
- Roles and expectations to the local city museum

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background for the research environment of the PhD
Due to a joint interest in the challenging situation in which most museums in Denmark find themselves in, collaboration was made between The Centre for Corporate Communication, Aarhus School of Business and the Centre of Museology at Aarhus University. A research group was formed in 2007 under the name of The Strategic Museum with the following participants: Associated professor and director of Museum of Ancient Art Vinnie Nørskov and associated professor Ane Hejlskov both leading figures in the Danish research of museology along with Professor Finn Frandsen and associated professor Winni Johansen both known for their research in Corporate Communication and especially in the field of crisis communication. The underlying premise of the research group was a question of investigating whether strategic communication could submit some of the answers to the challenging and changing context of museums management. Two on-going research projects into sponsoring and leadership of Danish Museum as well as a PhD project about art museums undertaken by Anne Karina Kjeldsen are giving a strong research environment for this PhD.

1.2. Quantitative empirical background
One of the first projects of the research group was a quantitative study with 122 participating museums on the state of strategic communication in Danish museums. The results of the study showed that there was a limited focus on communicating strategically at the Danish museums. Furthermore, Danish museums are generally not well-equipped with meeting the challenges of communicating and working in collaboration with their context as they view communication as a matter of marketing via traditional one-way media. This means that museums only to a very low degree invite central stakeholders in formulating visions of the museums and that in overall their approach to stakeholders are limited to known stakeholders to whom the museums displays a reactive approach. Communication is primarily regarded as a task for the management in the museums to take care of. As such the study displayed the notion that the employees at museums are an overlooked stakeholder group in regard to the museums' strategic communication. The study showed museum managements as having a high focus on economy and the managing of the traditional roles of the museum in society (Bysted-Sandberg & Kjeldsen 2008). As such the rapport showed an interest and the need for further investigations into strategic communication at Danish museums.
1.3. The financial and organisational set-up behind this PhD project

There are a number of partners involved in the process of the PhD project. Firstly, the Department of Business Communication, Aarhus School of Business, Aarhus University that is the home of the Centre for Corporate Communication. Secondly, the Heritage Agency of Denmark and the City Museum in Aarhus. The Department of Business Communication has funded two thirds of the PhD scholarship. The research group; The Strategic Museum, has worked together with the local city museum in Aarhus (The City Museum) and they attracted one third of external funding for the PhD project from the National Heritage Agency in Denmark. Therefore the PhD project has one major frame of reference, the local City Museum in Aarhus. Specific cases should always be selected for a specific purpose (Neergaard, 2010), however, the choice of this specific organisation as the empirical basis of the thesis has rather been a matter of network. As object of study the City Museum was therefore almost a given choice due to the collaboration between the Aarhus School of Business, Aarhus University and the City Museum in Aarhus. This set-up has made the empirical outset the PhD project.

1.4. The purpose of this PhD project

The overall purpose of the present PhD project is twofold:

A) In order to strengthen the positioning of small local city museums within their local societies the project maps the complex landscape of roles that local stakeholders have appointed to the City Museum and investigates the dynamics of strategic communication with stakeholders.

B) The project contributes to the dynamic approach in stakeholder theory by developing a model that accounts for how central stakeholders and their mutual interdependencies are central to the construction of identity and role of the organization.

The underlying premise is that one needs to understand the different conceptual frameworks that are at play when local stakeholders estimate their local museum’s legitimacy. As such the project asks how a small local city museum can be able to work in line with the notions of corporate communication while continuingly being aware of central stakeholders’ interdependencies and co-constructions in relation to the museum’s roles and legitimacy.
The twofold purpose, I suggest, will be met by answering the following research questions:

1.5. Research questions
Which organisational identities do organisational members at the City Museum construct?

What are the roles constructed by central stakeholders regarding the City Museum in Aarhus, are the constructions interdependent on other central stakeholders and how?

How to develop a dynamic model for corporate communication for a small local city museum while incorporating a dynamic approach to stakeholder theory?
1.6. Introduction to the theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for approaching the field of a local city museum is a bricolage of different theoretical concepts such as stakeholder theory (Friedman 1984, Friedman & Miles 2006) corporate communication (Van Riel 1984, Corneillisen 2002, Christensen & Morsing 2005) organisational identity (Hatch & Schultz 2000, 2004) and recent museological theories (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, Janes 2006).

The theoretical framework is not fully explored, as the empirical work of the project has been the primary object of study in the first year of research. Theoretical concepts are presented and defined in the present thesis proposal and will be the focus ahead as well as putting the question as to whether Actor Network Theory can be used as an analytical framework for the empirical case study. Throughout the theoretical discussions and defining sections of the present thesis proposal, I will relate the theory to the case study conducted at the City Museum in Aarhus.

1.7. Presentation of the object of study

The City Museum is a relatively new museum opened in 1993. Since then the museum has been physically extended and grown from two employees to fourteen, working either in the offices placed in an old railway station or in the public exhibition area being a modern architectural bright building from 2003. The City Museum is a heritage museum partly funded by the Heritage Agency of Denmark as well as the local municipality in Aarhus.

The City Museum in Aarhus is not representative of other Danish city museums as the norm is that other Danish city museums are making a financial turnover by
taking care of archaeology and excavations in the local region. The City Museum in Aarhus also differ in the fact that they hold a limited collection as the museum only started collecting from 1993 as opposed to other city museums which have been collecting since the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century (Strandgaard 2010).

Furthermore the museum has since 2005 been under continuously pressure due to both a financial deficit, problems with raising external funding for building their main exhibition, as well a problematic termination of a leader that ended in a court trial. All of this was reported and critiqued in and by the local media. Furthermore the City Museum has been subjected to two analyses made by officials from the city hall as well as receiving critical remarks in relation to their research by the Heritage Agency in Denmark. The total of this problematic history resulted in the City Museum being transferred to a larger museum near by (The Old Town) as the city council decided to sell off the premises that the City Museum inhibits. A fusion between the two museums will be effected by the end of June 2011 and the employees and work tasks will then be part of The Old Town in Aarhus. This drastic change in organisational setting influenced the frame of the present thesis.

I will now very briefly give examples of the identity analysis of the museum that I conducted in the first phase of research. Organisational members at the City Museum and the management had different personal perceptions as to the museum’s role and identity as such being “an archive”, “a registrar”, “an entertainer”, “a room for contemplation”, “a disseminator” and a “guardian of city history”. Organisational members and management also pointed to legislative foundations of the museum and the Museums’ Act in order to legitimate the actions of the City Museum and the state of the museum’s reputation. A sense of general unfair treatment from media as well as other stakeholder groups and a lack of money was also noted as important by the members and management at the museum. Furthermore the actual building and placement of the museum in a “central but remote building”, “an impossible exhibition area” was mentioned by organisational members as obstacles for changing the City Museums negative reputation.

2. Methodological framework
The PhD project is an attempt to generate theory by analysing a case study conducted at the City Museum in Aarhus. Since I was not acquainted with the museum, I have chosen an inductive approach from a bottom up design perspective (Maaløe 1996) in the design of the case study that has been used in an iterative process in developing the research questions of the thesis. A frequent criticism of the
The use of a case study as a methodology is that its dependence on one or few cases limits the ability to obtain generalizable conclusions. Since the use of a case study implies that research is limited to a few cases at a time, as Yin (2009) argues that a case study can never be a “macro-trial” no matter how many cases are involved. In his opinion, the goal of case studies should form the basis for further research. In this understanding, the study of a single case can be acceptable if it matches the area of research. Yin (ibid.) points out that generalization from case studies depend on its methodological quality and degree of consistent accuracy. In this context he emphasizes the three qualitative research principles: description, understanding and explanation. These principles have been guiding the way that I have constructed and written down observations during the initial phase of research where I followed the everyday life at the museum.

By analysing only one case study, I have produced a deep rooted and very thorough set of data of the complex and multifaceted dimensions of relations and interdependencies among central stakeholders of the City Museum in Aarhus. In contrast, a case study could produce arguments for or against a particular theory about the phenomena being studied (Yin 2009) through a theoretical generalization in using case studies is also possible (Ramian 2007). In the thesis’ use of case study of the City Museum I have been able to “get a deeper insight into demarcated specific areas” (Harboe 2001) of the museum as an institution with certain characteristics as well as providing a frame for using the explorative possibilities of the case study. Furthermore, the case study conducted has shown the method’s ability to set light on which issues are at stake in this context (Ramian 2007).

The empirical research project consisted of two phases. In the first phase of the research my main focus was on internal perceptions and constructions of the City Museums identities as shown in a number of roles constructed, articulated by the members of the organisation. The second phase of empirical research was a number of interviews and document analyses of external stakeholders of the City Museum. As Healy and Perry (2000) have noted the importance of the contextualization of the data in a case study, all data constructions are related in terms of time and place. This aspect needs further explorations as I am going to use the data obtained by interviewing external stakeholders about their perceptions of the museums identity. I saw no other possible option of covering their views than in interviews. I am using their articulation in interviews by noting which events or tales that they mention when asked, following my semi-structured research guide (Kvale 1998).
3. Empirical framework
As the City Museum was a partner in the foundation of the present PhD project, access to the organisation was not an issue (Neergaard 2007). Therefore I have been able to construct an empirical foundation that was in-depth and presented a longitude of almost one year of observing and following the City Museum from an inside as well as an outside perspective i.e. media coverage of the museum.

The case study has also presented the frame of analysis in order to select which external stakeholders to interview as part of the research. Here I have tried to construct the context of who and what have been spoken about at the museum covering the spectrum of activities. This was partly inspired by the attribution model introduced by Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997). I have also included potential stakeholders, but still those noticed and given importance by the organisational members actions or articulations, such as for example non-visitors. Ambler and Wilson (1995) “demonstrate that firms do not simply respond to each stakeholder individually; they respond, rather, to the interaction of multiple influences from the entire stakeholder set. Thus, explanations of how organizations respond to their stakeholders require an analysis of the complex array of multiple, interdependent relationships existing within the stakeholder environment”. (Freeman and Robert 2002, 30-31) This view has inspired the scope of the stakeholders included in the empirical research.

This descriptive approach of stakeholder theory has shown its limitation both from observations undertaken at the museum as well as in interviews with external stakeholders as a number of non-human entities have also been articulated as important in terms of understanding the museums role and expectations of central stakeholders.

As such I have two points of references for the construction of the empirical data as the basis of the thesis following Denzin and Lincol’s suggestion of the qualitative researcher as bricoleur (2005) as well as Silverman’s notion of diversity (1993). This has meant that I have had two phases of qualitative research and data construction:

3.1. Phase 1: An Internal frame of reference:
Observational studies
From a participant-as-observer research position I participated in one weekly meeting at the museum from May 2009 until January 2010 taking field notes. I participated in development meetings regarding the museum’s website development. I have also been observing a number of different events arranged by
the museum such as the annual meeting, a guided city walk, a guided tour of the museum as well a discussion evening hosted by the museum and other events held at the museum.
Also I have written observations and impressions of the time I spent working and being at the museum on a continuous basis throughout the observation period. This was done in order to obtain informal talks and build relations of trust with the members of the organisation. I participated in the morning coffee as well as being present at the museum. I spent time in the café, in the exhibition areas and behind the scenes. My observations from untapped talks and general impressions from the ‘everyday life’ at the museum were written down during as well and at the end of the day spent at the museum.

Document analysis
Annual rapports from the City Museum
Strategic written statements in regard to the exhibition
The About section of the home page
Event Calendar
Brochures about the exhibition “From Desire to Distress” and the museum
The project outline and vision for the new main exhibition, which was not executed.
The Facebook page of the City Museum

In-depth interviews
Six central employees:
Curator and historian in charge of stakeholder relations (Nete), registrar (Ole),
graphic designer (Frank), curator and archaeologist (Connie), curator and historian
(Søren) and a reception worker (Mette).
Three volunteers (Gerda, John and Inga)
Interviews with the director of the City Museum (Maiken).
Furthermore I have taped conversations with the director of the museum as well as other central stakeholders at events held the museum.
All interviews have been transcribed ad verbatim.

Photos
Pictures of the exterior of the City Museum: the building, the placing and the architectural design and landscape design surrounding the museum.
Photos of the inside of the building being the exhibition area, the reception and offices at the City Museum as well as the objects and people projected in the museum’s exhibition “From Desire to Distress”. I also followed the design phase and
construction of the same exhibition and documented the progress in pictures. In sum, this informal presence has given an invaluable insight into the realms of what kind of an organisation a local city museum is. Noticing the challenges of the museums workers along with the not so frequent visitors’ general responses in mind I will now precede to the external context of the museum.

3.2. Phase two

*External frame of reference:*

**National perspective**

Observations and written notes from three theme conferences held by the Heritage Agency of Denmark in Copenhagen, Aarhus and Vejle covering different aspects of the discussions between museum directors and the appointed work group appointed by the minister of culture to present suggestions to the coming revision of the national Museum’s Act. (The theme meetings took place in 2010).

**Local perspective**

**Documents**

Media coverage of the City Museum from 2003, until now
Rapports made by officials at the Aarhus Municipality
Announcement of the fusion of the City Museum with the Old Town from the homepage of Aarhus Municipality
SWOT-reports and analyses of cultural institutions in Aarhus including the City Museum made by 2017, Aarhus European City of Culture

**Qualitative interviews**

17 in-depth interviews with representatives of different stakeholder groups in relation to the City Museum
12 interviews with visitors and non-visitors
12 vox-pop interviews with visitors and non-visitors of the museum

**Interviews with external stakeholders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder group</th>
<th>Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>Short qualitative interviews with six visitors and non-visitors of the museum. Vox pop with 12 citizens on the streets of Aarhus and in front of the museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local media</td>
<td>Journalist Jens Kaiser, JyllandsPosten, Editor in chief of the local version of the paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tbody>
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| Politicians                 | Steen B. Andersen, Socialdemocratic member of the City Council and member of the Cultural Committee.  
|                             | Marc Perera Christensen, Conservative member of the city council and head of the department of Culture of Aarhus.  
|                             | Kirsten Jørgensen, Director at the Department of Culture at Aarhus Municipality.  
|                             | Søren Aalund, Economist at the department of Culture at Aarhus Municipality.  
|                             | Ib Christensen, Head of Culture at the Municipality of Aarhus.               |
| Officials at the municipality | Hans Pedersen, Editor in chief of the Cultural section at Aarhus Stifttidende. |
| Partners                    | Bodil Nielsen, Owner of Global Art Work and project leader of cultural projects  
|                             | Henrik Fode, Leader of The Foundation for Aarhus city history (Århus Byhistoriske Fond)  
|                             | Barbera Dunn, lecturer at Langkjær Gymnasium  
|                             | Flemming Knudsen, member of the board the supporting organisation of the City Museums Friends (Venneforeningen) |
| Sponsors                    | Niels Thorsen, Nordea Foundation and member of the board at the City Museum  
|                             | One declined to participate; therefore I have approached another sponsor.     |
| Collaborators and competitors | Rolf Haber, Director of The Main Library in Aarhus and member of the board of the City Museum.  
|                             | Svend Erik Christiansen, Member of the organizing body for Brabrand-Årslev Local History Achive.  
|                             | Søren Bitch, Director of Danish Centre for City History.  
|                             | Jan Skamby, Director at Moesgaard Museum.  
|                             | Thomas Bloch Ravn, Director at The Old                                         |
Research position
In the month of May 2010 I started working at the museum and spent a lot of time there. The beginning of this period made the foundation of the case study’s data collection protocol (Yin 2009), which gave room for keeping a very open approach to what happened at the museum and how, when and where members articulated events, rumours and perceptions of groups of stakeholders relevant to the museum. It soon became clear that the role of the researcher spending a lot of time in an organization that had certain expectations and needs conflicted with the ideal of a detached researcher from a positivist perspective. In the traditional sense of working as a qualitative researcher I had the objective of getting behind their life world, coming from a phenomenological hermeneutic tradition (Eneroth, 1994) not congruent with a researcher slowly becoming or taking some kind of part in the organisation. Just by the fact that I as a researcher was present, answering questions, entering in dialogues with the members of the organisation, the research position shifted, as it was not possible to obtain trust and full access without making a certain level of personal commitment to the people and organisation involved. This needs to be accounted for in terms of the strategy of analysis that is to be chosen for the thesis.

3.4. Timetable of the empirical research
Phase 1  Internal and national perspective April 2010 – January 2011
Phase 2  External perspective April 2011 – June 2011

I have as such established the empirical foundation for further research in an inductive manner. In the following I will try to outline theoretical key concepts and definitions while relating to the case study and the identity analysis, which was an outcome of phase one.

4. Definitions of theoretical concepts
In the following section I intend to explain the definitions applied, in relation to the theoretical concepts and theories in the theoretical framework of the thesis in order to use this thesis proposal to set the future strategy of analysis and thus the use of the empirical data that have been obtained during the case study. Therefore I also provide examples of empirical findings in order explain some of the preliminary findings of the research, as these have also shaped my understanding of the theoretical concepts in line with the inductive approach of the study. This, I hope,
will also appeal to the readers’ imagination as an invitation to participate with their suggestions.

4.1. Corporate communication
For the basis of the thesis I see the underlying concept of corporate communication as a means that can be readily accepted in terms of museums – for this purpose I use the following definition of corporate communication as being “an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communications are harmonised as effectively as possible’, with the overall objective of creating ‘a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent”. (Cornelissen, 2004:21) This is the classical approach to corporate communication that is challenged as to the extent of control that the organisation has of its communicated identities (Christensen & Morsing 2005).
When searching for a way of how a small local city museum can strengthen its positioning within local society by corporate communication, I could have chosen only to use the theoretic foundations of this field. However, the focal point of corporate communication is that the organisation has decided on its organisational identity as well as its mission, vision and values. The case study showed an organisation in disharmony with its surrounding stakeholders, as the reputation of the City Museum in interviews with external stakeholders is described as “non existent”. Also the corporate communication principles have not been incorporated by the City Museum as written statements. Corporate communication is therefore part of the theoretical lenses of my approach to the City Museum and will further be elaborated on as a central part of the theoretical foundations of the thesis.

4.2. Organisational Identity and implications for the case study
I will not attempt to define organisational identity, since “an analysis of the concept of identity according to different research paradigm assumptions reveals that in research it is more relevant to clearly report the basic assumptions made by the researcher than to present a precise definition of the concept of identity” (Puusa, 2005). This in line with Albert and Whetten’s (1985) argument that organisational identity is not a single concept or theory but a varied set of ideas, modes of analysis, and propositions. Organisational identity can be approached from both from a micro level and a macro level. In the first phase of research I have made an identity analysis from a macro level, as Albert and Whetten (1985) indicate that statements of organisational identity provide answers to the question ”Who are we?” (Hatch & Schultz, 2004:3).
Building on this conceptualization of “we-ness” (Ibid.), organizational identity can be understood as a set of constructs that organisational members believe to be the central, enduring, and distinctive character of their organization (Hatch & Schultz 2001, Ashforth and Mael, 1996; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). This is in line with the interpretative and constructionist approach to organisational identity (Pratt and Rafaeli 1997) with a basis assumption of subjectivism and hermeneutics. However, when attempting identity analysis one should also be aware that “that identity is both a dynamic process that unfolds over time and a source of stability for those who depend on it” (Hatch & Schultz 2004, 5) which implies a post-modern assumption (Svenningson and Alvesson, 2003). Incorporating both an internal and external perspective on organisational identity is therefore an obvious choice.

The notion of organisational identity is also incorporated in the way that I have approached the case study in relation to selecting or asking for specific documents from the City Museum. As an organisation can be regarded as reflecting and constituting its persona or identity in its formal discourse (McMillan, 1987), I have been trying to uncover where the City Museum projects examples this. As McMillan indicates, "there is a human being behind each organizational message" (1987:42), and as Ashfort and Mael point out the preferences of the management has a overruling influence in constructing organisational identity (Gioia Schultz & Corley 2000). At the City Museum it is the museum director who has the authority to speak or act on behalf of other organisational actors. Therefore it is in line with the theory of organisational identity that I have taped conversations with the director as well as examples of public speeches given at events at the City Museum. In the interviews with external stakeholders, accounts of external stakeholders perceive the museum’s director’s public speeches and it therefore makes sense that I have devoted more attention (at least in taping) to the director of the City Museum than to other internal stakeholders.

The City Museum has been criticized for years by the local newspapers. From the point of view of organisational identity, Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail note: “the media publicize information about an organization, public impressions of the organization and of the organization’s members become part of the currency through which members’ self-concepts and identification are built or rare eroded” (Morsing 1999) which also makes it relevant to do analysis of media coverage. Furthermore, some organisational members have continuously spoken about the media’s criticism and this is also noted in the observations from the case study.
The next section will look into how the notion of role can be related to organisational identity.

4.3. The notion of role and organisational identity construction
With respect to understanding why and in what way I speak of roles, I note that perceptions of role and identity construction are closely related (Hatch & Schultz 2002). Identity and expectations of stakeholders’ positions are also linked in an organisational and analytic context (Moingeon & Soenen 2002, Hatch & Schultz 2001, Cornelissen 2004). The relationship between the two notions is also demonstrated in empirical studies (Dutton & Dukerich 2002). The fact that role theory has been dismissed in issues of organisational identity can be seen as a way of allowing a more multi-faceted treatment of organising (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). From my empirical research it has emerged that the concepts of role and organisational identity co-construction are closely related and that a further exploration as to whether a strategic choice of roles for a local city museum in society can be a way forward in terms of working with communication from a corporate communication perspective. This is the aim of the final research question of my thesis.

A role can be understood as a dramaturgic choice (Goffman 1959) where social roles are enacted on the basis of prescript roles. This is a constructionist perspective of roles, where roles perform an important function in institutional conduct (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Blumer distinguishes role as an on-going process of social constructions between actors and the social order. In this sense roles are seen as ‘masks’ that organisational actors make the choice to adapt to in the on-going construction of self and society (Strauss 1969). For the underlying premise of answering the first research question I build on the notion that organisational role is ‘something’ being co-constructed. But I also follow the criticism of this functionalistic perspective of roles in moving to a more flux ontology (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) (in line with the search for a dynamic model in the second research question). In search of what this ‘something’ which the notion of role should represent in my thesis I turn to the following quote:

“The point of departure for our re-viewing of role is an understanding of identity construction as a dynamic, relational process. […] We propose that just such a formulation is possible if role is construed as an intermediary. This metaphor locates role in-between actors, where it facilitates the mergence of identities by translating meanings backwards and forward between actors. It evokes a sense of in-betweenness as well as the notion that both actors and intermediaries are co-constructing
aspects of identity constructions processes. As such, role may be seen as a vehicle that mediates and negotiates the meanings constructed in relational interactions, while itself being subject to on-going reconstruction in these relational processes.”  
(Simpson and Carroll, 2008:34). Building on Star and Griesemer (1989), Simpson and Carroll suggest that “several different worlds or domains of knowledge” position the boundary objects as they accept the argument of Burman that “boundary objects offer a site or medium for the negotiation of identity and difference” (2004, 370). This boundary object can then be seen as ‘role’ (Simpson and Carroll 2008). As such I understand the concept of role in the sense that it is a social construction among central stakeholders of the City Museum as well as a boundary object, albeit not a thing in itself.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) also incorporate roles as being important in the social construction of organisations, however leaving out the co-construction of identity between actors. From a corporate communication perspective the notion of auto-communication and the co-creation of identity are treated as mutual process between the organisation and its context (Christensen & Morsing 2005). In the case study I have noted how organisational members mirror external perceptions of the museum and how this co-construct their understanding of their role and identity as a museum organisation. This is very much in line with an American-based empirical study by Dutton and Dukerich (1991), which found organisational members’ organisational identity construction to be affected by opinions and reactions of organisational Others and thus motivating organisational members to become involved in certain actions and issues in order to change the reputation of the organisation. In the empirical research I also note how external stakeholders (or actors) mirrors other stakeholders opinions and reuse phrases from the media or speak of specific events that have formed their perception of the City Museum. Examples here could be the journalist’s recollections of an interview with the museum director, his visits to the museum, his articulation of the building and placing of the museum as well as specific actions or other forms of communication from the museum – but also his stories of dependency among external stakeholders in regard to what the City Museum role should be for a local society as articulated by a journalist: “They [the City Museum] should guard history of Aarhus”, “disseminate more”, “show more artefacts” - all along writing on a book about Aarhus’ history with another external central stakeholder showing the closeness to other stakeholders.

These organisational identity dynamics are suggested to be more than a just a mirror reflection because negative images are seen to prompt the organisation to question
its self-definition as “Image in its multiple guises provides a catalyst for members’ reflexive examination of their organisational self-definition. Image often acts a destabilizing force on identity, frequently requiring members to revisit and reconstruct their organisational sense of self” (Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000:67). However, from my initial identity analysis at the City Museum I found that organisational members are being aware of a negative image, but are not able to fully change neither actions nor communication along what the organisational members knew that critical stakeholders asked for. The management at the City Museum did several strategic communication attempts in order to change the overall negative reputation among local stakeholder groups. As the director told me several times: “We have told them [the politicians] … but nobody listens”. The interviews with the external stakeholders also suggest that these communicative acts of the director are regarded and evaluated on a number of different scales that can be related to the notion of what role a City Museum should play in a local society. In this sense both the internal and externally interviews provide an account of what and who shaped the reputation of the City Museum. An example of the strategic communication efforts that the management directed at the political Cultural Committee at the City Hall was also received and viewed in relation to what had been written about the local museum in the local press over the years. “The politicians can accept an empty museum but they cannot accept that it is written in the local papers” as an official stated in one of the interviews. These negative stories and articulation of the City Museum as “a recurrent problem” by City Hall officials are also mentioned in interviews as irritating “piles on the desk” that were part of the construction of the officials’ perceptions of the City Museum. As such the empirical data displays a large number of actors at play who are rooted in other conceptual systems. This displays that actions of other stakeholders are taken into account as well. This may be found in Phillip's (2003) notion of the moral system based on obligation and his normative stakeholder model, that allows for stakeholders to be identified but not for “how the corporative scheme should be organized or how obligations should be fulfilled in terms of these relative and sometimes shifting positions” (Friedman & Miles 2006, 60). However I note that Philips view on stakeholders as a network depends on normative obligations and instrumental considerations but does not display the dynamic constructions of shifting positions of stakeholders.

4.4. Organisational legitimacy
Another founding concept of the PhD project is that of organisational legitimacy, here the context being a local city museum and its stakeholders. I understand organisational legitimacy as “the generalised perception or assumption that the
actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate” (Suchman 1995:573-4). Legitimacy can also be seen from different perspectives such as resource dependence theory (Pfeffer, J. and G. R. Salancik 1978, Scott 2003), but Suchman’s notion on legitimacy is here “an anchor-point of vastly expanded theoretical apparatus addressing the normative and cognitive forces that constrain, construct and empower organizational actors” (Suchman, 1995:571). I could have chosen a resource dependency theory-perspective if the scope of the thesis was to determine which (inter) organisational and institutional factors that constitute for example issues of power. From an institutional approach I could have incorporated, Ruef and Scott’s (1998) argument that organisations must comply with certain normative rules, cognitive meanings and regulative processes (Deephouse & Carter 2005). For the purpose of the analysis this would present three different dimensions; a regulative, a normative and a cognitive dimension that could have be an analytical framework if an institutional perspective was the basis of the research. Instead I suggest that the thesis follow the notion of legitimacy as based on cognitive belief systems. This “call[s] attention to the ways in which organizations seek legitimacy and support by incorporating structures and procedures that match widely accepted cultural models embodying common beliefs and knowledge systems” (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 878 in Patel et al. 2005)

Returning to the choice of Suchman’s definition of legitimacy the thesis also incorporates the work of Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) who argue that organisational legitimacy implies congruence between social system norms and social values as implied by an organization’s activities (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). In their view organizations can build legitimacy in three ways: conform to existing social norms, alter social norms, and identify with social values (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975) while suggesting that changing social norms is difficult. At the City Museum I observed that the internal perceptions in regard to the legitimacy of the museum were quite different from the external stakeholders perceptions. These legitimacy gaps (Sethi 1979) can be understood as discrepancies that may occur between what the organisation does and what is expected in society.

In the case study I noted that strategic communication efforts made by the management could be seen as questioning the organisational adjustment and adaptations implied in the following model (Patel et al. 2005):
This model is made from a Public Relation perspective that I have not included in the thesis proposal.

In the literature on legitimacy, I found that “[f]uture research could examine the degree to which losing legitimacy and/or reputation will interfere with a firm’s ability to operate effectively” (Deephouse & Carter 2005). This is interesting in relation to my preliminary empirical findings that negative critique of the City Museum and its loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the external stakeholders somehow co-construct organisational members actions and ways of conducting their work at the museum:

“We cannot do it, when they keep criticising us”, “We are exhausted” and expressions like “Let us breathe “, are organisational members responds to the negative critique that the organisation as a ‘we’ experience. The team of employees were working to build a new main exhibition and organisational members articulated a negative effect due to the negative critique. Observations support these articulations.

The fact that the City Museum has had a very short lifespan also cast light on the notion that “organizational legitimacy (Deephouse & Carter, 2005) can only be maintained when an organization has more faith-holders than hateholders” (Luoma-aho, 2006). This proposition may be accounted for in the present empirical case.

The next section is an attempt to establish how the thesis understands the notion of stakeholder, but the stakeholder concept is not yet explored.
4.5. The stakeholder concept

This thesis proposal invites suggestions as to the work ahead within the stakeholder theory. However, I will define what the term stakeholder means for this thesis proposal. Freeman’s definition of a stakeholder “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievements of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman 1984, 46) is the starting point of this study. Freeman’s normative core for stakeholder theory is based on value creation as a contractual process among stakeholders as well as other normative focus on fairness (Friedman & Miles 2006). This is relevant in the adaptation of the definition in regard to museums as: “Museum stakeholders are individuals or organisations who have an interest in, or influence on, a museum’s ability to achieve its objectives” (Janes 2006).

Furthermore, I point out that Starik (1995) has introduced the notion that non-human stakeholders should be deemed as important as human stakeholders. Such a stakeholder could be ‘any naturally occurring entity which affects or is affected by organizational performance” (Starik 1994, 92 in Friedmann & Miles 2006, 9). Therefore the stakeholder definition for the thesis is in the line with Starik and is, as such, a very broad definition of the stakeholder concept.

This perception of stakeholders is part of the normative stakeholder concept. As such the definition of stakeholder stems from a normative stakeholder perspective rather than following a descriptive position (Donaldson and Preston 1995), which would have been wise if the thesis intended to question the effectiveness of stakeholder management, although the premise of the third research questions has a descriptive intension; for now, the normative approach to stakeholder theory is chosen.

I will now give examples of elements in the case study that can be included in this stakeholder definition. As Vidgen and McMaster (1996) define stakeholders both as “as human and nonhuman organization unit that can affect as well as be affected by a human or nonhuman organization unit’s policy or policies” (Luoma-aho & Paloviita 2010, 255). As such the legislation of the Museum’s Act is, in this view, a unit at the museum and can be included.

In order to incorporate recent museological theory developments this can also be done when choosing the above definition and approach to stakeholders. How ideas travel can be viewed in the light of memes as Friedman & Miles describe Dawkins idea of memes as “units of cultural transmission [and are to be understood as]
instructions for producing behaviour [...] and passed on [by] imitation” (2006, 10). As such what the City museum did by inviting immigrant artists and students to participate in making objects for their exhibition might be seen as a meme from newer museology that, as such, imitates and produces behaviour similar to the notion of social inclusion. Social inclusion happens where the museum is working for "social change and [to] help resolve social problem” (Dodd & Sandell, 2001). This can also be found in the City Museum’s choice of trying to tell Aarhus history through focusing on migration in their exhibition “From Desire to Distress”. Stephen E. Weil’s title, “From being about something to being for somebody” is very apt for this development in museology. By focusing on such new issues the museum also challenges the perception of identity of the museum (Hooper-Greenhill 2000) and in interviews with stakeholders some are reluctant to accept this change as a way to project city history at the City Museum. “We really need some more real artifacts”, said a curator as a critical remark to the exhibition’s focus on individual stories, artworks and personal artifacts borrowed from the participating individuals.

4.5.1. The dynamic approach
I will now concentrate on how I believe the case study could contribute to stakeholder theory. Stakeholder theory has been criticised for assuming that the environment of the organisation is static. This thesis attempts to further develop a more dynamic approach. Dynamic approaches to stakeholder theory can be found in other works from the analytic perspective of stakeholder theory with Mitchell, Agle and Wood’s (1997) focus on how certain stakeholders becomes salient due to issues of power, legitimacy and urgency. Also Rowleys (1997) network theory of stakeholder influence, leads to a complex field of stakeholders (Friedman & Miles 2006). Theories from within crisis management displaying the dynamic perspective could be of inspiration (Alpaslan, Green, & Mitroff, 2009) as they focus on a multi vocal approach as also Johansen & Frandsen (2005).

In his later work Freeman notes that “[w]hen environments are more complex and uncertain, webs of interdependences are created among stakeholders … bridging (also called boundary-spanning) techniques are needed that build on interdependences rather than buffering them (Harrison and St John 1996), and collaborative strategies become important.” (Freeman & Robert 2002). As such, the case study at the City Museum displays examples of “[j]oint ventures with competitors, co-operative product development efforts involving suppliers and customers, and industry-level lobbying efforts are examples of partnering techniques
that bring the firm into closer alliance with its critical stakeholders”. (Freeman & Phillips (2002) The intension is to reduce uncertainties in regard to unpredictable demands from stakeholders. However Luoma-aho and Paloviita criticise Freemans normative approach, as the organisations should also ask “Which issue arenas are relevant for the future of organizations? And “Which issue arenas provide opportunities for interaction with specific groups?” (2010). At the City Museum the management did attempts of working collaboratively with stakeholders (for example politicians, officials, journalists, local artists and schools) in relation to certain issues such as migration and the need for a city archive. As accounted for in the interviews conducted with some of the external stakeholders the collaboration with the museum meant that they turned to an even more negative stance. Therefore issues as well as a postmodern approach to stakeholders (Calton & Kurland 1995) also need to be accounted for in the dynamic model that is to become one of the outcomes of the thesis. Especially Stakeholder Enabling, which is “especially suitable for public organisations, where the role of the state and public organisations is to enable stakeholders such as citizens and involve them in decision-making” (Luoma-aho 2005, 100), might be congruent with the thesis. In the external interviews other themes such as timing and style of strategic communication as well as the role of the museum also seem to be relevant here.

I now proceed to the overall analytical framework that I, on the basis of the previous chapters, have selected as suitable in meeting the thesis’ objectives. As the thesis intends to contribute to the dynamic perspective of stakeholder theory I could attempt following Luoma-aho and Vos (2010) in using Actor Network Theory as the analytical strategy and as such contributing with an empirical founded way of exploring this view. The Actor Network Theory (ANT) - also known as enrolment theory or the sociology of translation - could present the conceptual frame for displaying the dynamic co-constructions of identity and role of a local city museum. Although ANT has primarily been used to analyze sociotechnical processes and the production of knowledge in scientific networks, the framework is here proposed to be relevant for this thesis and the field a small local city museum.

5. Actor Network Theory
As I have yet to work more in depth with the theoretical framework of the thesis, I suggest that the thesis use ANT (Callon 1986, Latour 2005) as an analytical framework that will be able to handle the complex set of actors at play and in this way develop an empirically founded of coping with the on-going dynamics between
stakeholders. In this manner, I suggest that the thesis will be able to answer the twofold objects of the research questions of the thesis.

For this purpose I will relate ANT to the field of stakeholders and the constructions - or rather from now on - translation processes in between actors included in the empirical study of the City Museum in Aarhus. Actors are here seen as building and performing a network through the process of translation. This is a process of transformation, organization, re-location, or re-configuration of elements, by which actors try to overcome resistance and stabilize the network. The network consists in terms of the thesis actors that are named or observed in the case study. In the building of The Actor Network Theory, Callon (1986a) identifies four stages of translation in the creation of a network: problematization, interessement, enrollment and mobilization.

During the stage of problematization, actors define a relevant problem and identify who the critical actors are. In the stage of interessement, the critical actors try to persuade others to invest in, or follow, their programme. At the stage of enrollment, the critical actors give qualities and motivations to actors and establish roles. In the next stage of mobilization, enrolled actors focus on mobilizing their constituencies to action.

The dynamics for stakeholdering a local city museum are embedded in these translations as it involves constant negotiations among human actors and nonhuman actors to establish a mutual set of definitions and meanings to make a way for dialogue and understanding of the phenomenon with which the network is concerned. The process of negotiation is marked by the identification of the obligatory point of passage (OPP) that is an actor indispensable to the network, a gatekeeper through which all the other actors have to move. With the thesis attempt to both develop the dynamic perspective of stakeholder theory and to establish a way for a small local city museum to communicate within the complex set of stakeholders’ expectations the OPP could be seen as the City Museum.

Negotiations of an actor network could be characterized as aligned interests in terms of how stakeholders perceive the role of a city museum. The degree of alignment is the degree of convergence of an actor network. As a result of converging interests, stakeholders inscribe them into something that could be specification documents, and physical artefacts – leading to specific technological and social outcomes (Callon, 1986; Law & Callon, 1992). Therefore the translation process presupposes material in which it is inscribed. The case study at the City Museum has given me access to a large set of durable artefacts; documents and also interviews that I suppose will
show how translations are made. Callon (2005, p. 4) affirmed that an actor is “made up [not only] of human bodies but also of prostheses, tools, equipment, technical devices, algorithms, etc.” From the point of view of the case study conducted at the City Museum, I propose, that this will both incorporate the dynamics of the broad notion of stakeholders whom the empirical research has found to be at play in determining roles and legitimacy for a local city museum, as well as displaying dynamics in translations processes accounted for both by observations and displayed in stakeholders’ accounts of passed translations. The notion of role and legitimacy of a local city museum might be viewed in terms of the context of Black Boxing which is defined as: “The way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed the more opaque and obscure they become.” (Latour, 1999)

ANT does not provide a set of clear rules to guide researchers through the research process (Law, 1992). To define which networks exist in a given setting, how actors translate their ideas and interests, and which forms these translations take depend on the specific situation under study. At the outset of a study, however I have not intentionally followed the suggestion that it is a good idea not to assume too much about the phenomena of investigating. This was the point of my outset at the beginning of the case study, an approach that resulted in a large set of data. In ANT, as I understand, there needs to be a starting point, which could be my focus on roles, legitimacy and identity of a small local city museum. ANT does not project a data analysis technique, but identification and description of the full range of associations among the actors involved are needed. If I have done the empirical groundwork, what remains to be done and if/weather/how ANT is the next step forward is therefore the primary question of my Thesis proposal.

5.1. Challenges ahead

As the above outline of the stakeholder concept shows, I have only lightly touched the stakeholder theory as well as how issues and actors are dependent in co-constructions of role and identity. However, the thesis may benefit from my teaching a course in external stakeholder relations at master levels at the Aarhus School of Business, Aarhus University in the fall of 2011. Also I invite the panel to suggest to where to direct the focus of the future works in the field of dynamic stakeholder theory.
I also would like the panel to estimate whether the thesis can encompass the mentioned key concepts of organisational identity construction, role and legitimacy of a small city museum as well as accounting for and conducting the ANT analysis. As corporate communication theory, newer museological theories should also be given space in the thesis, which is why I am curious as to the balance and intertwining of concepts and theories.

For the oral presentation of my thesis proposal, I will give examples of the identity analysis that I conducted in the first phase of the research and relate the findings to the present state of the theoretical and analytical framework. As I have so far primarily focused on the empirical parts of my thesis, I look forward to further developing the theoretical and analytical framework as well as incorporating the panel’s suggestions and implications for further readings in this process.
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