

## Instagram in the Photo Archives Curation, Participation, and Documentation through Social Media

Bente Jensen  
Aalborg City Archives and Aalborg University

### Introduction

A majority of us takes photos and videos anywhere, anytime, of anything and everything on mobile devices, on tablets and smart phones cameras, and share them with each other. It happens across cultures and on a global scale. Photography is already a common cultural practice, but with smart phone photography it becomes an even more inherent aspect of everyday life and mediates social relations (Lee, 2010, Van House, 2011). People have adopted the new photo sharing services and ways of photography with breathtaking speed.



Istanbul, Marseille, Oslo, everybody is doing it – smart phone photography (photo: Bente Jensen)

Memory institutions as archives and museums can choose to ignore this phenomenon or they can grasp the possibility and consider the ubiquitous mobile photography as an opportunity to involve new user groups, to communicate, and to be a part of the documentation of the contemporary world seen from a diverse point of view, as everybody has the possibility to take part. According to Van House (2011 p. 130) personal photography is primarily pursued for four overlapping reasons: 1. Memory, narrative, and identity, 2. creating and maintaining relationships, 3. self-representation, and 4. self-expression. The archives have the opportunity to place themselves in the mediation junction between communication, self presentation, and memory and offer history and eternity to the volatile photo practices as a part of their strategy. In the case studies in this paper the offer is accepted positively by the smart phone photographers and seen as recognition even they did not originally intend a relation with history and archives, when they captured the snapshot.

Based on case studies of the different practices of three Scandinavian archives' (The Norwegian National Archives, Aalborg City Archives, and The Old Town Museum both in Denmark) use of the photo sharing application, Instagram, it will be discussed how the development of ubiquitous photo practices can generate new forms of interaction with the users and develop new participatory cultural consumption habits and practices through e.g. collaborate tagging. It will also be shown how the concrete archives transform the volatile images to archival material through their practice and strategies.

## Participatory Archives

Quoting the Norwegian researcher Dagny Stuedahl: "... the research field of digital cultural heritage does bring discussions of interchange between cultural heritage practices and theories on digital culture, theories on institutional transformations, theories related to documentation and archiving practices, new communicative practices ... as well as new relationships with audiences" (Stuedahl 2009, p. 67). The case studies will show that practice and relationships between user and archives are challenged in more ways.

It is widely agreed in recent research that the relation between archives and users has changed profoundly from a monologue to several simultaneous dialogues and developed from mediation to collaboration quoting Elizabeth Yakel (Yakel 2011, p. 257). New digital technologies and media initiate to narrative connections with the content and collections involving the user.



Attention has in some way moved from the holdings to the users and the character of the relation has changed from an asymmetric relation to the ideal of an equal relation or connection. The concept of the participatory archive has also been introduced by Eveleigh, Huvela, and Theimer (Eveleigh, 2012, Huvela, 2008, Theimer, 2011). Kate Theimer suggests a definition of a participatory archive: "An organization, site or collection in which people other than the archives professionals contribute knowledge or resources resulting in increased appreciation and understanding of archival materials and archives, usually in an online environment" (Theimer 2014).

The paper's aim is to analyze a field between two current research topics: The handling of new digital photography practices and the development of the relation between archives and users towards increased engagement and participation.

## Archives on Instagram

Instagram is in some ways the new Flickr. The photo sharing platform Flickr from 2004 was taken to heart by many cultural heritage institutions. Flickr Commons has been a way to meet the cultural institutions and to introduce an interactive platform for digital exhibitions of archival material quote: "The key goal of The Commons is to share hidden treasures from the world's public photography archives".

Now Instagram seems to have beaten Flickr, when it comes to the growth of user numbers and popularity. Instagram was launched in October 2010 as an on line photo sharing and social networking service. In 2012 Instagram was acquired by Facebook and in June 2013 sharing of sequences of video up to 15 seconds was added. In August 2014 a hyper lapse function was introduced in a separate app. The service enables the user to take photos and videos, apply filters and frames, comment and apply tags (metadata) and share the photos with "followers" on Instagram and other social media as Facebook, Twitter in one flow. The response to a photo from other users on Instagram (called lgers) is "likes", comments, and reposting. The service has gained rapid popularity: 60 million photos are uploaded daily, there are 20 billion photos on Instagram, and 83 percent has hash tags according to Instagram's own statistics. There are few academic studies of Instagram and even fewer that analyze the connection between the photo sharing application and archives or museums. I have previously carried out a study where focus was to define types of involvement in the interaction between the user and the cultural heritage institutions using Instagram (Jensen, 2013b). Two studies can be mentioned: Weilenmann, Hill, and Jungselius' study of how visitors communicate the museum

experience through Instagram photo sharing at Gothenborg Natural History Museum in Sweden (Weilenmann et al. 2013) and Stuedahl and Lowe's analysis of communication of the industrial history of Norwegian river, Akerselva, through the use of Instagram (Lowe and Stuedahl 2014).

But how many archives do actually use Instagram as a part of their social media strategy? It is difficult to state an exact number as the search function of Instagram is not adequate. A list is made based on searches and supplied by an inquiry. The list includes 26 archives ranging from national archives to local archives around the world (Jensen, 2014). It does not include archives that use Instagram through the implementation of a specific hash tag e.g. in a concrete project or campaign. I will return to the role of the hash tag later in the paper.

The empirical analysis is based on the web appearance through third part viewers as Iconosquare and Instagram's own web function supplied by information from archivists working with the media.

Smartphone cameras and social media applications such as Instagram make it easy in a networked society to produce, edit, tag, and share images on the move in one flow. The diffusion of smart phones means that the social media is increasingly mobile and foster unrestricted participation as people are "nearly always-on" and the speed during which photos can be shared is accelerated. Mobile devices also make it possible to connect to, comment and interpret the topography of city- and landscapes and ongoing events, as we shall see in the analyzed cases. This means the relation between the archives and the user is extracted into the landscape and the relation is also a part of the event. Tagging, pinning and collaborative mapping are ways of articulating the place or a theme. The use of hash tags has become a unique tagging convention to help associate the images with contexts and is essential, when curating and categorizing.

The communication is not limited to the digital sphere as we shall see it. New analogue meetings between archives and user as Instameets and Instawalks are evolved in the process and new networks are created with partners from commercial and cultural industries.

### **Cases**

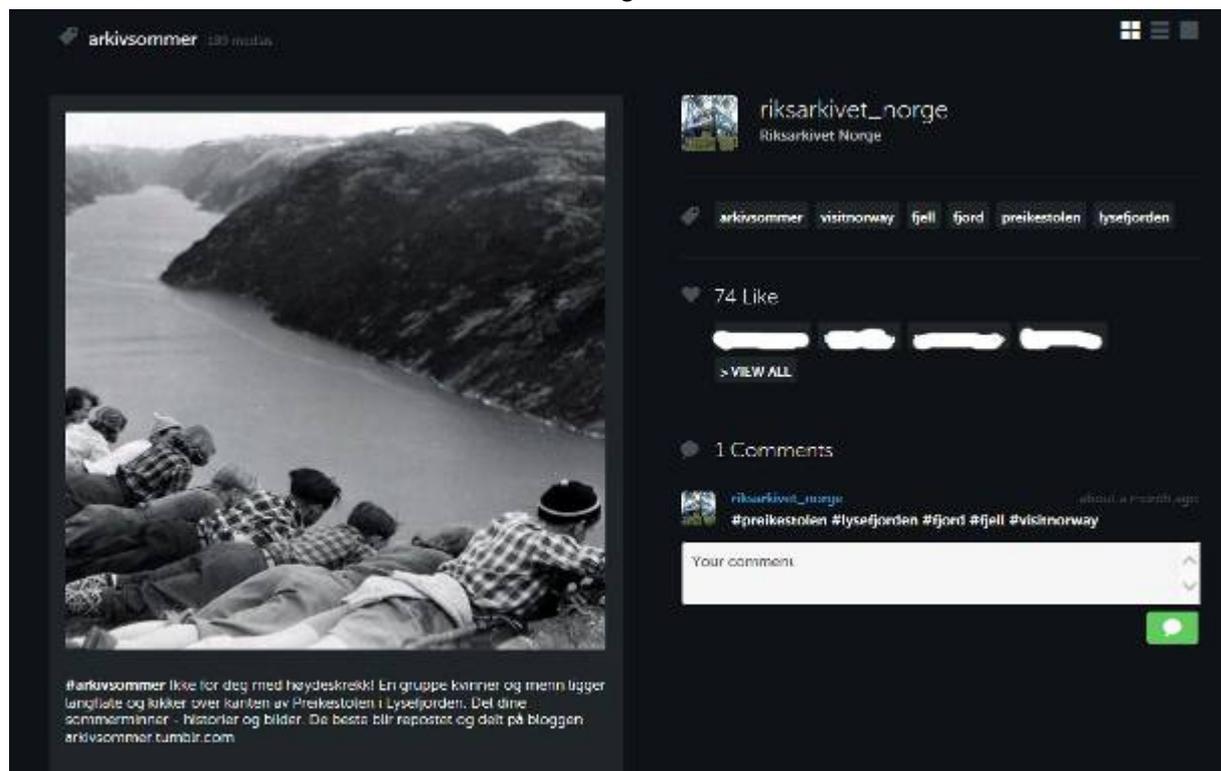
Aalborg City Archives are one of the first Danish heritage institutions on Instagram with an account from September 2011. Next in Denmark to curate through Instagram was the open air museum "Den gamle By", The Old Town, in Aarhus which also houses a photo archive. The third case is Riksarkivet, The National Archives of Norway, which have been using Instagram since 2012 and represent a national institution as the others are regionally or locally based.

#### Riksarkivet, The National Archives of Norway and #archivalsummer

Beside Riksarkivet other National Archives in the world are active on Instagram such as The national archives in Denmark and Sweden, NARA in USA, and the National Archives of Australia. These archives use Instagram in a way that corresponds with NARAs policy: "Here, we'll post pictures and videos of behind-the-scenes looks, shots from our exhibits, special events and more, all through the eyes of Instagram's trademark vintage filters." The archives use the media as a possibility to create a sense of familiarity and to tell stories based on photos of archival material often of current relevance.

The National Archives of Norway have an active social media strategy and do also have accounts on Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, and Pinterest. The archives use Instagram the way as mentioned above for storytelling, behind the scene stories and for promotion of analogue events in the archive building. This summer Riksarkivet changed focus and used the media for a campaign called #arkivssommer (#archivalsummer) with an invitation to the users share their

historical photo memories of summer in the past and to get into dialogue with the archives holdings of photographs signaling summer. The campaign was part of cross media effort on Facebook, Twitter combined with a Tumblr blog.



People were encouraged to upload photos to their own Instagram account and use the tag #arkivssommer. Riksarkivet showed photos from the archives of e.g. Landslaget for Reiseliv (National Society for Travelling life) Norsk Spisevognselskab (Norwegian Dining Wagon Society) and the Magazine, *Billedbladet* from the 20 th. century. Riksarkivet reposted during the summer pictures from the users on the archives' Instagram account with a clear indication of the owner. An evaluation of the campaign reveals that the most popular (most liked) pictures were: Nostalgia and lost practices (e.g. eat in a restaurant on the train) and national romantic scenes.

The project was primarily based on photographs from the past, historical photos, which in a fundamental way conflicts with the original idea of Instagram which is to share pics of the instant moment. But Instagram is a flexible media which means it can be used in ways it was not originally intended for and it is evolved all the time. The National Archives had not indicated wherever they had an intention of collecting the photos tagged with #arkivssommer and are still considering the question. #arkivssommer gave a participatory aspect to Riksarkivet's use of Instagram as it became a platform for dialogues in two ways: About the archives' holdings as well as about the users' own archival material.

### Den gamle by - The Old Town Museum in Aarhus and popular music

Den Gamle By, an open air museum in Aarhus with a photo archive started using Instagram for digital curating April 2013 and only got account of their own in 2014, which indicates that the museum used Instagram by introducing specific hash tags, inviting to collaborate tagging through other media.



Insta photos from #NS13 NorthSide Music festival in Aarhus. Campaign hash tag promoted via t shirt.

The Old Town Museum has directed their focus of the digital curating on Instagram to the theme: Popular music, as the project was a part of the preparation of an exhibition about contemporary popular music in Aarhus from 1960ies-2014 that opened in May 2014: "Aarhus Rocks". The museum initiated close cooperation with the organizers behind three local music festivals: Spot, "Grimfest" (the ugly party), and NorthSide alongside with the Danish Journalist and Media School in Aarhus. The museum wanted to collect photo material that illustrated the experience of live music today. They selected media platforms where the young people and festival visitors already felt at home as a part of their daily lives. Hash tags were introduced and media students acted as digital reporters on the festivals promoting the hash tags and the project with flyers etc. The campaign was a success; at the SPOT festival (#spot13) 1000 photos were uploaded in two days, at Northside (#ns13) 11.000 photos were uploaded after a week and #grimfest generated 500 photos. The 13000 photos were analyzed and divided into themes: The music and concerts (31 %), me and my friends (27 %), the atmosphere (20%), festival logos (14%). A minor part of the photos will be saved permanently in the collection. The photos are now a part of the exhibition, Aarhus Rocks, in their original form as Instaphotos shown on screens.

The museum emphasizes the importance of the fact that new young audiences have been reached and that they have been active in the collective collection process. The photos are now a source that makes it possible to analyze contemporary music and festival culture (Djubdræt 2014a and b).

The case shows a participatory aspect, but also illustrates successful cooperation between memory institutions and other cultural industries in the acquisition and outreach processes. New partnerships have been created through the campaign.

The Old Town Museum has experienced that the choice of #hash tags and communication of the hashtag are crucial in Instagram campaigns and on social media as such. The importance of the right hashtag or keyword is a question related to metadata and the indexing of archives, but also in social media it plays an important role in the communication and promotion of projects and facilitation of dialogues. The hashtag is more than a collection of characters, it is an efficient tool to be used to reach new audiences, connect like-minded people, and facilitate streams of conversation. The researcher Chang (2010) speaks about the communication through social tagging, though his case is Twitter. He shows how the use of hash tags has become a unique tagging convention to help associate messages with certain events or contexts. "Prefixed by a # symbol with a keyword, a Twitter (and an Instagram) hash tag serves as a bottom-up user-proposed tagging convention". But in the projects like the ones mentioned in this paper it is not

only a bottom-up direction, as the projects are initiated by the archives and start with the institution's choice of the right hash tag, as we shall see illustrated in the following case.



### Aalborg City Archives and #myaalborg

As the first cultural heritage institution in Denmark Aalborg City Archives initiated a digital curating campaign on Instagram launching the project #Christmasinaalborg (#Juleniaalborg) in December 2012 with the slogan: "Because Christmas 2012 soon will be History" (Jensen, 2013a). The city archives wished at that time to test new methods of digital curating and forms of user involvement. Aalborg City Archives had experience using Instagram to communicate an informal picture of life in the archives like the case of the National Archives for a year when, the Christmas project started. People were asked to tag their images with #julenial aalborg from early December to December 27, 2012 and were encouraged by a competition; three photos would be chosen (by the archivists) and win a gift. The archives received 175 photos from 50 different "Instagrammers" with motives mostly from the town following the hash tag's

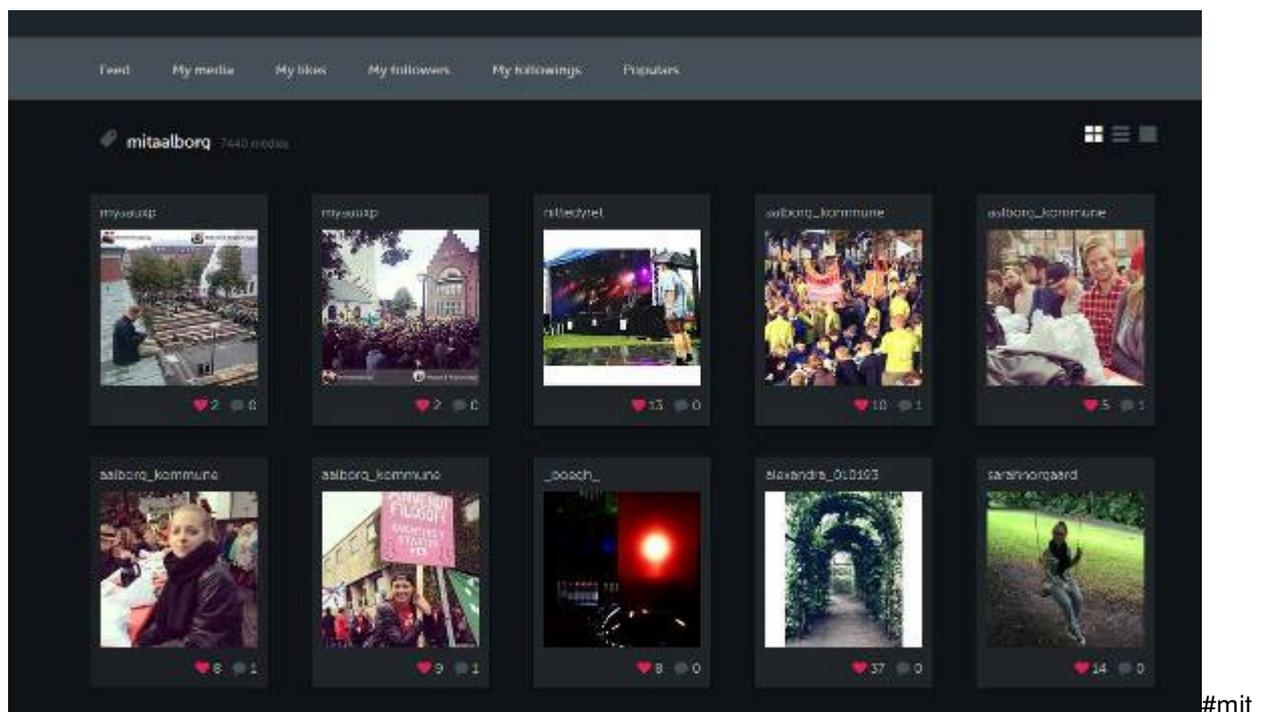
indication.

The latest attempt to facilitate digital curating through Instagram was the introduction of a hash tag that indicates that the user wants to share their photo with the City Archives for future preservation. The tag is #myaalborg (#mitaalborg) and the choice of hash tag indicates that the archives ask for photographs that show people's view on the topography of Aalborg. The project has run since April 2013 and is still running. The problem is now that the hash tag #mitaalborg has become one of the most popular tags in town. It is not possible to own a hash tag and it does very easily get its own life so to say.

In one year from April 2013- April 2014, 2500 photos were tagged #mitaalborg. They are in the process of being analyzed and raise a discussion on how to appraise the large number photos. Should the users e.g. be involved in the selection like in similar museum projects like Brooklyn Museum's "Click" ([www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/click/](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/click/)) or should all the insta photos be preserved? Leaving appraisal matters to the public collide with the traditional role of the archivist and symbolize a loss of authority. No matter what the final decision will be the users have to be asked and a traditional agreement about the rights to photo and the archives' right to use the it, shall be signed.

Aalborg City Archives have through the Instagram projects obtained experience on how to build and facilitate a digital community. They have reached a new user group mainly women between 18–30 years. The digital community is kept alive through reposts, likes, and comments as in the case of Riksarkivet and through dissemination of the photos to other media. Experiments with the ultimate level of participation: The so called "takeovers", where the user literally takes over the account of the archives, Aalborg\_stadsarkiv, and for three days shows their photos with the tag #mitaalborg have also been conducted with success.

Stuedahl, Smørđal and Sem introduce in their research the concept of experimental zones: A format for a collaborative design space where media based dialogues are explored in line with professional practices (Smørđahl, 2014). Even the research is based on a museum exhibition using Instagram in an outdoor context, the already mentioned Akerselva Digitalt in Oslo, I suggest that the concept could be transferred to archives experimenting with new forms of communication platforms as Instagram, where issues concerning ownership, relevance, authority, contexts, and media practices of the institution are in motion and evaluated. Do the archives, as Palmer (2009), Yakel (2011), Eveleigh (2012) and Theimer (2014) discuss it in their works on participatory archives, loose authority? Giaccardi (2012) confirms their worries and points out that the participatory culture and more plural cultures questions the boundaries between professional, consumer, producer, and the grassroots. This observation could also cover archives working with smart phone photography as seen above, crowd sourcing, and social media in general.



aalborg (#myaalborg): Photos from Aalborg City Archives' Instagram campaign. The date is 1. September 2014 - start of the university year.

The relation between user and archives is not only changing in digital environments. New analogue meetings places are created as result of the activity on the social media: Aalborg City Archives now organize and facilitate Instawalks together with a self organized group: Instagrammers Aalborg. The event is often located "behind the scene", exclusive venues in town you will never visit otherwise e.g. the mayor's office, fantastic views of town from private houses. New partnerships are evolved as other cultural institutions as theatres, art museums, and concert halls invite the group to take photos behind the scenes, in empty museums e.g. This is not an exclusive Aalborg trend, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has for example invited people outside opening hours the last year using the tag #emptymet. Why? Because the instaphotos become a part of the marketing strategy of the museum that at the same time brand itself as a participative institution through the instagrammers: Of the very same reason the tourist organization in Aalborg is very interested in the project #mitaalborg as the photos communicate a picture of town from a young segment and can help attracting potential tourists and visitors. What's in it for the archives? New networks, new user groups and everyday photos in the holdings.



Instawalk with Instagrammers Aalborg in the empty Art Museum; Kunsten, facilitated by the City Archives (photo: Klaus Holm Neve).

## Conclusion

I quoted the Norwegian researcher Stuedahl (2009) in the beginning of the paper for stating that theories related to documentation and archiving practices, new communicative practices will be changed by the digital culture. The three cases illustrate that also practise has changed. The conclusion will touch on questions from the case studies that relate to the basic archival function of collection, appraisal, and access.

### Should the archives collect insta photos or snapshots

Critics could claim that the quality and the aesthetics of the insta photos is too poor that the photos for that reason not are worth saving for future preservation in the archives. How this statement is addressed depends on the strategy of the specific archive. The discussion about the value of the snapshot and everyday photography has been going on for ages and the digital development actualizes it. The work of the professional photographer is strongly challenged in the media and elsewhere by everyday photographers with a smart phone in their hands. Is the professional photographer's exclusive role as an observer and collector of pictures of the surroundings in a time with a cocktail of digital photographs, social and mobile media being replaced by a huge public acquisition? Several researchers will point out that the development already started with the Kodak box camera in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the slogan: "You press the button we do the rest." Snap shooting has been considered neither art nor culture. It was too easy, too accessible to qualify as art or culture. Heikka and Rastenberger (2014 p. 37) note how snap shooting always has been seen as a purely social matter and that fine art photography pursued by members of photographic clubs and societies tried to distance themselves from the phenomenon trying to draw a clear line. In one of the case studies, Aalborg City Archives, the same observation can be made, when photo club members and instagrammers clash on a photo/instawalk.

The focus of photographs in historical archives is not only about art and aesthetics but about documentation and what we see is a massive documentation of the landscape and life. The

Swedish researcher Karin Becker (Becker 2014) also discusses the implication of changed photo practices. She notices that lack of focus, haphazard framing now are accepted as signs of validity as a representation of an event and valued for the person's point of view. Visual aspects that previously have signified lack of control or incompetence are today seen as heightening the presence. Archives especially with local affiliation can have to redefine their collection policy if they want to follow the recent development.

Technology can be another critical argument, but the smart phone cameras are increasingly getting better and in general follow technical standards. If the size of picture is the crucial matter Karin Becker reminds us that the screen is the dominant visual interface on how people experience the world today and these interfaces have become the first and primary way photographs are experienced. Only a small number of files will ever be printed or published as paper copies. We saw in the "The Old Town Museum" case that even in a museum exhibition the photos were shown on a screen in their original digital environment.

According to Becker leaving paper, the tactile element, means that the visual element and the act of taking pictures, performances (rituals, selfies, photographing each other), and the experience takes priority over the quality. Heikka and Rastenberger also observe that the development is characterized by that image sharing is more important than what the images depicts and predicts a future where practice become detached from content and based on metadata and actions. A tendency we can see in e.g. Instagram, which stress the need for collecting not only the photo itself but also to be very much aware of the metadata and the conversation about the photo, the context.

Aalborg City Archives, The National Archives of Norway, and "The Old Town" museum did not have a strategy ready, when they started the projects on Instagram. Because of the low price of using an existing platform it could be claimed in retrospect that the archives defined "an experimental zone" through the projects and thereby tried to meet the need for the understanding of the new practices of photography to give space and room for developing new methods and practices in traditional archival functions.

### Participatory elements

The projects can also be regarded as a kind of communication that symbolize archives are ready for conversation and dialogues in a digital room, where people are present and comfortable - a method to attract new user segments.

New networks are established through the Instagram projects as noticed in the two digital curation cases, Aalborg City Archive and "The Old Town Museum". The interest expressed from cultural, commercial, and creative businesses (tourism, event and festival organizers) and vice versa for collaboration is interesting and may lead to synergy effects for all partners.

### **Bibliography**

- Becker, Karin (2014). "Photography in the Age of Screen Culture" In: Lehmuskallio, Asko et al (eds.). *Snapshot, Cameras amongst us*. The Finnish Museum of Photography, p. 17 – 21.
- Djubdræt, Martin (2014a). Aarhus Rocks < <http://blog.dengamleby.dk/aarhus/tag/aarhus-rocks/> > . [Identified 30/08/2014]
- Djubdræt, Martin (2014b). "Indsamling i Den Gamle by var en succes" < <http://blog.dengamleby.dk/aarhus/2013/05/09/indsamling-af-billeder-pa-arets-spot-festival-var-en-succes/> > [Identified 30/08/2014]
- Eveleigh, Alexandra (2012). "Welcoming the World: An Exploration of Participatory Archives", Paper at the International Council on Archives, Brisbane

<http://ica2012.ica.org/files/pdf/Full%20papers%20upload/ica12Final00128.pdf> [Identified 30/08/2014]

Chang, H. (2010) "New Perspective on Twitter Hash tag Use: Diffusion of Innovation Theory", in *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, Volume 47, Issue 1, pages 1–4, November/December 2010.

Giaccardi, E. (2012): Introduction." Reframing Heritage in a Participatory Culture" in: *Heritage and Social Media. Understanding heritage in a Participatory Culture*, Routledge.

Heikki, Elina and Rastenberger, Anna-Kaisa (2014). "The Best Thing Ever: Snapshot Culture and Aesthetics in Fine-Art Photography" In: Lehmuskallio, Asko et al (eds.). *Snapshot, Cameras amongst us*. The Finnish Museum of Photography, p. 37 – 40.

HUVELA, Isto (2008). Participatory archive: Towards decentralised curation, radical user orientation, and broader contextualisation of records management. *Archival Science*, 2008, 8 (1), p. 15-36.

Jensen, Bente (2013a), "#Christmasaalborg (#Juleniaalborg ) and Aalborg City Archives on Instagram

- because Christmas 2012 is History Now" < <http://arkivformidling.wordpress.com/blogposts-in-english-3/>> [Identified 27/08/2014]

JENSEN, Bente, (2013b) "Instagram as Cultural Heritage". In: Addison, Alonso et al. (eds.). *Proceedings of the 2013 Digital Heritage International Congress (Digital Heritage): 19th int'l VSMM, Eurographics GCH og 2nd Unesco Memory of the World Conferences Vol. 2* Marseille: IEEE, p. 311-314.

Jensen, Bente, (2014) Archives using Instagram, Arkiver på Instagram - Inquiry <<http://arkivformidling.wordpress.com/2014/08/28/archives-using-instagram-arkiver-pa-instagram-inquiry/>>. [Identified 27/08/2014]

LEE, D.-H. (2010). "Digital Cameras, Personal Photography and the Reconfiguration of Spatial Experiences". *The Information Society: An International Journal*, 26 (4), p. 266-75.

LOWE, Sarah. and STUEDAHL, Dagny. (2014). "Small-Scale Design Experiments as Working Space for Larger Mobile Communication Challenges" *Journal of Learning Design*, 7(1), p 59-73.

PALMER, J. (2009): "Archives 2.0: If We Build It, Will They Come?" in *Ariadne*, issue 60- <<http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue60/palmer>> [identified 29/08/2014]

RICHTER, Rudolf and SCHADLER (2009). „See My Virtual Self: Dissemination as a Characteristic of Digital Photography – the Example of Flickr.com“. *Visual Studies*, Vol.24/2, 169-177.

SMØRDAL, O., STUEDAHL, D. and SEM, I. (2014). "Experimental zones: Two cases of exploring frames of participation in a dialogic museum". *Digital Creativity*, 25 (3).

STUEDAHL, Dagny (2009). "Digital Cultural Heritage Engagement – a New Research Field for Ethnology". *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 2009, volume 29, p. 67-81.

THEIMER, Kate (2011): *A different kind of web. New Connections between Archives and our Users*, SAA, Chicago.

Theimer, Kate (2014). "Participatory Archives: Something Old, Something New" <<http://www.archivesnext.com/?p=3463>> [identified 29/08/2014]

VAN HOUSE, Nancy (2011). "Personal photography, digital technologies, and the uses of the visual". *Visual Studies*, 25 (1), p. 125-134.

Weilenmann, A., Hillman, T. and Jungselius, B. (2012). "Instagram at the museum: Communicating the museum experience through social photo sharing" in. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human factors in computing systems*, Paris, ACM Press: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2470654.2466243>> [identified 29/08/2014].

Yakel, Elisabeth (2011). Who represents the Past? Archives, Records, and the Social Web, In: Cook, Terry (Ed.): *Controlling the Past. Documenting Society and Institutions, Essays in Honour of Helen Willa Samuels*, SAA, Chicago, p. 257.