



Foreword: A European Project

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This Open Access publication gives a comparative overview of the historical roles of national museums in state-making processes. Its national reports have been presented and discussed at a workshop in Stockholm in April 2010 and at a conference at the University of Bologna March 2011. The conference proceedings provide a basis for comparative analyses and include 37 reports by 33 researchers.

The conference proceedings are the first in a series of Open Access publications from the three-year research project EuNaMus which is introduced below.

The editors wish to thank all partners, contributors and staff involved in research and publication of this impressive comparative collection of observations and analyses of a central cultural institution.

Eunamus – the project

The level of investments in national museums is high in contemporary society. The motives and hopes are often a mixture of a will to secure a scientific and relevant understanding of the national heritage, community integration, stimulating creativity and cultural dialogue and creating attractions for a burgeoning experience economy. In France, Germany and The Netherlands there are plans for new national museum for communicating a stronger historic canon, a path also chosen in Denmark. A great many other museums in Canada and New Zealand and also England and Sweden hail a more multi-cultural approach, downplaying the traditional national aspect of narrative and inviting new citizens to a more diverse idea of society. The pan-European project for a historical museum is on its way. Ethnographic museums in many places open with post-colonial invitation to dialogue all over the world in tension with strong demands for restituting objects ranging from the human remains of Samis, to the Elgin Marbles of Acropolis. It is a contested billion-dollar cultural industry creating, negotiating and reinforcing ideas of values, belonging and ownership.

The *European National Museums: Identity politics, the uses of the past and the European citizen* (EuNaMus, www.eunamus.eu) research project explores the creation and power of the heritage created and presented by European national museums to the world, Europe and its states, as an unsurpassable institution in contemporary society. National museums are defined and explored as processes of institutionalized negotiations where material collections and displays make claims and are recognized as articulating and representing national values and realities. Questions asked in the project are why, by whom, when, with what material, with what result and future possibilities are these museums shaped.

In order to shape a cultural policy for an expanding European Union the Commission asks for more research on the working of its cultural institutions and national museums constitutes one of its most enduring institutions for creating and contesting political identities is necessary. The

focus in our project is on understanding the conditions for using the past in negotiations that recreate citizenship as well as the layers of territorial belonging beyond the actual nation-state.

This project is one of the few humanistic projects supported by the Seventh Framework Programme, run by the European Commission. It has grown out of collaboration between university partners connecting starting with a network of young and senior cultural researchers supported by the Marie Curie programme, and will for three years (2010–2013) proceed by a series of investigations beyond the stereotypical ideas of museums as either a result of outstanding heroic individuals, exponents of a materialization of pure Enlightenment ideas or outright ideological nationalistic constructs disciplining citizens into obedience.¹

The research is pursued through multi-disciplinary collaboration between eight leading institutions and a series of sub-projects (in EU-speak: work packages or WPs) studying institutional path dependencies, the handling of conflicts, modes of representation, cultural policy and visitors' experiences in national museums. Understanding the cultural force of national museums will provide citizens, professionals and policy makers with reflexive tools to better communicate and create an understanding of diversity and community in developing cultural underpinning for democratic governance.

The first work within the project to start is called "Mapping and framing institutions 1750–2010: national museums interacting with nation-making". This overview of the most important museums established to fulfill the function of a national museum in all European countries will achieve several objectives, most of them possible to attain only through the comparative method used. Surprisingly this has never been done before.

The first project, which is documented by these conference proceedings, gives us the general patterns of what museums were initiated and realized, by whom, with what agenda and with what consequences.² In the first step it is the interaction with political state-making that is analyzed covering all EU states. One hypothesis is that the actual history of state-making is of importance for the role played by museums, since empires, old well-established and unthreatened states did not have and still do not have exactly the same needs as nations more recently struggling to form a nation-state. Finland and Norway show different patterns than Sweden and Denmark; Greece, Italy and Germany have partly other priorities than France or the UK. The role of empires in initiating colonial museums at home or abroad is also considered.

In the second project led by Dominique Poulot our research penetrates deeper into explicit narratives of the unity and destiny of the nation as well as the opposite, the treatment of conflict and "heritage wars" that exist in all nations. There is tension between striving towards a hegemonic representation of the cultural and political history of a country and oppositional voices of many kinds coming from other nations and minorities as well as regional aspects, class and gendered tensions that demand representation in these prestigious arenas or a new narrative assigning them a more prominent role. The conflicts over heritage range from a targeted destruction of heritage in war via international battles for the ownership of artifacts to issues of how to represent or integrate minorities.

All narratives are, however, not explicit. In the third project led by Simon Knell the implicit message of architecture, city plans and the whole assemblage of national museums will be interpreted in a number of states. Art museums are especially interesting since they do claim to stand for universal aesthetical values but at the same time assess narratives in several dimensions

on the grandeur of the host carried by the arrangement of collections and exhibitions. Another aspect of the spatial arrangement of national museums is the relationship between representations centralized to the capital and the existence of various “distributed” performances of the national in many local, regional historic and art museums of Italy. How is the national constructed in collecting and interacting with regional identities and marginalized communities? The third dimension, which is also a new form of distribution, is to interpret the impact of new assemblages of digital museums, like the representation of communities that goes beyond the individual museum.

National museums have from the start been utopian visionary projects carried by politicians, intellectuals, scholars and citizens in the state and in civil society. The hopes of cultural politicians to use museums as tools for education, tourism and integration interplay with the formulation of the national museum professionals and directors themselves. In the fourth project led by Arne Bugge Amundsen, this dynamic is explored for the last two decades on both national and on European policy-making levels.

Now that we have a good view of the set-up, trajectories and importance of the institutional framework, the explicit and implicit narratives that negotiate meaning, conflicts and directions, and the major actors’ hopes for the future, the question remains: How does this matter to the audience? The fifth study led by Alexandra Bounia concerns audiences in a set of European countries with a view to mapping the experience of visiting by both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The sixth project led by Simon Knell involves extracting the most relevant results and inserting them in a global context by exploring the working of national museums beyond Europe.

In projects financed by the Seventh Framework Programme a great deal of weight is put on communication. A communication plan is required to develop the identification of stakeholders and the means to communicate with them. Websites, newsletters, policy briefs, reference groups and material for exhibitions are some of the means used. This work is led by Bodil Axelsson.

Conferences are part of the running project with the final one in Budapest in December 2012 going to focus on broad participation and on identifying the multi-dimensional relevance of the results. The major results will be available via Open Access, but a series of books will also come out of the efforts. The best way to keep up is to follow www.eunamus.eu.

Notes

¹ Among the publications are several conference proceedings, also available on-line at LiU E-press, and a book linking to the new project. Arne Bugge Amundsen & Andreas Nyblom, (eds.), *National museums in a global world [Elektronisk resurs] : NaMu III : Department of culture studies and oriental languages, University of Oslo, Norway, 19-21 November 2007*, ed., *Linköping electronic conference proceedings (Online)*, 31 (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2008); Peter Aronsson & Magdalena Hillström, (eds.), *NaMu, Making National Museums Program. Setting the frames, 26-28 February, Norrköping, Sweden [Elektronisk resurs]*, ed., *Linköping electronic conference proceedings (Online)*, 22 (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2007); Peter Aronsson & Andreas Nyblom, (eds.), *Comparing: national museums, territories, nation-building and change. NaMu IV, Linköping University, Norrköping, Sweden 18-20 February 2008 : conference proceedings*, ed., *Linköping electronic conference proceedings (Online)*, 30 (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2008); S.J. Knell, P. Aronsson, and A. et al (eds.) Amundsen, *National Museums. New Studies from around the World*, ed. (London: Routledge, 2011). The earlier project was presented in Peter Aronsson, "Making National Museums (NaMu) - ett internationellt program för jämförande studier rörande nationalmuseernas framväxt och funktion,"

Nordisk Museologi, no. 1 (2007); P Aronsson et al., "NaMu: EU Museum Project connects and educates scholars from around the world," *MUSE* 26, no. 6 (2008) and is still available at www.namu.se.

² We anticipate that partners and others will benefit from this material for further analyzes and publications beyond Eunamus. Among those already announced are Aronsson, P. and Elgenius, G., (eds.) (2013) *A History of the National Museum in Europe 1750-2010*: In prep.