



European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen

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INTEGRATING EUNAMUS RESEARCH STRANDS

The three-year research project Eunamus has entered its final year, and its researchers are intensively involved in finalizing and integrating its research strands. The integrated findings will be presented and enhanced at a conference, *National Museums in a Changing Europe*, in Budapest 12-14 December 2012. This conference has been designed to create dialogues among museum professionals, professional organisations, policy makers and university researchers. It provides a forum for debate and dialogue between those who study national museums and those who daily shape these institutions and are charged with taking these institutions forward. There are two ways to sign up for the conference. If you wish to make a presentation, the call for conference papers is open until the 30 July 2012. Please send an abstract to eunamus_bp@pasts.ceu.hu

The conference also welcomes delegates who do not wish to present a paper. In this case, to register your interest in attending, please send an email to registration_eunamus_bp@pasts.ceu.hu

This newsletter presents the latest advances within the Eunamus research strands. Starting with Eunamus investigations of the ways in which identities are created in national museums, it then places Eunamus research on national museums in the context of similar European Commission funded research. The newsletter then takes its readers on a tour of Asian national museums. Next follows an introduction to Eunamus research on museum policies. Finally, some new literature on the intersection of political citizenship and cultural identities is presented.

Outline of NATIONAL MUSEUMS AND A CHANGING EUROPE

The conference *National Museums in a Changing Europe* opens with round table discussions on “National Museums Around the World”. These dialogues are followed by keynote speeches and paper sessions. An open call for papers ensures the relevance of the content to participants, and Eunamus is looking forward to contributions from around the globe. To tie in with topical issues concerning state interference and institutional autonomy, the conference includes a panel on the controversies around the proposed merger of Hungarian National Gallery and the Museum of Fine Arts in the planned *Museum Quarter* in Budapest. The controversy has raised a set of questions regarding the extent to which national museums should act as arenas for overtly nationalistic exhibitions, and how economic and cultural values can be balanced in governmentally instigated fusions and relocations. More information on the conference is posted at www.eunamus.eu

The last day of the conference includes a panel with experts invited to discuss with Eunamus consortium the roles of national museums. In doing so, the panel will look for new ways for museums to act in intricate and diverse landscapes of identity, belonging and citizenship. How can national museums creatively include and work with contemporary Europe’s dynamic, fluid and fundamentally diverse identities? How can strivings in areas of democracy and learning be made to work along the lines of innovation, economic sustainability and the creative industries which are at the heart of today’s discussions on cultural policy?



EUNAMUS ON IDENTITIES AND PROCESSES OF IDENTIFICATION

As pointed out by Andromache Gazi at a recent Eunamus workshop in Athens, the ways in which museums use their space and design exhibitions create roadmaps for identification and points of belonging in the social world. Eunamus researchers has investigated both the different ways in which national museums all around Europe invites to identifications, and how the spaces in nine major museums are perceived by its visitors in terms of identity.



Professor Simon Knell has led a set of studies on how the material culture of national museums invites people to regard themselves as European, national and regional.

The conclusions suggest that many nations distinguish themselves from other nations by exhibiting the same types of objects, for example, medieval art, contemporary art, the Classical and Christian heritages. On the hand, this common European museological language creates an implicit sense of Europeaness and increases the potential for international dialogues and loans of objects. On the other hand, the Christian and Classical heritage may exclude smaller countries who cannot invest in art and groups of people who have not had the opportunity to invest in education. More nuanced accounts of the nation may instead be produced at local and regional museums. Museum like spaces on the web in turn carry with them the possibilities to cross national and institutional borders.

The perspectives of museum visitors have been studied under the leadership of Professor Alexandra Bounia. This is the most extensive comparative visitor investigation undertaken in Europe. It has studied the experiences of the country's citizens and visiting tourists at nine national museums in Europe with the help of 5356 questionnaires, 166 interviews and four focus groups with national minorities.



Arne Bugge Amundsen discussing Eunamus visitor study with Pille Runnel, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Jocelyn Dodd and Alexandra Bounia in Athens 25 April.



In brief, Eunamus visitor study shows that national identification prevails over alternatives such as a hybrid national identity (two or more heritage roots), a trans-national (European) identity, cosmopolitan ideals, universal humanity or the importance of the individual in determining identity. It also shows how minorities have difficulties in feeling at home at national museums and that many visitors also show complex layers of identification of regional belonging. Especially the qualitative part of the research suggests that there is no straight-forward way for museums to shape identities. Identities are co-evolving in many contexts in a fast changing Europe.

The report ***Crossing Borders: Connecting European Identities in Museums and Online*** is already online, available through [Linköping University Electronic Press](#). The visitor study will be online in September. Until then, follow this [link](#) to read about the research process.

23-27 April, Eunamus held two workshops with public lectures in Athens on museum identities. Pictures and observations from the event are published at the [blog Unfoldingeunamus](#).



The policy implications of Eunamus research on the material culture and processes of identification of museums are being developed. Taken as a whole these two studies suggest that, even though national museums work a great deal with education, there is much more that could be done in cooperation with schools and other educational institutions to develop collective identities through democratic processes. Such work could contribute to more inclusive approaches to Europe's humanistic heritage.

THE TRICKLING DOWN OF A RESEARCH CONCEPT

Currently greater global interconnectedness, migration and, not least, economic turmoil are testing the political, cultural and social bonds both within and among many countries of Europe and the world. Within this situation notions of identity and identification have emerged as key concepts in understanding the allegiance people feel to political communities. Questions of identity and identification have entered public debates and policy discussions. In particular, the European Commission has turned to research to develop insights to support political and economic integration in the EU. In this process academic concepts are transformed into tools to better understand, and develop strategies to deal with, the interconnected and entangled processes of democracy and cultural belonging. On the one hand, there is a perceived need to provide a better foundation for democratic legitimacy based in a sense of belonging and identification, especially in the European Union's integration process. From the context of the European Union European identity, may be perceived as too weak. On the other hand, identity may also be perceived as too strong, for example, in the growing support for nationalistic political parties or the rise of radical political Islam.

The trickling down of conflicting and unstable concepts of identity to public debates and policy-making from academic disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and critical cultural research, has productively challenged Eunamus project team and other researchers from the social sciences and humanities to interact with policy-making bodies and funders. All in all there are twenty-two projects funded by the European Commission during the 6th and 7th Framework Programmes that study identity dimensions of Europe. Earlier this year many of these projects gathered at a conference in Brussels co-organised by the European Commission and Prof. Robert Miller from Queens University, Belfast. Compilations of projects are available at http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/events-194_en.html.

NATIONAL MUSEUMS IN ASIA

To know more about the societal role of national museums, Eunamus is complementing its research on national museums in Europe with a wider contextual examination of the how museums have been shaped by, or shape, cultural and social policies in societies beyond the European continent.

Simon Knell, who integrates Eunamus findings so as to form conclusions on the role of national museums in building greater European cohesion, has had extensive dialogues with museum professionals and organisations in Asia.

“The national museum has become a major platform through which Asia countries have sought to negotiate and enshrine their national identities. If Europe saw the heyday of the national museum in the late nineteenth century, many Asian countries are only now fully realising the post-colonial potential of these institutions today and in doing so are producing some of the most socially significant institutions in the world. Nations like Korea have experienced conflict, colonialism, genocide, isolation, division and rapid modernization; the national museum provides a vehicle for self reflection and cultural recovery. The National Museum of Korea in Seoul is one of the largest and most impressive national museums in the world. In Singapore, superb national museums, like the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Peranakan Museum, permit and encourage conversations about this tiny city-state’s defining multiethnicity. Singapore offers Europe some interesting lessons on how national museums might accommodate complex and changing national identities. Language, ethnicity, culture and identity are constantly in negotiation here. Here as in Hong Kong there are also major national gallery developments taking place which seek to occupy the cutting edge of curatorial practice. In Taiwan, the National Palace Museum possesses the wealth of mainland China. The country’s difficult political position has made national museums and exhibition exchanges important players in cultural diplomacy and in attempts to define what it is to be Taiwanese.”
Simon Knell



Peranakan Museum, Singapore, 2011. A defining feature of Singapore is its multiculturalism and ethnic and cultural fusions. This museum explores and celebrates, the Peranakans, people of mixed ethnic origin. This culturally rich and complex group includes Jawi Peranakans descended from Indian Muslims, the Chitty Melaka community descended from Hindu Traders and the Baba community of Chinese origin. Photo: Simon Knell



New National Art Gallery in Singapore references the style of European national museum architecture. Read more on the meaning of this architectural language in the report *Crossing Borders: Connecting European Identities in Museums and Online*. Photo: Simon Knell



National Museum of Korea, Seoul 2006. Photo: Simon Knell



MUSEUM POLICIES IN EUROPE

The extent to which museum is a vital policy area in national politics varies across Europe. To establish some main perspectives on the development during the past 20 years, Eunamus has investigated five different countries: Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary and Norway as well as the cultural policy from the European Union (EU). Below you find the case studies presented at the conference ***Museum Policies in Europe between 1990 and 2010: Negotiating Political and Professional Utopia*** in Oslo 27-29 June. Guest speakers are: *Prof. Dr. Stefan Krankenhagen*, *Clelia Pozzi* (Politecnico di Milano /MeLa), *Dr. Richard Benjamin*, (Head of the International Slavery Museum, Liverpool, *Curator Leif Pareli* (Norsk folkemuseum/The Norwegian Cultural Historical Museum), *Council member Vibeke Larsen* (Sámi Parliament of Norway), *Dr. Ian McShane* (RMIT University, Australia), *Boban Batricevic* (curator, National Museum of Montenegro).

CASE STUDIES

After Soviet: In Eastern Europe, and in the former Baltic provinces of the Soviet Union, new kinds of nationalism are accompanying the reinvention of old nations. Material culture in national museums in these countries is now being re-sorted and narratives rewritten in order to produce these new national realities. Gabor Elbi and Peter Apor from the Central European University perform in their report a detailed presentation of Hungary, hereby exemplifying how East-Central Europe has been profoundly reshaped after the dismantling of the socialist dictatorships in 1989-1990. According to Apor, it has been important “to unbound museums from ideological constraints and heavy state infiltration” in order to increase the level of cultural and professional autonomy of civil societies in Hungary. The Hungarian National Museum is in this report presented as the foremost authority in the museum infrastructure of the country, but the National Gallery and the Museum of Fine Arts serve together with the Museum of Ethnography, the House of Minorities and the Roma Museum of Contemporary Art as other interesting case studies. Estonia will serve as an exemplary

study of the Baltic countries of the former Soviet Union that defines the socio-political rupture in Europe of the past two decades (the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist system and the extensive enlargement of the European Union in the 21st century). In her report, professor Kristin Kuutma from the University of Tartu presents three case studies: History Museum, Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Art Museum, and she identifies three distinct periods defining the shifting focus of politicians after the collapse of the communist system.

Development in a former colonial empire: In European states which formerly possessed large colonial empires, like France or Great Britain, the sense of nation has dealt with waves of immigration, and each has developed different sensibilities with regard to multiculturalism and one-nationalism. Felicity Bodenstern from the Sorbonne University in Paris demonstrates in her report on French museum policies “how contemporary ideological tendencies are reformulating France’s Universalist ambitions as a desire to represent diversity and to establish places of cultural dialogue that is very much present in current museum policy”. She argues however that the general desire to address difficult aspects of the nation’s past and present seems to give preference to strategies that one might define as neutralizing rather than as explicative. Examples of political actions and demonstrations in museums (e.g. ‘Musée des civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée’) suggest, however, that the civil society in France claims the museum as a space for a dialogue that it intends to be part of.

Contemporary uses of classical antiquity: At the borderlands of Europe, nations confront rather different challenges. Greece and Turkey, have related to a classical past in quite different ways to invent universal notions of nationhood and trans-European national influence. Alexandra Bounia from the University of Aegean discusses the ways and the extent to which national museums have proclaimed their political and cultural roles, using the new Acropolis Museum and the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens as



important case studies. The last decade of the 20th century and up to 2004 was a period of prosperity for Greece, as the country joined the European Economic Community and successfully organized the Summer Olympics. The following period was an anticlimax, which eventually led to the current difficult situation: economic constraints leading to a serious financial and social crisis, influencing cultural policy and museum policy in particular.

Incorporating minorities and migrants: The Nordic countries have over the past decades come to terms with an excluding and colonial history related to several minority groups, and Norway is no exception. Lill Eilertsen from the University of Oslo introduces Norwegian museum policies by pointing to a comprehensive museum reform initiated in 2001 with the aim to facilitate administrative processes and secure milieus of professionals in Norwegian museums. The reform has caused a profound change in the Norwegian museum landscape, both on an administrative level and in regard to official aims and statutes. The impact it has had on Sámi museums is also treated. The Norwegian Folk Museum, the National Museum of Art, Design and Architecture and the Museum of Cultural

History, all situated in Oslo, serve as central cases in the study of how both private and public national museums have redefined their aims in order to adapt to the official museum policy of the Norwegian Government, hereby causing both minor and profound controversies.

European Union as an agent of change: Finally, Maria Höglund from the University of Linköping states in her report that the role of museums as possible agents of social change isn't necessarily just of national concern. EU as an actor in the museum field is a rather unexplored area, and Höglund aims to provide a collected picture of the aims and means that the Union has had to influence museum activities. She looks at the fundamental EU agreements in the field of culture politics, like the key document 'The Agenda' (European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World) released in 2007 and further exemplifies a range of channels where the EU has approached museums during 1993-2010. According to Höglund, culture is both considered a problem and a solution to the European integration problem.

Lill Eilertsen

EXPLORING CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP IN NATIONS AND BEYOND

[Culture Unbound, Volume 3, 2011: Thematic section on Exhibiting Europe](#)

"The development of European narratives in museums, collections and exhibitions provides an exemplary field of inquiry for understanding Europeanization as a cultural process." With this starting point of Stefan Krankenhagen's, seven authors explore the Europeanization of museums in a recent volume of the online journal Culture unbound. The volume gives a foretaste of the conclusive book [Europa ausstellen. Das Museum als Praxisfeld der Europäisierung](#) by Wolfram Kaiser, Stefan Krankenhagen and Kerstin Poehls. Köln, Weimar & Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2012.

[Gabriella Elgenius Symbols of Nations and Nationalism: Celebrating Nationhood. Palgrave Macmillan \(2011\)](#)

This book draws the attention to the layered and ongoing process of nation-building through a careful analysis of the creation and development of flags and national days in Europe. It is comparative in its outset and considers symbolic discontinuity and ruptures in political histories of nations.

[Johan Fornäs Signifying Europe Bristol: Intellect Press \(2011\)](#)

This book is an exploration of the cultural dimensions of the political project of the European Union as it explores various symbols for European identification. The author critically analyzes the ways in which the European Union has blueprinted the tool box of nation-making, including the flag, the European day, the anthem, and the motto. It juxtaposes official EU symbols, in particular the symbolic dimensions of the Euro-notes, with symbols created by the broader public and the publishers characterize it as a critical interpretation of the meanings of the various symbols—and their often contradictory or ambiguous dimensions.

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