

Staging the Sami – Narrative and Display at the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm

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This paper deals with the question of how the Sami, an indigenous people in northern Scandinavia and Russia, over a period of more than 130 years have been presented in permanent exhibitions at the Nordiska Museet, the Swedish national museum of cultural history. It is a topic that can be used to analyse the construction of the national museum as well as the narratives about the Sami, but also to understand the role of museums in shaping social and ethnic categories and their situation in society.

The paper has the character of being an overview of a work in progress, and it touches upon a series of aspects that will be researched more closely further on. It is divided into four sections, representing how the Sami issue has been managed in the contexts of nation building, modernity, contemporary representation, and globalisation.

Managing Nation Building

The Nordiska Museet was created in 1873 under the name *Skandinavisk-Etnografiska samlingen* (The Scandinavian-Ethnographic Collection), which was changed in 1880 to the Nordiska Museet.¹ It moved in 1907 to its present building at Djurgården in central Stockholm. The founder, Artur Hazelius, has a prominent role in the museum's history. He was a well-known person in his time and his ambitions have been interpreted in a number of ways in different contexts.² Hazelius also founded the open-air museum Skansen in 1891 with the aim of forming and expressing a national Swedish identity.³ Until 1965, the two museums were parts of the same organisation.

Originally in private hands, the museum was transformed at an early stage into a foundation and was therefore able to take its place among the other public institutions which, at the end of the 1800s, helped create the nation of Sweden by forming a Swedish natural and cultural history. In the Nordiska Museet this was materialised through the acquisition of artefacts and the staging of exhibitions, in Skansen through the transfer of buildings to its site and the arrangement of various natural environments. In the idea of the nation and the new national consciousness, space and place played important roles as different landscapes formed the nation's territory as a part of a whole. Geographic provenance was a central classification category in the museum's collections and exhibition arrangements, as it was for Skansen's houses and farms.

An extensive collection of objects, documents, photographs and buildings were quickly brought together via specific field trips. Despite the name, the museum had no particular Nordic or Scandinavian profile in its collections and activities, rather a national Swedish parallel to a more undefined northern European profile. Until 1905, Sweden still formed a union with Norway, which led to extensive Norwegian acquisitions. The Finnish inheritance had dwindled (until 1809 Finland was part of Sweden) except for an interest in older Finnish settlements in western central Sweden and in the Finnish-speaking areas far in the north (*Tornedalen*). Among the Baltic countries, Estonia in particular was featured, due to the historic migration patterns. After the first decades, however, the museum gradually became more nationally oriented with a focus on Sweden and Swedish conditions. In recent years there has been a "transfer" of Norwegian and Icelandic objects to their original countries – not, however, as a "repatriation" in today's indigenous-political sense.

Initially the ethnic category that was given special attention was the Sami.⁴ The history of the Nordiska Museet, Skansen, and the Sami is still being researched but it is clear that Artur Hazelius' interest in the Sami as a cultural-historical phenomenon was similar to that of other

1 For non-Nordic readers: the name Nordiska Museet translates literally as "The Nordic Museum" but has the status of the Swedish national museum of cultural history. The early names of the museum reflect the Nordic and Scandinavian current of ideas of the late 1800s.

2 Most recently in Hillström, M. (2006) *Ansvar för kulturarvet. Studier i det kulturhistoriska museiväsendets formering med särskild inriktning på Nordiska museets etablering 1872–1919*. Linköping: Linköpings universitet.

3 For the early history of the Nordiska Museet and Skansen, see also Björnstad, A. (ed.) (1991) *Skansen under hundra år*. Höganäs: Wiken; Hammarlund-Larsson, C. (1998) "Samlingarna och samlandet". In Medelius, H., Nyström, B. and Stavenow-Hidemark, E. (eds) *Nordiska museet under 125 år*. Stockholm: Nordiska Museet; Hammarlund-Larsson, C. (2004) " 'I denna tid af slapp nationalkänsla.' Om Artur Hazelius, vetenskapen och nationen". In Hammarlund-Larsson, C., Nilsson, B. G. and Silvé, E. *Samhällsideal och framtidsbilder. Perspektiv på Nordiska museets dokumentation och forskning*. Stockholm: Carlssons; Nyström, B. (1998) "Att göra det förflutna levande". In Medelius, Nyström, and Stavenow-Hidemark (1998) *op. cit.*; Sörlin, S. (1998) "Artur Hazelius och det nationella arvet". In Medelius, Nyström, and Stavenow-Hidemark (1998) *op. cit.*; Jönses, L. (2005) "Den patriotiska promenaden. Skansen och Svenska turist-föreningen i konstruktionen av det svenska territoriet". In Aronsson, P. and Hillström, M. (eds) *Kulturarvens dynamik. Det institutionaliserade kulturarvets förändringar*. Norrköping: Linköpings universitet; Hillström (2006) *op. cit.*

4 Could also be spelt Saami or Sami in English. In the various Scandinavian and Sami languages, the spelling also differs. Up to the 1960s the common name used by outsiders was "Lapps" or "Laplanders", until it became a pejorative term.

Europeans at the end of the 1800s. The exotic people of the north fascinated many, and both Sami families and reindeer were exhibited at World Expositions and in Zoological Parks.⁵ For the World Exposition in Paris in 1878, for example, Hazelius contributed various ethnic tableaux including a Sami motif,⁶ and from 1874 the *Höstflyttning i Lule Lappmark* (Autumn Migration in Lule Lappmark) was on display in his own museum. When Skansen opened, there were several tents and sod huts with Sami families as live installations. They looked after the reindeer and were said to live as they would at home to give the visitors a true picture of their conditions.⁷

Hazelius' interest in collecting has been described as manic, and his exhortations to his "gatherers" on collecting trips to Lapland certainly seem to support that interpretation. The Nordiska Museet's Sami collection today includes around 6,300 entries in the accessions register, which implies an even larger amount of individual objects, of which approximately half were received by the museum before 1910.

Researchers have characterised this somewhat romantic interest in the Sami as a result of a colonial perspective – which also influenced ethnographic museums' collections and the World Exposition's non-European sections. In this perspective the Sami were given the role of "The Other", living their lives in a timeless, ethnographic present in contrast to developing, civilised western industrial societies.⁸ This point of view was reinforced by the anatomic research which, under the auspices of physical anthropology during the 1800s and race biology in the 1900s, attempted to categorise people into lower and higher ranked races, mainly on the basis of the form of their crania.⁹ Among others the Sami were considered suitable objects of study.

If this cultural and scientific interest in the Sami can be seen as part of the hierarchical organisation of modern society, it is also possible to apply a geopolitical slant to the Sami representation in museums and exhibitions. The reindeer-herding Sami had since time immemorial moved over territories that were not definitively divided between the four nation-states – Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia – until the beginning of the 1900s. Since the 1500s, the historian Lars Elenius notes, the Sami had been included in the Swedish nation-state's mythology by a number of cultural-historical works.¹⁰ But to retain control over an area, a state had to show that it was in use, and in this way the nomadic Sami were excellent "territory-markers", following the argument of historian Lars Jönses.¹¹ Thus it was good for the Swedish state to keep a large group of active reindeer-herders. To a certain extent this explains the strict distinction policy which, at the beginning of the 1900s, went under the name "Lapps should be Lapps" and which barred the reindeer-herding Sami entry into the

5 See, for example, Broberg, G. (1981–1982) "Lappkaravaner på villovägar. Antropologin och synen på samerna fram mot sekelskiftet 1900". *Lychnos*; Ekström, A. (1994) *Den utställda världen. Stockholmsutställningen 1897 och 1800-talets världsutställningar*. Stockholm: Nordiska Museet; Mathisen, S. R. (2000) "Travels and narratives. Itinerant constructions of a homogenous Sami heritage". In Anttonen, P. et al. (eds.) (2000) *Folklore, heritage politics and ethnic diversity. A Festschrift for Barbro Klein*. Tumba: Mångkulturellt centrum; Baglo, C. (2006) "Samer på ville vege? Om 'levende utstillinger', antropologi og vitenskapelige praksiser". *Nordisk Museologi* 1.

6 Ekström (1994) *op. cit.*, pp. 44 and 136.

7 Upmark, G. (1916) "Skansen 25 år", p. 151. *Fataburen*.

8 Fabian, J. (1983) *Time and the other. How anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press.

9 Lundborg, H. (1927) *Svensk raskunskap. Folkupplaga med text, kartor, diagram och planscher*. Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell; Broberg, G. (1995) *Statlig rasforskning. En historik över Rasbiologiska institutet*. Lund: Lunds universitet; Lundmark, L. (2002) "Lappen är ombytlig, ostadig och obekväm ..." *Svenska statens samepolitik i rasismens tidevarv*. Umeå: Norrlands universitetsförlag; Lundmark, L. (2007) *Allt som kan mätas är inte vetenskap. En populärhistorisk skrift om Rasbiologiska institutet*. Stockholm: Forum för levande historia; Ljungström, O. (2004) *Oscariansk antropologi. Etnografi, förhistoria och rasforskning under sent 1800-tal*. Hedemora/Uppsala: Gidlunds.

10 Elenius, L. (2006) *Nationalstat och minoritetspolitik. Samer och finskspråkiga minoriteter i ett jämförande nordiskt perspektiv*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, p. 54.

11 Jönses (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 70.

growing industrial and welfare society.¹² At the same time it was important to strengthen the Sami's attachment to Sweden, for example through the educational system, so as to prevent its becoming a nation within a nation. Including the Sami in the Swedish cultural history can then be interpreted as a part of defending the national territory in the northern regions.

Managing Modernity

In 1907 the present building of the Nordiska Museet was finished, but when the new exhibitions were planned a conflict arose concerning their design. The archaeologically inspired researchers won over those who wanted to carry on the scenic legacy of Artur Hazelius.¹³ Two rooms on the ground floor of the museum, *Lappska afdelningen* (The Lapp Department), were devoted to the Sami collections, with systematically displayed artefacts.¹⁴ But in the same way as Hazelius had supplemented his sceneries with typologically arranged objects, there were also mannequins with costumes together with the last remains of one of Hazelius' early dioramas: *Den åkande lulelappen* (The travelling Lule Lapp).¹⁵

During the first decades of the 1900s some fieldwork was conducted in the northern regions, whereby traditional Sami life was documented with or without the acquisition of objects. A definitive change took place in 1939, however, when the Nordiska Museet appointed a special curator for Sami culture and the Sami collections, the ethnographer Ernst Manker.¹⁶ Manker initiated a period of extensive fieldwork and collection of objects, taking various settlements and lifestyles as his starting points. Spiritual sites, burial rituals and even the images on the Sami shaman drums were among the topics that interested him. In connection with work on the Stora Lule River before the construction of the power station in Porjus, various scientific explorations were made of the Sami areas that were to be submerged from 1919. In 1939 and 1940 Manker carried out a larger study that was concluded with the documentation of "what the Lapps' adaptation looked like now that the water had reached its highpoint".¹⁷ His writing about the place and the fieldwork became a lament for the flooded cultural area and a previously protected national park, though it simultaneously expressed an enthusiastic belief in the project's necessity in the interests of modern society's need for electric energy – for mining, railroads and, not least, to supply the northern towns and farms.¹⁸

Manker published his research widely in popular as well as scientific form. He started the scholarly series *Acta Lapponica* and he separated all Sami materials from the museum's general archives and gathered it in *Lappska arkivet* (The Lapp Archive).¹⁹ Manker also directed

12 Vitalis Karnell, vicar and school inspector in Karesuando, 1906: "When the Lapps start building organisations and have their own journal, when they go to folk high schools, then they are totally finished as Lapps, and they will become the most miserable people you can imagine. (...) Favour the Lapps in every possible way in their occupation, make them moral, sober people with just as much education as they need, but don't let them taste civilisation in other respects (...) it has never brought and will never bring a blessing. Lapps should be Lapps." Lundmark (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 70.

13 Lindberg, E.-F. (1957) "Gunnar Hazelius och Nordiska museets installationsfråga". *Rig*; Hillström (2006) *op. cit.*, p. 259 ff.

14 Hammarstedt, N. E. (1911) *Lappska afdelningen*. Stockholm: Nordiska Museet.

15 Ambrosiani, S. (1912) *Bilder af utställda föremål*. Stockholm: Nordiska Museet; Ambrosiani, S. (1912) *Guide to the collections of The Northern Museum*. Stockholm: Nordiska Museet.

16 Kjellström, R. (1998) "Nordiska museets sameforskning". In Medelius, Nyström and Stavenow-Hidemark (1998) *op. cit.* Manker's position was financed by a special grant from the government after a debate concerning whether or not the Sami curator should belong to the Museum of Ethnography or to the Nordiska Museet.

17 Manker, E. (1941a) "Lapparna kring Suorvasjöarna. Forskningar i övre Lule älvdal", p. 28. *Ymer*.

18 *Ibid.*; Manker, E. (1941b) *Det nya fjällvattnet. Forskningar och upplevelser bland lapparna kring Akkajaure*. Stockholm: Medéns.

19 This separating out of Sami research and Sami material also took place at other museums and archives at the same time, actions that are still to be analysed in their contemporary contexts.

the installation of a new permanent exhibition, *Lapparna* (The Lapps), which opened in 1947.²⁰

In the 1930s a radical renovation of the museum's permanent exhibitions had begun. The displays from the early 20th century were taken down and replaced by new ones, characterised by visuality, experience and functionality instead of the former study collections with typological series of objects. *Lapparna* was one of these exhibitions, and Manker expressed his aims concerning the design this way:

A showroom which conveys in an evocative manner the core of the culture in question, although not romanticism, but realism. The old way of covering the walls with type series etc. does not belong to the showroom but to the study store. The objects are displayed as far as possible in their organic, functional context. Away with messy pictures and labels; only some large, sweeping images. Let in the artist with brush and pencil. It's also a matter of creating air and space around the scene – as it should be with a culture under the open sky.²¹

From the exhibition a wall painting by Folke Ricklund is still in place, showing a mountain Sami summer dwelling. Besides Ricklund Helmer Osslund, Ossian Elgström and Nils Nilsson Skum were represented with paintings and drawings, and Runo Johanson with portrait sculptures of “prominent representatives of the Sami people”, including Johan Turi, Nils Nilsson Skum and Anta Pirak.

In different sections the exhibition described the reindeer herding and its products, the hard male and the soft female handicraft, and the spiritual world, with sacred objects as *seitar* (sieidis) and shaman drums. A low platform ran along the wall, with summer and winter *rajder* (sledge caravans). Parts of the work were undertaken in collaboration with representatives of the Sami community, whose acquaintance Manker presumably had made through his field trips and other research. Among others, Mattias and Sigga Kuoljok were engaged to get all details correctly arranged. The press made quite a show of Mattias Kuoljok coming to Stockholm by reindeer sledge, air and train to talk at the opening, when he “stressed the Lapps’ delight that their culture and customs had got such an excellent permanent expo on the museum’s ground floor”.²²

Another example of Manker's relations to the Sami community was his collaboration with the famous Sami artist Nils Nilsson Skum.²³ Skum grew up in a reindeer-owning family and began to draw as a child. In the 1930s he developed his talents as an artist, mainly by painting and drawing, but also through traditional Sami handicraft. He came into contact with Manker, who edited a couple of books in which Skum drew from his memories of keeping reindeer.²⁴ Skum's pictures became popular and were distributed through the art markets and in the press. He became famous and his art was shown in numerous exhibitions, not only in Sweden but also in Paris and New York.

In these ways the museum and the market became structures that formed a narrative about the Sami during a period when the atmosphere between them and the mainstream society wasn't too friendly. With the growth of industrial society, pressure to exploit the natural resources in northern Sweden increased, at the same time as the view of Sami formed by perspectives of race biology and the “Lapps should be Lapps” policy persisted in many

20 Medelius, H. (1998) “Utställningarna”, p. 295. In Medelius, Nyström and Stavenow-Hidemark (1998) *op. cit.*

21 These and other data about the exhibition come from Manker's working material in the archives of the Nordiska Museet.

22 *Svenska Morgonbladet* May 30, 1947.

23 Manker, E. (1956) *Boken om Skum*. Stockholm: LT.

24 Skum, N. N. (1938) *Same sita – Lappbyn*. Stockholm: Thule; Skum, N. N. (1955) *Valla renar. Olika sätt att sköta renar i ord och bilder*. Stockholm: Gebers.

people's minds.²⁵ The demand for assimilation and homogenisation was strong in the postwar Swedish welfare state when the Sami began to mobilise at a new level. There had been a number of waves of ethno-political movements since the turn of the century (1900), but the first national organisation was constituted in 1950: *Svenska Samernas Riksförbund* (The National Association of Swedish Sami), SSR.

There are several examples of researchers working during the first half of the 1900s who were studying controversial contemporary topics such as the "Lapp Issue" and the "Gypsy Issue" while they carried out their own cultural-history research. They were considered "experts" at a time when the groups in question were not seen as being able to speak for themselves, though this does not diminish the fact that they were often driven by a desire to engage with marginalised sections of the Swedish population.

Managing Contemporary Representation

In the end of the 1970s Manker's exhibition was dismantled and in 1981 replaced by *Samerna* (The Sami), a descriptive and comprehensive cultural historical exhibition with themes such as: dwellings, reindeer herding, hunting, fishing, skin dressing, handicraft, costumes, food, religion, music, school teaching, folklore, visual arts, customs, organisations... At the same time the present knocked on the door and was represented by a snowmobile and a contemporary reindeer herder's cabin. During the preparation of the exhibition, the museum began collaboration with representatives of the SSR and the Sami Association in Stockholm, but it didn't turn out too well.²⁶

The opening of the exhibition was supposed to take place in October 1980, but it was postponed almost half a year. One reason was the Sami's disapproval of the planned entrance display, a tableau showing an encounter between a Sami and a bear, pleading that it might strengthen false conceptions about the Sami wanting to extinguish wild species. The scene was replaced by a male Sami in a *kolt*, a traditional dress, with a *lasso* in his right hand. In spite of that, the chairman of the SSR, Nikolaus Stenberg, gave a critical speech at the inauguration:

The exhibition we see today has many valuable features. Yet, according to our opinion it doesn't give a complete and fair picture of the Sami's situation today, for example the effects of the exploitations in the Sami area. I believe and hope that the museum is prepared to supplement the exhibition on this point. In that way the Sami exhibition will become a living part of the museum.

From the documents one can see that, besides the entrance scene, the disagreements were mainly about the lack of contemporary Sami life along with different opinions on facts and data, including the maps. More generally I get the impression that the Sami representatives felt that they were not respected and represented and that they did not have any real influence on an exhibition about themselves.

This was a period when the Sami began to organise in new ways and to speak for themselves, while the Nordiska Museet still was an influential channel for knowledge about Sami issues in society – not as today when the museum, in spite of its particular position and history, is only one voice among others, not at least the Sami's. It was a period when the researchers began to be confronted with claims that their projects should be carried out with

25 Samis were also measured, registered, and photographed in the name of race biology. Data from the studies were published as late as 1941 in *The race biology of the Swedish lapps. P. 2. Anthropometrical survey*. Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell. Cf. note 10.

26 Data about the exhibition come from working material in the Nordiska Museet. The exhibition work was conducted by Rolf Kjellström, the then Sami curator at the museum.

the direct involvement of Sami. It was no longer acceptable for them to go out in the field to bring back knowledge and materials in the classical ethnographic manner.²⁷

During the 1970s and 80s the Swedish museum network for contemporary studies and collecting, *Samdok*, was launched. The participants were divided into working groups – “pools” – initially ten concerned with production, public and commercial environments, and one with domestic issues. But it was not until 1990 that Sami questions were included in the organisation, through the creation of *Samiska poolen* (The Sami Pool). This is so far the only working group to be formed on the basis of ethnicity, and that happened after pressure by the SSR.²⁸ The group functions as a network for the members and arranges seminars, study trips and field studies. The aim is, through documentation and collection, to create an understanding of how Sami culture changes and develops in the traditional settlement areas, in the urban environments and in the wider world.

In 1989, just before the Sami Pool was formed, a new museum was created in Jokkmokk: *Ájtte, Svenskt fjäll- och samemuseum* (The Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum). Today Ájtte is the main Swedish museum for Sami culture, a special museum for mountain nature and culture as well as an information centre for mountain tourism. At Ájtte there are cultural as well as natural history collections, archives (with documents and photographs), a library and exhibitions.²⁹ Ájtte is a national institution that aspires to be a Sami voice and present Sami perspectives.

Two conclusions can be drawn concerning the period around 1970–2000. First, when the Swedish cultural history museums, under the direction of the Nordiska Museet, expressly wanted to include contemporary life in their documentation and collections, it was the Swedish modern mainstream society with a focus on industrial production that was given the definition “contemporary”. Both new and old ethnic minorities’ conditions and lifestyles came in second place. International migration moved more quickly to the contemporary agenda than the national domestic minorities.

Second, during that period the study of Sami issues was shifted northwards, through increased resources to the regional museums, the creation of Ájtte as well as the establishment of Sami research at the University of Umeå. At the newly started *Nordisk Samisk Institutt* (Nordic Sami Institute) in Kautokeino, Norway, Sami-dedicated research activity was taken up. This formed radically new conditions for the national museums to address Sami questions, at first in relation to the material cultural heritage. At the Nordiska Museet, the accession of Sami objects slowed dramatically while the Museum of Ethnography chose to deposit its Sami collections at Ájtte. In many ways the basis for today’s postcolonial heritage situation was founded during these decades.

Managing Globalisation

During spring 2000, Sweden’s new national minority policy came into effect after Sweden ratified the European Council’s “Framework convention for the protection of national minorities” and the “European charter for regional or minority languages”. The Swedish national minorities are: Sami (who are also considered an indigenous people) Swedish-Finns, Tornedalians, Roma, and Jews. The goal of the minority policy is, in Sweden as in other

27 Ågren, K. (1974) “Dräktforskning”, p. 8 f. In Kjellström, R. (ed.) (1974) *Sameforskning i dag och i morgon. Rapport från symposium rörande den samiska kulturen 19–20 november 1973 i Nordiska museet*. Stockholm: Nordiska Museet.

28 The first members were the Nordiska Museet, the regional museums in Umeå and Luleå as well as Ájtte, The Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum in Jokkmokk and The National Association of Swedish Sami. Later the Department of Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research in Umeå joined, together with the Multicultural Centre in Botkyrka as well as the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm.

29 www.ajtte.com.

countries, to protect national minorities, strengthen their influence and support their language, culture, religion, and identity.³⁰

In 2003 the Nordiska Museet responded to the new policy by reallocating resources to a curator for minority and diversity issues – a position I hold. One of my tasks has been to work out the concept for a new Sami permanent exhibition. The former one, *Samer*, was closed in 2004, and the new one, *Sápmi*, opened in November 2007.³¹ A Sami focus group with representatives from seven organisations and institutions has been attached to this project. Even Skansen has, during recent years and with the collaboration of a Sami focus group, updated its Sami camp with two new dwellings and an information area. In spring 2007 a collaborative network was formed to exchange experiences and information between Sami organisations and the museums whose activities have some Sami connection.

As a general starting point for my position I took up a pressing and difficult question: do museum representations add to frozen identities, locked into expectations of tradition and authenticity, or can they embrace the dynamic and border-crossing realities that minorities are a part of, both historically and in our times? Do the collections constitute a positive continuity through recognisable symbols, which confirm Sami history? Or do they become impediments that constantly reduce the Sami to a historic phenomenon? These reflections have also driven the ideas behind the *Sápmi* exhibition, which aims to contribute to today's debate about indigenous and minority rights, representation, and identity. By applying a historical perspective to our contemporary questions, we hoped to show how the Sami and the Swedish have been formed in relation to each other, not least in a power and conflict perspective in which even the Nordiska Museet has played a role.

At the base of the exhibition is a multi-perspective and process-oriented point of view: How has knowledge been created, how has identity been constructed? The idea was to allow the visitor to encounter various aspects related to objects and images – as both beautiful and useful, unique and ethically problematic. Even though the exhibition's main theme is the Sami, the idea was also to include mainstream society in the representation, for example by bringing the Nordiska Museet into the narrative. To some extent that decision goes back to the commission for the exhibition, namely to deal with identity issues in general and at the same time display the museum's old and extensive Sami collections.

The underlying idea is therefore built on five themes of general scope relevant not only to the Sami but also to other ethnic groups in Sweden and internationally. That means that they can include equivalent relations between other majorities, minorities, and indigenous peoples and can be used both for the visitors' own reflections and in the educational activities of the museum: How do these questions look for you? For us? What similarities and differences are there?

The five themes refer to both historical and contemporary conditions. The first one, *Origin*, deals with issues of history, kinship, perceptions of identity and ethnicity. How have the Sami been described and discriminated against by outsiders? What was the impact of the legacy of race biology? How have the Sami identified themselves? What does it mean to different individuals to say: I am Sami. The second theme is about *Justice and injustice*, in this case aiming at land rights, legal processes, and political movements. Who has the right to land resources, to traditional knowledge, to the reindeer, and to the borders and names on the maps? The third theme focuses on the museum's material collections under the heading

30 For a further discussion of these questions, see Silvé, E. (2006) "Museer och minoritetspolitik – inläsning eller gränsöverskridande?" In Aronsson, P. and Alzén, A. (eds.) *Demokratiskt kulturarv? Nationella institutioner, universella värden, lokala praktiker*. Norrköping: Linköpings universitet.

31 *Sápmi* is the Sami term for the traditional Sami areas in Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden, but it also denotes the Sami society as a whole, including the people per se.

Brought home, taken away, brought back – with the questions of collecting, repatriation and indigenous knowledge in mind. The fourth theme is labelled *Whose view, whose voice, whose story* and deals with documents and images from the museum's archives, not least the many photographs. Who is looking at whom – the foreign observer or the depicted Sami? The fifth theme is *The third space*, a postcolonial concept including cultural encounters and hybrid identities in a globalised world. In the exhibition this theme was visualised by material expressions of Sami identities (different categories of objects) as mixtures of a wide range of varying influences. Through time the original themes have been reordered and renamed, but the main topics remain the same. And, finally, since the exhibition has two entrances, there are two ways to experience it: either from the perspective of *The Sami – one people in four countries* or *The Sami – one of the world's indigenous peoples*.³²

Conclusions

During the last 15 years, politics conducted by international indigenous people has led to a paradigm shift, while Sápmi has turned from being an outpost in the north to a part of a growing, global indigenous network. The Swedish territory has been the same since 1905 but the projection has changed, the frame is altered and the content is pervaded by other ideas. That gives a new set of challenges and a new position to the Nordiska Museet and other national museums.

All exhibitions are children of their time concerning contents, perspectives, cooperation, design, and educational aspects. All have also had a contemporary impact. When Lars-Anders Baer, chairman of the board of the Swedish Sami Parliament, spoke at the inauguration of the new exhibition, he wanted to understand it as a link in a decolonisation process, hoping that it would contribute to a fruitful dialogue, confidence and reconciliation between the Sami and the Swedish.³³

Today the museums face a somewhat different dialogue with the outside world than before. There is increasing scope today for collaborative exchanges between museums and their users, especially in cases where the objects come from indigenous people and ethnic minorities.³⁴ As the practice in many museums shows, repatriation of artefacts is not the only way to create better relations with indigenous people and minorities. There are also other roads to try such as “shared custody”, creating a different and more inclusive history and allowing more people to make an impression in the collective memory. Despite this, the demand for repatriation should not be treated lightly. *Where* the objects are physically kept has great symbolic significance, just as it had when once they were removed. Real things in real places play a role in a social and cultural system. When they were taken away, they became markers of power and influence, centre and periphery. A return can therefore mean an acknowledgement of an alternative order of power, significant for creating new identities for all those involved. In this way the museums' collections can be reused to start a process of reconciliation and revision of previous asymmetrical power relations between countries and within countries. Here the national museums have a particular opportunity and responsibility.

32 Cf. the exhibition catalogue: Silvén, E. et al. (2007) *Sápmi – att vara same i Sverige/ Sápmi – makkár lea leahkit sápmelaš Ruotas/ Sápmi – on being Sami in Sweden*. Stockholm: Nordiska Museet.

33 www.sametinget.se/3183

34 Clifford, J. (1999) “Museums as contact zones”. In Boswell, D. and Evans, J. (eds.) *Representing a nation: A Reader. Histories, heritage and museums*. London: Routledge; Smith, L. T. (1999/2004) *Decolonizing methodologies. Research and indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed; Peers, L. and Brown, A. K. (eds.) (2003) *Source communities. A Routledge Reader*. London: Routledge.