

Contested Boundaries: Nation, People and Cultural History Museums in Sweden and Norway 1862–1909

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Abstract

It has become commonplace to assert that museums embody, perform and negotiate national identities. Many researches in museum history have stressed a close relationship between nation building and the origin and formation of the modern public museum. Museums, it is argued, contributes to the construction and representation of the ethnical and historical distinctiveness of the nation's self. This article explores the ambiguities of the concept when applied to the establishment of cultural history museums in Sweden and Norway during the latter half of the 19th century. It shows that the relation between nation building and early museum building in the Scandinavian context was more intricate than earlier has been assumed. Museum founders like Artur Hazelius, who opened the Scandinavian-Ethnographic Collection in 1873 (renamed Nordiska museet 1880), was deeply influenced by Scandinavianism, a strong cultural and political force during the 19th century. Union politics played an important role for museum politics, as did the transitions of the concepts of "ethnography" and "nation". At the very end of the 19th century the original concept of "nation" meaning people and culture gradually was subordinated to the concept of "nation" as state and political territory. In early 20th century museum ideology cultural history museums were strongly connected with "nations" in the modern sense. Consequently, efforts to "nationalise" the folk-culture museum were made both in Norway and Sweden. A contributory force was, naturally, the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905.

Keywords: History-19th century, Museumhistory- 19th century, Nationalism, Scandinavianism, Nordiska museet, The University Museum of Ethnography in Oslo, Norsk Folkemuseum.

Nordiska Museet: A Museum of and for the Swedish Nation?

It has become commonplace to assert that museums embody and negotiate national identities. Many researches in museum history have stressed the close relationship between nation-building and the origin and formation of the modern public museum. Museums, it is argued, contribute to the construction and representation of the ethnic and historical distinctiveness of a nation's self (Bennett 1995; Duncan, 1995; Boswell & Evans 1999; McClellan 1999; Knell et al. 2010). In Sweden, this dominant academic perspective has played an important role in the description and analysis of how the Nordiska museet in Stockholm was established. The museum was opened to the public in 1873 and moved to its current premises at the beginning of the 20th century. Many scholars have suggested that Nordiska museet should be analysed within the perspective of nationalism and the construction of national identity. The inclusion of folk culture as part of the national heritage to be displayed in the museum has helped to establish, demarcate, propagate and visualise the national identity.

In the book *Historia, museer och nationalism*, the ethnologist and museum historian Stefan Bohman (1997) focuses on the relationship between museums and national identity. He argues that during the 19th century people from aristocratic and middle-class circles promoted the idea that the people's national feelings and loyalty must be strengthened. Therefore, the people in these social groups tried to propagate an accurate meaning of Swedishness. According to Bohman, one of the most important actors was Artur Hazelius (1833–1901), the founder of Nordiska museet and the open-air museum Skansen. Bohman argues that Hazelius contributed successfully to the symbolic construction of the national past, emphasising Swedish history – the kings, the great Swedish artists and, most importantly, folk culture. The old Swedish peasantry (*allmogen*) signified a national Swedish identity worthy of imitation. The Swede should get to know himself/herself through an encounter with unspoiled and original folk culture (Bohman 1997: 21).

A related viewpoint is articulated by the historian Sverker Sörlin (1998). In the introduction to the anniversary book *Nordiska museet under 125 år*, Sörlin asserts that Artur Hazelius was involved in many projects that contributed to the establishment of a national consciousness. This process included a mapping of the nation; the nation became a concept, picture, map and a story. Through these means the nation became conceivable to people. Nordiska museet is a representative of national institutions whose establishment aimed to mobilise the masses to revive the nation. The overall purpose of Artur Hazelius' museum projects was to create a national memory and a national memorial, Sörlin adds (1998: 27).

These interpretations seem valuable enough yet, when looking more closely at the museum's collections and the collecting practices that characterised the museum's early development in the late 19th century, the strong alignment between nation-building and museum-building that is advocated, among others, by Boh-

man and Sörlin cannot be empirically supported. The perspective is oversimplifying the complexity of museum formation in 19th century Scandinavia. Rather than any straightforward nation-building, the setting for cultural museum-building in Scandinavia in the late 19th century was profoundly permeated by attracting and repelling forces of countries intricately joined together in political history. Up until 1809 Finland was part of Sweden; in 1814 Denmark and Norway parted and Norway entered into a union with Sweden. Up to the last quarter of that century Scandinavianists sought to establish a pan-Scandinavian nation-state, and celebrated the cultural unity of the Scandinavian people (Finland was often included). These political and historical circumstances formed the contexts of museum-building in the North. Also contributing to political uncertainties about the territorial definition of the nation was the contemporary re-definition of “ethnography” and changing ideas of what a cultural history museum should be and what collections they should consist of.¹

Heterogeneous Collections and Uncertain Geographical Boundaries



The Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection (Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen).
(*Meddelanden från Nordiska museet 1898*, Stockholm 1900.)

Nordiska museet was opened under the name of the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection (Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen) in 1873. The name was changed in 1880 when the museum was turned into a private foundation. Formerly, it was owned by Artur Hazelius himself. Until 1907 the museum was located in central Stockholm and later the collections were moved to a building at

Djurgården, where they still reside. The museum was originally described in newspapers as a permanent exhibition of peasant costumes, but almost immediately after that the collections expanded in various directions. They grew ever bigger and more diverse. The breadth of the collections can be illustrated by a report in the museum's yearbook from 1898 (Hazelius 1900: 161–174). In this year, the collections were expanded, for example, by the inclusion of the following items:

The folk culture division:

From Swedish provinces: Jewellery, bridal crowns, household utensils made of wood, tin, bronze and clay, tools for handicraft, a spoon made of silver, a rich decorated sideboard possibly painted by the famous artist Per Hörberg, a sleigh from the early 19th century, several complete costumes for women and man, different kinds of old furniture, a hurdy-gurdy, an iron cross, furniture hollowed out from wooden logs typical of the Finnish people from Värmland, a child's costume, two dishes from the 17th century, hand-made paintings with biblical subjects, and a clog almanac. ***From Norway:*** Richly carved sideboards and four-poster beds, household utensils made of glass, brass and bronze, silver jewellery, peculiar bottles, tapestries, and harnesses. ***From Finland:*** Two boats. ***From Estonia:*** A gift from peasants (*allmogemän*) close to Reval consisting of household utensils made of wood and a piece of jewellery made of bronze, probably from the Middle Ages.

The arts and crafts and guilds division

From Sweden: Eight old guild-plates made of silver, two guild-chests and numerous seal stamps.

From Germany: Parchment records from the 17th century, a guild-chest, 58 seal stamps, paintings and richly decorated banners.

The history of work division

A printing press from 1747, several woodblocks made for textile and tapestry printing, a sewing machine from the 1860s made in Sweden, a sewing machine, some harrows, and a larger collection of pewter casting forms.

The memories of old Stockholm division

A number of old sign boards, some lintels made of oak, glazed tiles and an iron gate, all from different houses and addresses in Stockholm.

The hunting division

Several bear traps and wolf spears.

The military organisation division

Two medieval weapons, two powder horns and military uniforms from the 18th century.

The church division

A decorated chandelier made of iron, a christening font, a pew from the 17th century and a poor box.

The higher classes division

Two portraits of nobility from the 16th century and other paintings once belonging to the castle of Målsåker and donated by King Oscar II, several rich embroidered waistcoats in silk, silk embroideries, cloths with embroidery, a sewing table made of mahogany, two goblets made of glass, and two sugar bowls made of crystal.

The history division

Plaster models of statues and busts made of famous Swedish artists, a work box once belonging to Queen Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, sheets and pillow cases bearing the monogram of Queen Josefina, various possessions from the estate of Frithiof Holmgren donated by his wife (both were close friends of Artur Hazelius), a large number of tools and other equipment including a working table from the estate of the famous Swedish engraver Lea Ahlborn, and a number of remembrances of artists, including a shoe once belonging to the celebrated Swedish-Italian danseuse Marie Taglioni.

The portraits and engravings division

Numerous Nordic portraits (engravings, lithographs and photographs) and 96 silhouettes from the second half of the 18th century.

The above inventory is only a selection of the many items that were incorporated into the collections in 1898. It is important to observe that most of these objects were gifts. In 1898, 522 people donated a total of 3500 gifts to the museum.

The wide heterogeneity of the collections appears clearly enough from just this short glimpse at the accession list. However, the museum's many faces have been suppressed by its historians in favour of the museum being seen as a museum of folk culture with the explicit purpose of collecting and exhibiting artefacts of the Swedish pre-industrial rural culture. A strong emphasis has been given to the dioramas and panoramas that Artur Hazelius installed in the museum (e.g. Nyström 1998). This was a popular exhibition technique that grew out of the great industrial exhibitions during the latter half of the 19th century. The idea was to reconstruct the "natural" environment of the objects. The dioramas in the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection contained house interiors, including exterior parts, from different provinces of Sweden. In order to create as lifelike a milieu as possible, wax mannequins dressed in folk costumes populated the houses. A panorama depicted a "Laplander scene": The autumn movement of reindeers. However, most of the objects in the museum were not presented in dioramas. They were gathered in glazed cases and cupboards; they hung on walls and from ceilings, always in overcrowded rooms (Hazelius 1900: 271ff).



Artur Hazelius 1833-1901

Among Artur Hazelius' contemporaries, this heterogeneity of the collections was questioned from time to time and influential critics, including Hans Hildebrand, director of the state-owned Historical Museum, argued that Artur Hazelius collected everything that he could get, without any consideration of the scientific and artistic value of the objects. He was, in short, a doubtful omnivore. Even worse, he collected objects that were also collected by other museums in Stockholm, showing no respect for the principles of museum organisation. They asked for his plans, but received no answer. In fact, a single and well-articulated official meaning of the museum was never established. On the contrary, the floating meanings formed a substantial part of the achievements of Nordiska museet in terms of rapidly growing collections and of public endorsement. Artur Hazelius' main strategy was to allow as many actors as possible to contribute to the museum. According to Artur Hazelius' rhetoric, the museum was built by the people and in line with the people's will, opinion and taste in terms of the items collected (Hillström 2006: 205). The museum could only be clearly distinguished from the Natural History Museum and one noticed that objects from countries outside of Europe were rare.

One of the many aspects of diversity was the indecisive geographical boundaries of the collections. From the very beginning Artur Hazelius collected objects from Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Greenland, Iceland, Estonia, Russia and Germany (and from other areas). This circumstance contributed to uncertainties among both admirers and critics of the museum. Through which lenses should the museum be viewed: Was it a museum representing Sweden and the union neighbour Norway or a Scandinavian (Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and perhaps Finnish) museum? Was it a museum of the old Swedish Empire? A museum of Northern Europe? Did Artur Hazelius collect on behalf of the Swedish/Scandinavian/Nordic people or on behalf of the Nation itself? (Hillström 2006: 219f). What kind of "nation" or "people" was assumed in the collecting and exhibiting practices?

Scandinavianism and Ortography

These questions could not be answered with certainty, neither then nor now. However, a clue can be found in the biography of Artur Hazelius. He was, like many of his generation, devoted to the idea of a strong affinity and community amongst the Scandinavian people (including Finland). He was a Scandinavist, similar to many intellectuals and artists of his generation. He participated in the student meetings in Uppsala in 1856, in Copenhagen in 1862 and in Kristiania in 1869, but his commitment to Scandinavian ideas can perhaps best be illustrated by his passionate engagement in an orthographical reform (Böök 1923: 45ff).



The Scandinavian students meeting in Uppsala 1856. Unknown painter.

In 1869 a Nordic orthographic meeting was arranged in Stockholm. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possibilities of harmonising the spelling of the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish languages. These efforts were based on the idea that spelling should be as phonetic as possible. Artur Hazelius played a major role at the meeting as he was responsible for reporting the suggestions and their consequences for the Swedish language. However, Johan Eric Rydqvist, a prominent member of the Swedish Academy and the leading linguist of the time, regarded the meeting as an indecent initiative and worked hard and successfully to refute Artur Hazelius, who was publicly scandalised (Böök 1923: 231ff). At the beginning of the 20th century the spelling reform Artur Hazelius had suggested was put into practice, but at that time he was no longer alive. Rydqvist's indignation exemplifies how Scandinavists both identified themselves and were identified as rebels to the "old generation" of academics and similar types (Nilsson 2000). In arranging the orthographic meeting any involvement by the Swedish Academy was carefully avoided. It has often been argued that, when the dreams of a united Scandinavian state finally lost all political relevance in 1871, the Scandinavian movement was transformed into a non-political but cultural movement (e.g. Hemstad 2008). Yet this distinction must be questioned as it presumes that "culture" cannot be "political". The many attacks on Artur Hazelius that originated from "the old" elite show that the Scandinavian movement was not conceived as innocent and harmless, although in terms of realist politics it might be difficult to understand what was actually on the agenda. It is also important to note that many

members of the Scandinavian student movement later constituted the new social and academic elite, as emphasised by Uffe Østergård:

The high political vision of political pan-Scandinavianism was superseded by cultural collaboration at the civil level. Interestingly, this activity was to a large extent undertaken by the self-same Scandinavianist student circles, whose members were now able to work together by virtue of the positions they held as public servants, teachers, and artists. Scientists, lawyers, engineers, educationalists, painters, and writers were all able to maintain connections at Nordic meetings and through Scandinavian journals. (Østergård 1997: 42)

Here one can add that Artur Hazelius was mobilising a well-established Scandinavian network when starting his new career as a collector and museum builder.

The fact that Hazelius named the museum the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection and later renamed it Nordiska museet has been perceived as testimony to a lifelong commitment to Scandinavianist ideals of a common Nordic history and identity. Hazelius himself never explained these names since he was generally quite reserved about his thoughts and plans.

The Various Meanings of “Nation”

The theory of a strong connection between museum-formation and nation-building is based on: a) an idea of what a nation is; and b) an idea of what a museum is. The museum is identified as being dependent on nationalist ideas. “No nationalism, no modern museums”. Ernest Gellner’s well-known definition states that nationalism is primarily “a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent” (Gellner 1983: 1). Hobsbawm stresses that the concept of “nation” was transformed towards the end of the 19th century (Hobsbawm 1990). Although many historians agree that the modern Western state system emerged as a result of the Thirty Years’ War, the nation-state, the modern territorial state, is generally a more recent invention – perhaps more so than we usually assume – as it did not attain mass support until the 20th century (Hettne et al. 1998). The mistake of Bohman and Sörlin is that they tend to equate “nation” with “state”. Despite the obvious fact of the two names of the museum: the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection and Nordiska museet, they are convinced that Nordiska museet encouraged a *Swedish* national self-consciousness and was “mapping” the territory of the Swedish nation-state. Viewed in this way, the museum appears to have been more dependent on nationalism, in Gellner’s sense, than was really the fact. The collecting and exhibiting practices were not guided by ideas of “mapping” a territory, nor did they stake out the borders of the Swedish state.

Hobsbawm observes that the concept of “nation” mostly did not have any territorial connotation in the 18th century. It signified variations in traditions and customs. Therefore, different “nations” could exist in the same territory (Hobsbawm 1990: 16f).

Much of that survived into the late 19th century. If one seeks a definition of “nation” in the first edition of the Swedish encyclopaedia *Nordisk familjebok*, published in 1887, the following is found.

Nation [lat. natio, people from nasci, to be born] People; unit of people with common descent, physique, mentality, fatherland, language, culture, religion, legal system, customs, forms of government and historical memories. *In the Swedish language* “nation” and “people” are usually used without distinction.²

The drifting of meaning of “nation” from “people” to “state” is underlined by an article on “nation” in the authoritative *Nationalencyklopedin*. “Nation” is explained there as a concept that in the Swedish language is used synonymously with state.³ The difference between the definitions of “nation” in the two encyclopaedias used here as empirical sources illustrates the historical transformations of the concept of nation, today meaning state or country.

The complex relationship between old and new linguistic usage is demonstrated in an article in *Nordisk familjebok* from 1887 that can be found under the heading of “*The principle of nationality*”. It was written by Magnus Höjer (1840–1910), a historian, geographer and liberal politician.⁴ Among other things, one learns that the principle of nationality refers to the basic idea of modern political life emanating from the French Revolution, according to which the state should be grounded on nationality. The principle of nationality was superseding older ideas of the legitimacy of the state, and was revealing its power in political movements seeking unification in Italy and Germany. Bismarck had earned his greatness by being a servant of the idea of nationality, Höjer noted. Pan-Scandinavianism is mentioned as an example of the impact of the principle of nationality in the North.

Nonetheless, Höjer warned against far-reaching applications of the principle of nationality since that would pose a risk for “freedom” and “cultural development”. The principle of nationality was applied excessively when a powerful people sought to assimilate and politically incorporate a minor people of “equal nationality” (sic!) that had as much of the necessary physical and spiritual capacity to live an independent political life and to develop a valuable culture. The author exemplified “abuses” of the principle of nationality by pointing to the ideals of Grossdeutschland (Greater Germany) and Pan-Slavism.

“Nation” and Collection

One of the promoters of the Nordic Orthographic Meeting in 1869 was Ludvig Kristensen Daa (1809–1877), a controversial politician, publicist and historian. Daa was an influential leader of the Scandinavian movement. He had a special interest in the history and culture of Finland, and argued that Finland should be seen as the fourth branch of the Scandinavian tree. Daa published a book about Swedish grammar in 1837 and a Swedish-Norwegian dictionary in 1839. Like Hazelius, he supported spelling reforms and museum development, although Daa

started before Hazelius as a director of the University Museum of Ethnography in Kristiania (Oslo) from 1862 until 1877. The museum was founded in 1856. When Daa became the director the museum was in a very poor condition and Daa spent a lot of time trying to introduce some orderliness into the museum's narrow rooms. He concluded that the objects should be arranged in accordance with geographical principles. The main reason for this, he emphasised, was the difficulties in separating items of different national origins from each other. Knowledge about an individual object was mostly limited to the country it had been collected from, for example India, Africa, North America or Russia. Even rarer it was possible to identify the nation which had used it (Nielsen 1907: 31).



Professor Ludvig Kristensen Daa.

Ludvig Kristensen Daa 1809–1877

Today, as already mentioned, “nation”, “state” and “country” often are used without any clear distinction. For Daa, “nation” and “country” were not overlapping concepts. For him, the “national” origin of an object was much more difficult to detect than the country of its origin; it was even tricky, he added, to distinguish between Norwegian and “Lappish” objects in terms of their “nationality” (Nielsen 1907: 31).

Daa worked hard to expand the small collection. He travelled to Amsterdam and London in order to buy or exchange objects with museums or antique dealers. He established contacts with consulates and encouraged Norwegian sailors to collect “exotic” items from distant places. He successfully searched for ethnographical objects (Scandinavian and others) in the University Museum of Northern Antiquities and the University Museum of Natural History. It was often the case that to enlarge the museum collection he received several gifts, sometimes larger private collections (Nielsen 1907: 23ff).

In an official letter to the Budget Committee of Stortinget in 1862, Daa drew at-

tention to the fact the museum of ethnography lacked objects belonging to the Norwegian people. The absence of such objects must seem very strange to a visitor from abroad, he argued (Nielsen 1907: 28). Daa tried to increase the collection of Norwegian objects and received help from a renowned collector from Hallingdal, Sander Røo, and from a clergyman in Hiterdal. In 1877 the Scandinavian (as Daa called it) collection comprised 200 accession numbers (Nielsen 1907: 77ff).

When Artur Hazelius began his new career as a collector and museum builder, he argued that the old folk culture was quickly disappearing as society was modernising. In addition, the remaining objects of folk culture were often being taken to foreign countries by collectors of antiques and antique dealers. Therefore, public attention to and the collecting of peasant objects could not wait. Soon, very soon, they would be gone, and irrevocably along with them knowledge about the peasants' habits and customs (Hazelius 1900: 270f). In Norway Daa articulated the same opinion. The Norwegian people ran the risk of losing their "treasures" of science. If nothing was done, knowledge about the Norwegian people would in the future have to be searched for in Hazelius' museum in Stockholm. Daa dreamed of a separate room for the Scandinavian collection in the museum, convinced that it would encourage the public appeal and growth of the collection (Nielsen 1907: 76f).

From Daa's perspective, an ethnographic museum included all cultures, all ethnoses – groups of peoples – or "nations". He considered Artur Hazelius' ambition to create a Scandinavian ethnographic collection reasonable enough as the Scandinavian people shared common roots. He also considered it most appropriate to exhibit "nations" from all over the world in the same museum (Nielsen 1907: 77).

As I have tried to illustrate, the connection between nation-building and museum-formation in 19th century Scandinavia is much more intricate than has often been assumed. Of course, nationalism was an important component of the museum's legitimacy in both the 19th century and the 20th century. It cannot be said that Nordiska museet was a museum exclusively in the service of Swedish nationalism, or that it chiefly contributed to the mapping of the Swedish nation-state, making it an "imagined community", in Anderson's terms (Anderson 1991). Most significant are the voices of the past that questioned the identity of the museum and hesitated about Artur Hazelius' purposes. Nordiska museet was not underpinned by a firm idea of contributing solely to the Swedish people's identification with the Swedish nation-state. The meaning of it was much more floating and the geographical borders of the collections were never defined. In Norway, Daa strived for a museum collecting and exhibiting all "nations" and human "races" in the world, hoping to develop ethnographical science. It is obvious from the examples of Daa and the Swedish encyclopaedia that "nation" primarily meant "people" and that the territorial aspects of "nation" were subordinated or not articulated at all. It is significant that in both Norway and Sweden museums of cultural history originated within the Scandinavian movement.⁵

The stress on the unity of Scandinavia as the relevant frame of reference for Hazelius' as well as Daa's museums was equally a matter of museum-building and nation-building. Contributing to Swedish and Norwegian patriotism was seen as fully compatible with a concept of culture, people and nation that privileged "Scandinavia" over its individual countries. Considering the changing meanings of "nation" from "people" to "state", it is indeed true that the pioneering cultural history museums were "nationalist". But it must be carefully observed that the nation involved was not exclusively Sweden or Norway but also encompassed Scandinavia.

Nationalising the Museum

The founder and director of Nordiska museet, Artur Hazelius, died in 1901. Soon after his death a committee was formed. It consisted of ten members, including Artur Hazelius' son Gunnar Hazelius (1874–1905). Before his death, Artur Hazelius expressed a strong desire for Gunnar Hazelius to succeed him as keeper of Nordiska museet and Skansen. Yet, contrary to Artur Hazelius' wish, in 1905 he was in fact succeeded by the archaeologist Bernhard Salin. In the meantime, Gunnar Hazelius was appointed the head of Skansen, and the art historian John Böttiger the head of Nordiska museet. Gunnar Hazelius and John Böttiger played major roles in the committee. So did the chairman Oscar Montelius, a renowned archaeologist and museum curator (Hillström 2006: 259ff).

The committee's purpose was to devise a programme for the internal design of the new museum building, including the layout of new exhibitions. The committee members disagreed in several important respects, including the meaning of the museum as a national institution. The committee's report was published in 1902 and strongly stressed Nordiska museet as a national Swedish institution. The report underlined that Nordiska museet was founded with the aim of strengthening national feelings and patriotic values and ascribed the original intention to create a museum for the Swedish people that would illustrate the people's history and development to Artur Hazelius.⁶

Gunnar Hazelius rejected this description as radically mistaken. Contrary to the report, he ascribed a twofold aim to Artur Hazelius: The museum was:

- (a) a Swedish patriotic educational institution addressing the Swedish people; and
- (b) a Nordic scientific institution.

The origin and growth of the museum, Gunnar Hazelius argued, proved that it was firmly rooted in Scandinavianism and a feeling of Nordic affinity and community. The Scandinavian people had a common cultural development. The Nordic people should build their future on this basis, along with their shared history and joint characteristics and experiences. From the perspective of Scandinavian cultural history and ethnology geo-political borders played a less relevant role. They did not constitute natural cultural borders between the Nordic people. According to

Gunnar Hazelius, this fact should be clearly articulated and easily observable in the museum. Most importantly, Swedish cultural history should be displayed in ways that emphasise the Nordic context. This included, for instance, that the rich collection of German guild items should be put on display alongside guild items from other Nordic countries – obviously, Gunnar Hazelius included parts of German cultural history within the boundaries of Nordic culture.⁷

Gunnar Hazelius accused certain committee members of distorting his father's vision. In opposition to the museum's original aim, they wanted to create a Swedish national museum with Scandinavian subdivisions. Oscar Montelius rejected Gunnar Hazelius' view. It was necessary to follow scientific principles of order and comprehensibility when arranging museum exhibitions. If not, the museum visitor would be confused. The visitor should always know in which country he or she was. Therefore, it was imperative that objects from different countries be set apart. Contrary to Gunnar Hazelius, Oscar Montelius argued that the Nordic dimension of the museum had already been subordinated to the Swedish dimension during Artur Hazelius' lifetime.

The conflict between Gunnar Hazelius and Oscar Montelius illustrates several essential themes, some being specific to the history and development of Nordiska museet and some holding general implications for the formation of modern cultural history museums in the early 20th century.

After the death of Artur Hazelius, the various meanings of the museum and its miscellaneous collections were regarded with suspicion by many museum professionals (Hillström 2006: 259ff). Oscar Montelius' demand for organisation and his heavy emphasis on the museum being a national Swedish museum can be understood as an effort to make the museum more homogeneous in terms of which people and nation it appealed to and represented. Stating that Nordiska museet was a museum for, above all, the Swedish people solved an important problem. Yet Gunnar Hazelius could not agree with such a simple solution. He defended the idea that Nordiska museet was a museum for the Nordic people. As a museum and scientific institution of cultural heritage it represented a Nordic nation, a Nordic people with floating geo-political boundaries. However, he agreed with Oscar Montelius that in its capacity of a public institution the museum primarily addressed the Swedish people.⁸

One reason for Oscar Montelius to stress the Swedishness of Nordiska museet was the crisis of the union between Sweden and Norway. From around 1890 this union had entered a period of crisis that ended with its dissolution in 1905. One main factor was the claim made by the Venstre (liberals in Stortinget, the Norwegian parliament) for separate foreign consuls. In May 1905 the Stortinget accepted the Norwegian government's proposal for Norwegian consuls. King Oscar II declared that he could not accept the decision and thereafter the ministry resigned. The Stortinget then agreed to a resolution stating that the Union had been dissolved since King Oscar II could not form a government – all in accordance with

a prearranged plan. In Sweden, the reactions to the Norwegian revolt were strong and preparations for war were made by both countries. Military forces were mobilised although it all ended peacefully. In September 1905 King Oscar II acknowledged Norway as an independent state. Prince Carl of Denmark ascended the Norwegian throne as Haakon VII in November of the same year.

Although neither Montelius nor any other committee members mentioned the union, it seems highly reasonable that Montelius tried to adjust the identity of Nordiska museet to the actual political situation. Being sensitive to the political currents of the time, not least the Norwegian claim for self-government and independence, he found it less wise to emphasise the museum's Nordic identity, especially when the big Norwegian collection in the museum was frequently deplored in Norway. An illustration of Hazelius' bad reputation that was prevalent within museum circles in Norway is the opinion the internationally renowned archaeologist Ingvald Undset (1853–1893) articulated in a programme to establish a National Norwegian Museum in Kristiania (Undset 1885). In the new museum (that was never actually realised) a Norwegian folk museum was to be installed and organised as a separate department with its own supervisor. Undset presented the organisation of Dansk Folkemuseum in the National Museum of Copenhagen as a model. Nordiska museet was *not* to be imitated, he warned. The museum contained too many heterogeneous collections and, even worse, nothing in the museum's programme stopped Hazelius from swallowing up all the museums and collections in Scandinavia.

The efforts to “nationalise” Nordiska museet were, in view of the crisis and dissolution of the union in 1905, a step of rational adaption to the political realities. Montelius' argument was quite understandably *not* a political one but one of museum orderliness – separating collections by country rather than by cultural nation. The “new” Nordiska museet was opened to the public in 1907. According to Montelius' main principle of orderliness, all items were exhibited within a geographical framework consisting of provinces and countries. However, this was the only consequence of the endeavours to nationalise the museum. The rich Norwegian collection was exhibited in a conspicuous way and even the guild objects that had been collected in Germany were put on display (Hillström 2006).

A National Museum of Folk Culture in Norway

Parallel to the political forces that contributed to the “nationalisation” of Nordiska museet after Hazelius' death were changes in the idea of ethnography and its application in museum practices in Norway.

When Daa died in 1877 he was succeeded by Yngvar Nielsen (1843–1916). Nielsen was a historian, publicist and politician and became a professor of geography in 1890. Nielsen played a major role in Høyre, the conservative party. He was a strong supporter of the union between Norway and Sweden, and also an

important advisor in Norway to the Swedish-Norwegian king Oscar II. Like Daa, he was particularly inspired by Scandinavianism and had participated in several student meetings (Nielsen 1912). Many of his Swedish friends were also the most important allies of Artur Hazelius.



Yngvar Nielsen 1843–1916

His vision for the museum differed from Daa's but in the spirit of Daa he found it most important to enhance the Scandinavian collection, although he resisted the name. Nielsen wanted to establish a Norwegian folk museum separate from the Ethnographic Museum and stated that the idea to include all groups of people in a single museum was entirely wrong and old-fashioned. The overall aim of an ethnographic museum was to represent the culture of "primitive" people, not European people and culture. Objects that illustrated European civilisation must be sorted out from ethnographical museums, Nielsen emphasised, although he failed to undertake such a reform in his own museum (Nielsen 1907: 77). Nielsen regarded the enriching of the Norwegian collection as his assignment. Parallel to Artur Hazelius, Nielsen told a revealing story of the source of his obligation to rescue what was left of old-time peasant objects. Similar to Hazelius (and Paulus) the conversion took place during a journey. Hazelius was travelling in Dalarna; Nielsen through the fjords (Hazelius 1900: 270; Nielsen 1881: 153). Through these stories, both Hazelius and Nielsen dramatised themselves as the chosen ones for collecting with the noblest aims. They should not be mistaken for antique dealers or private collectors – their potent rivals in the collecting field.

Nielsen travelled through Norway during the summers of 1878, 1879 and 1880. He collected costumes, jewellery, household utensils and other objects that could illuminate the oldest cultural development of Norway. He mainly paid for these

journeys himself. He wrote letters to *Morgenbladet*, eager to draw the reader's attention to his important work. Nielsen's vision was to establish a museum similar to and in competition with Nordiska museet and he hoped to reduce the lead of Artur Hazelius. It was, Nielsen wrote, both a national and scientific programme. However, Nielsen's dream was left unfulfilled. In 1881 the Stortinget refused to give him a supplementary grant to develop the Norwegian collection. Nielsen added this rejection to the many critical voices that were heard at the Stortinget and in the newspapers about the value of a national Norwegian collection (Nielsen 1907: 78ff). Nielsen continued to look for new funding. During the spring of 1881 he gave five public lectures about Norwegian cultural history, aiming to inspire the audiences to support the idea of a state-owned national Norwegian museum. The lectures were later published in a book. All the resulting income was donated to the Ethnographic Museum (Nielsen 1881). However, it seems that after this Nielsen lost his fervour and turned to other duties within the museum.

From the outset the University Museum of Ethnography was a destitute museum installed in small and dark rooms with no heating during winter. The situation was much the same as for the state-owned Historical Museum in Stockholm. Money was a constant problem. Nielsen's efforts to find new financial resources are illustrative of the conditions of many state-owned museums in Scandinavia during the 19th century. One can also observe that the Stortinget was as hesitant as the Swedish government to give more than minor financial support to museums (Hillström 2006).

When Nielsen wrote the history of the University Museum of Ethnography in 1907 he tried to distinguish between his own activities and aims and those of Daa. Replacing "Scandinavian" with "Norwegian" is one tendency. Another one is that he blamed Daa for not being conscious of the need to separate "primitive" culture from the culture of European civilisation. A third tendency was that Nielsen called special attention to those items in the museum collected by Daa that Nielsen emphasised had no place at all in an ethnographic museum. He mentioned the following:

half of a Russian time-bomb used in the Crimean War; a model of the lighthouse in Eddystone; a one-dollar bill, a ten-dollar bill, part of a bomb and a lead bullet from Sebastopol; a piece of pitcoal from Spitsbergen; and the hydrogen balloon "La ville d'Orleans". The latter was sent from Paris but lost its course and ended up in Telemark. When the two French passengers eventually arrived in Kristiania they were celebrated as heroes. The balloon, obviously, was found and exhibited in the Ethnographic Museum (today it is in the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology). (Nielsen 1907: 32–53).

Why did Nielsen draw the reader's attention to items he thought had no place in the collections? To amuse the reader with the stupidities of Daa? The late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century was a period of museum-formation. This process was characterised by shifting opinions and conflicts about the most accurate principles of museum regulation. The late 19th century and beginning of

the 20th century was a period, in short, of boundary work. In this process, many of the earlier museum builders, like Hazelius and Daa, were accused by subsequent museum curators of accumulating curiosities, creating some kind of late Wunderkammern, rather than scientifically ordered and modern museums (Hillström 2006: 259ff). In the 19th century most cultural history museums, including museums of art and industrial art, comprised heterogeneous collections (The South Kensington Museum, later renamed the Victoria & Albert Museum is a very good example; see Burton 1999). Nielsen's hopes and strivings for a separate Norwegian folk culture museum from the Ethnographic Museum, characterising his programme as both "national" and "scientific", visibly resemble the conflicts that followed Artur Hazelius' death. One central aspect of this was the change of reference to the concept of ethnography.

The shift of meanings ascribed to "ethnography" can be illustrated by two articles in the first and second editions of *Nordisk familjebok*, the Swedish encyclopaedia.

The first article was published in 1881 and written by the anatomist and pathologist Gustaf von Düben. He wrote: Ethnography is the description of man as he appears in social groups as people. Ethnography refers to both physical and mental character, environmental adjustment and relations between people, habits, customs, tools etc. The concepts of ethnography and ethnology are not demarcated, and run together with the concept of anthropology. Collections of tools, household utensils, weapons, costumes etc. belonging to different people are named museums of ethnography. As examples, he mentioned Nordiska museet, and the museums of ethnography in Stockholm and Copenhagen.⁹

The author of the article "Ethnography" in the second edition of *Nordisk familjebok*, Edgar Reuterskiöld, remarked that "formerly" the concepts of "ethnography" and "anthropology" were not distinguished. "Nowadays", he added, anthropology refers to the study of the physical aspects of man's life, whereas "ethnography" refers to the cultural aspects. Anthropology observes man as a specimen of the Homo family, while ethnography regards him as a member of a certain group of people. "At the present time" ethnography is used in a more restricted sense as a descriptive science, while ethnology is a comparative science. The purpose of ethnography is to describe the cultural feature of each people. Ethnography is "today" commonly limited to the study of "primitive people". The corresponding study of the culture of civilised people is called cultural history.¹⁰

The following article is about ethnographic museums. The author was Erland Nordenskiöld, who became director of the ethnographic division of the Göteborg Museum in 1913. Nordenskiöld wrote that ethnographical museums were commonly associated with museums that collected objects from countries outside Europe. However, this assumption was wrong, he argued. Several European museums, including the most famous Nordiska museet, collected objects of "domestic" ethnography.¹¹

The inconsistencies between the two articles in the second edition of *Nordisk familjebok* are noteworthy. The first author is very clear on the point that “ethnography” refers to the study of “primitive” people. Nordenskiöld, on the other hand, insisted that Nordiska museet was an ethnographic museum. If he had followed the opinion expressed by the first author, he would have characterised Nordiska museet as a museum of cultural history. Obviously, the “new” meaning of ethnography had not been fully established.

The replacing of “Scandinavian” with “Norwegian”, that in Nielsen’s terms was part of the “national” programme, indicates that “Scandinavianism” was losing ground in Norway. After the 1860s the Union lost much of its political support in Norway and liberal politics were making progress. In 1884 parliamentarism was adopted and the liberal government of Johan Sverdrup was installed. The two opposite groups established official political parties in 1884: Venstre (Left) for the liberals who wanted to break up the union, and Høyre (Right) for conservatives who wanted to hold on to a Union of two equal states. Although Nielsen might have wanted to retain the idea of a Scandinavian collection (he travelled to Finland in order to enhance the number of Finnish objects in the museum in 1880), this was not wise from the perspective of gaining the desired political support for creating a national Norwegian folk museum. In this Nielsen showed the same political realism as Oscar Montelius. In his memoirs, Nielsen complained that his idea had been largely rejected by the Stortinget on the basis that as a conservative politician he was not regarded as a trustworthy nationalist by the liberals (Nielsen 1912).

New Times: Norsk Folkemuseum

The idea of a national museum of the Norwegian people was realised 1894. The weakened political support for the Swedish-Norwegian union constitutes an important background to the success of the new museum project. Indeed, in the biography *Hans Aall – mannen, visionen og verket* (1994) Tonte Hegard identifies the emblem of the new museum from 1895, representing the Norwegian heraldic lion as a proclamation of Norwegian independence in the union politics.

Parallel to Nordiska museet, Norsk Folkemuseum was a private initiative by Hans Aall and its establishment was independent of the Norwegian state. Similar to Artur Hazelius and Yngvar Nielsen, Aall told an “origin story” of how, during a journey to Hallingdal, Numedal and Telemarken, he was overwhelmed by a strong conviction that the old peasant culture was being threatened by modernisation, and that it was necessary to rescue *everything* that was left of an old, disappearing culture (Hegard 1994: 38).

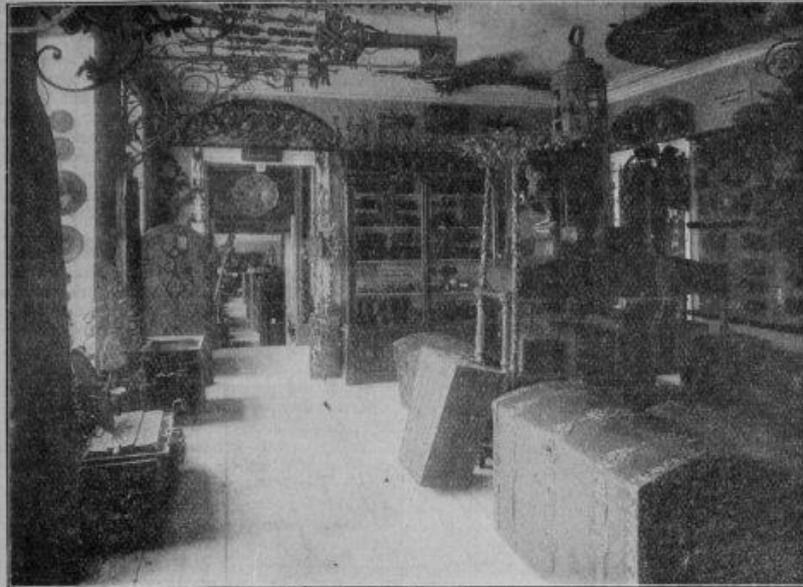


Fig. 1. Ett museirum, ordnadtt efter numera föråldrade principer. (Från Nordiska museets första, trånga lokaler vid Drottninggatan i Stockholm.)

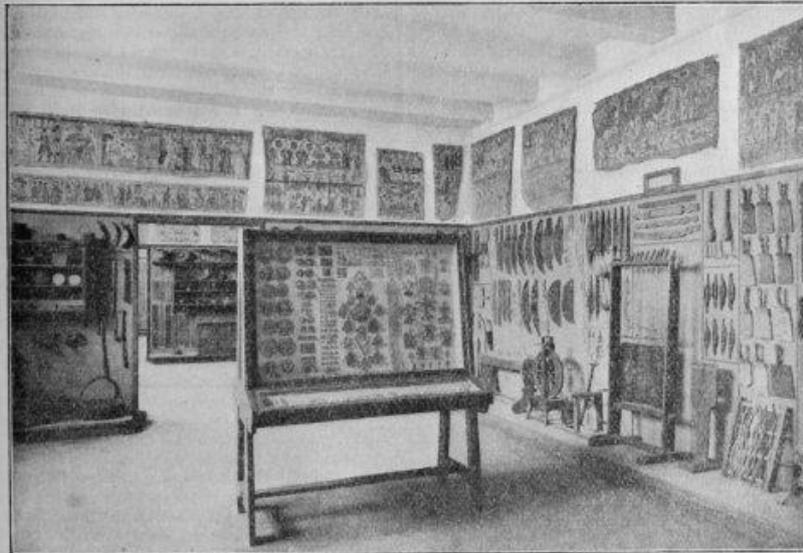


Fig. 2. Ett välordnadtt museirum. (Från Nordiska museets nuv. skånska allmogefdelning; se sp. 1424.)

Illustration of disorder and order in museums. The example is Nordiska museet.
(*Nordisk familjebok*, Stockholm 1913).

Aall was born in 1869. He was a three-year-old boy when Artur Hazelius first presented his vision of a permanent exhibition of peasant costumes. Aall died in 1946; Hazelius in 1901. In comparing Nordiska museet with Norsk Folkemuseum, one must pay careful attention to both the relevance of the union crisis and the fact that Aall and Hazelius belonged to different museum generations. When Aall started his career as a museum builder the museum profession was already gradually emerging, manifested among other things by the emphasis on the proper ex-

hibiting order of things and the need to advance science through collections. Contrary to Hazelius then, Aall wrote museum manuals and paid significant attention to professional tools like standardised catalogues. Although museums were being built in much the same ways, not least through gifts of different kinds that resulted in heterogeneous collections, like many of his generation Aall marked a distance towards Hazelius' museum projects. When Nordiska museet became the target of professional critique, Aall was one of the critics. However, it is important to note that, although Norsk Folkemuseum consisted of heterogeneous collections, the Norwegian framework was kept. In contrast, when Nordiska museet in Stockholm was nationalised according to Montelius' principle of "countries apart" it was obviously still a museum without distinct geographical borders.

The Scandinavian movement represented a nationalism that, in retrospect, has been described as a romantic illusion of a Nordic community upheld by naive and arrack-loving students. However, in its historical context, Scandinavianism was an important cultural and political force that is difficult to grasp for subsequent historians working in the context of 20th century concepts of the "nation". It was possible for Hazelius to mobilise the rhetoric of Swedishness and Swedish patriotism within a framework of Scandinavianist nationalism.

A Real Museum of Folk Culture

However, the Scandinavianist framing of Hazelius' museum was losing terrain, both politically and professionally. It was neither comparable with the disruption of the union between Norway and Sweden, nor with a new generation of museum ideology that then, in the 20th century, strongly connected cultural history museums with "nations" in the modern sense. From the early 20th century the 20th century concept of "nation" also became increasingly relevant in actual museum practice.

The actuality of these questions in early 20th century museum policy can be further illustrated by a presidential address to the Museum Association at a meeting in Maidstone in 1909.¹² The president was Henry Balfour (1863–1939). He was an anthropologist and the first curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. In his talk he complained about the lack of interest in Britain in national culture, reflected in particular in the *absence* of a splendid collection of national artifacts. In the British Museum, Balfour argued in his address, the ethnology of most regions around the world was represented; however, there was a "reticence in dealing with our own nation which is especially noteworthy in view of the name which is applied to this great institution". Whereas the pre- and proto-historic antiquities of Great Britain were represented by rich series in the museum,

[...] the student who wishes to form a more or less complete picture of the mediaeval and post-mediaeval life of these islands in particular, and he who would investigate the gradual development of our later culture and the survivals of early condi-

tions in recent times will be compelled for the most part to seek his material for study far and wide and often in vain. (Balfour 1909: 253)

“What is required is a National Folk Museum, dealing exclusively and exhaustively with the history of culture of the British Nation within the historic period, and illustrating the growth of ideas and indigenous characteristics”, Balfour underlined (1909: 254). National Folk Museums could be found in most continental cities: Berlin, Budapest, Sarajevo, Moscow, Paris, Helsingfors, Copenhagen, Bergen, Christiania and Stockholm, with all of them expressing national pride. These folk museums, Balfour continued, contained objects of times long past as well as “characteristic features of the more recent culture and social economy of the peasantry, the backbone of every nation” (Balfour 1909: 254). The most important of these folk museums was, according to Balfour, Nordiska museet in Stockholm that afforded “a model worthy of imitation”. In Nordiska museet, it “may now be studied in detail the domestic and social economy, arts, industries, and amusements, ceremonies, beliefs and superstitions of the Swedish people and to a lesser extent of the other Scandinavian peoples” (Balfour 1909: 255).

Although “a model worthy of imitation”, Balfour stressed that a national museum, contrary to Nordiska museet, “should be devoted exclusively to national products and objects of national use”. If not, there was a risk that the national character of the museum would be obscured:

The exotic specimens, at first added to the collection to give additional interest and significance to the indigenous objects for which the museum was primarily designed, would be liable soon to outnumber and overwhelm them, and would rapidly obscure the original national character of the collection and tend to convert or pervert it into a museum of comparative technology. (Balfour 1909: 256)

It was wiser, Balfour stressed, to keep the two ideas separate. A national museum should be restricted exclusively to national objects. The function of dealing with “the evolution and geographical distribution of human arts and appliances of the wider basis of a broad comparative system” should be left to museums of comparative technology (Balfour 1909: 256). In defining “national objects” Balfour’s point of departure was obviously the geo-political borders of Great Britain. A national museum was a museum for and of the British people, collecting and exhibiting British cultural history. According to Balfour, the national museum should display the development of British culture in a chronological series “depicting the general life and habits of the people at successive periods” (Balfour 1909: 256). It should illustrate the environmental effects on physique, culture and national characteristics but also illuminate local peculiarities. The national museum ought to be completed by an open-air exhibition and by a permanent centre for performances of folk dances, songs and old-time ceremonies.

Balfour’s view reveals that the nationalising force in cultural history museums developed around the turn of the century. Nation, people and culture were finally united in terms of the territorial domain of the political state.

Conclusions

One important change in the museum landscape of late 19th century Europe was the rise of the museum of domestic (in contrast to exotic) folk culture. It was here that the Scandinavian countries played a pioneering role. Many museum historians have pinpointed nationalism as the basic spiritual force behind the rise of major institutions like Nordiska Museet in Sweden and Norsk Folkemuseum in Norway. This paper argues that, while in a sense this is true, it misses the vital point that Nordiska Museet and the unsuccessful predecessor of Norsk Folkemuseum, the University Museum of Ethnography in Oslo, collected and displayed a Scandinavian “folk”. The museums were certainly Swedish and Norwegian institutions of popular education and learning but their “folk” was a Scandinavian one in the “old” sense of the concept of nation as a cultural community transcending politically defined territories. They both conceived themselves as ethnographic museums at a time when ethnography meant the study of folk culture generally. The original name of Nordiska Museet was the Scandinavian Ethnographic Museum. Around the turn of the century in 1900 the concept of ethnography came to designate only the cultures of primitive peoples. At the same time, the longstanding drifting of meaning of the concept of “nation” – from “people” to “state” – was coming to an end.

Strongly contributing to the idea of Scandinavian folk culture museums in Sweden and Norway was Scandinavianism and the union between Sweden and Norway, established in 1814. Artur Hazelius, the successful founder of Nordiska Museet, Ludvig Kristensen Daa and Yngvar Nielsen, directors of the University Museum of Ethnography, were all active in the Scandinavian movement. After about 1870 “old-school” Scandinavian nationalism started losing ground to “new-school” territorial nationalism. From about 1890 the union between Sweden and Norway was hastening towards its dissolution in 1905. As a consequence, the folk culture museum movement in Norway changed paths into Hans Aall’s Norsk Folkemuseum, founded in 1894, and pressures mounted to “nationalise” Nordiska Museet in Sweden, i.e. to turn it into a proper *Swedish* museum of cultural history.

In this nationalising process of Nordiska Museet the political downfall of Scandinavianism ran parallel to changes in ideology of the emerging museum profession. The politically convenient “de-Scandinavianisation” of Nordiska Museet after Hazelius’ death in 1901 was therefore argued in terms of scientific and museological prudence. Through the combined forces of conceptual changes to “nation”, the downfall of Scandinavianism and the rise of a museum profession Nordiska Museet transformed into a Swedish National Cultural History Museum with a big division to cover neighbouring countries.

There are many connections between nationalism, nation-building and museum development in Europe in the 19th century. Yet the formation of nation-states and the spiritual ascent of political nationalism in the 19th century may as a theory of the driving forces of museum-building be over-emphasised with regard to the ma-

for novelty of the museum branch, the folk culture museum. As exemplified by the development of folk culture museums in Sweden and Norway adapting collections to nation-state borders was not a significant 19th century trait. It only developed at the very end of the century, when the original concept of “nation” as people and culture, in this case Scandinavia, was gradually being subordinated to the concept of “nation” as state and political territory.

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Notes

- 1 The capacity of the idea of a Nordic cultural community to negotiate national tensions is the main subject of the research project *National History – Nordic Culture: Negotiating identity in the museums* that is also examined in Aronsson (2008).
- 2 “Nation” in *Nordisk familjebok*, first edition, Vol. 11, 1887, p. 837. Unsigned.
- 3 “Nation” in *Nationalencyklopedin*, www.ne.se. Signed by Rune Johansson.
- 4 “Nationalitetsprincip” in *Nordisk familjebok*, first edition, Vol. 11, 1887, pp. 842-843. Signed by Magnus Höjer.
- 5 The argument could easily be expanded to Denmark for the same period. See Aronsson 2008. For contemporary attempts to revitalise a Nordic dimension, see the contributions by Stuart Burch and Egle Rindzeviciute in this volume.
- 6 Handlingar rörande installationen i Nordiska museets byggnad, bilagda nämndens protokoll af den 24 april och 6 maj 1902 (Stockholm 1902).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 For a more comprehensive account of these conflicts and more specific information about relevant sources, see Hillström (2006), Chapter 9.
- 9 “Etnografi” in *Nordisk familjebok*, first edition, Vol. 4, 1881, pp. 777-778. Signed by Gustaf von Düben.
- 10 “Etnografi” in *Nordisk familjebok*, second edition, Vol. 7, 1907, pp. 996-997. Signed by Edgar Reuterskiöld.
- 11 “Etnografiska museer” in *Nordisk familjebok*, second edition, Vol. 7, 1907, p. 997. Signed by Erland Nordenskiöld.
- 12 Henry Balfour, “Presidential Address to the Museums Association, Maidstone Meeting, July 13, 1909”, *The Museums Journal* 9 (July 1909), 5-18. Reprinted in *Museums Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Bettina Messias Carbonell (ed.), 2004, pp. 252-259.

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