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***Lost worlds? Museum Heritage in a Cultural Economy.***

*By:*

Lizette Gradén

*The Royal Armoury, Skokloster Castle with the Hallwyl Museum*

*E-mail: lizette.graden@lsh.se*

Tom O'Dell

Lund University.

E-mail: Thomas.O\_dell@kultur.lu.se

*Abstract:*

Although more museums are created than ever before, too little attention has been paid to the concrete ways in which cultural processes of commoditization affect heritage production. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, this article focuses on The Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle, and Skokloster Castle outside of Stockholm to explore how these institutions negotiate public participation, engage new audiences, and adapt their operations to meet the demands of the cultural economy they operate in. Drawing on critical cultural theory, the article illuminates the ways in which different cultural and economic contexts affect museums' potential to develop, expand, and meet their objectives.

**Keywords:**

Cultural Economy, Museums, Collections, Diversity, Heritage, Local community and volunteers

**AUTHOR PRESENTATION**

**Tom O'Dell**, Professor of Ethnology, Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences, Lund University, Sweden. O'Dell's research over the past two decades has focused primarily on

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the manner in which cultural and economic processes are currently, and have historically, been entangled in one another. Among his previous publications are *Culture Unbound: Americanization and Everyday Life in Sweden* (Nordic Academic Press, 1997), *Experiencescapes: Tourism, Culture, and Economy* (Copenhagen Business School Press, 2005, together with Peter Billing), and *Spas and the Cultural Economy of Hospitality, Magic and the Senses* (Nordic Academic Press, 2012).

**Lizette Gradén**, Head of Collections at The Royal Armory and Skokloster Castle with the Hallwyl Museum, Stockholm and Affiliate Associate Professor at the Scandinavian Department at University of Washington, Seattle. Graden's research includes material culture, ritual, and performance in the wake of Nordic migration to the US. Her recent publications are *FashionNorth: Folk costume as Performance of Genealogy and Place in Journal of Folklore Research* (2014) and *Performing Nordic Heritage: Everyday life and Institutional Culture* (Ashgate 2013) co-edited with Aronsson. She is an active member of the research network for museums in Stockholm, serves on the SASS Advisory Board, and co-chairs the SIEF working group Museums and Material Culture.

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In the U.S. alone museums attract more than 850 million people annually to over 17,500 museums.<sup>1</sup> That's more than the number of people who attend all professional athletic games per year (AAM website May 2014). At the center of these museums are collections formed over time by a variety of strongly invested stakeholders, which include but are not limited to individual collectors, families, groups, regions and state governments. These collections have their own cultural heritage. They bear witness to the past of which they are remnants, and relate to the moment when the objects were given second life as institutionalized heritage and the process through which they are preserved and utilized. (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 2004). In so doing, museum collections speak implicitly of the challenges and costs of preserving heritage. Museums themselves rarely call attention to the economic preconditions that both enable and constrain their cultural activities, but museum collections inevitably tell stories of their cultural and economic backgrounds to the extent that they speak of place, curating, conservation, technical innovation, and the potential of their physical facilities to be innovatively used in their daily operations.

Although more Museums are created than ever before, less attention has been paid to the concrete ways in which cultural heritage is affected by the processes and conditions of commoditization. Discussions of the cultural economy often focus upon the movement of signs, media images, fashion and their entanglement in economic processes,<sup>2</sup> but museums and the materiality of their facilities and collections are noticeably missing from this

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literature. The tensions between collections, facilities and resources take different shapes and are managed in different ways by different types of museums, and in different countries. Thus they illuminate the ways public cultures and histories are produced through museums and ongoing transformation of museum practice.

This article focuses on The Nordic Heritage Museum (NHM) in Seattle, and Skokloster Castle outside of Stockholm to explore the manner in which culture and economic processes are entangled in one another in North America and Europe. The material used for this specific article include participant observations and interviews conducted while doing fieldwork in 2014 and 2015 as well as official documents such as annual reports and websites.

The two museums this article focuses upon contain very different collections, but both are primarily organized around the preservation and conservation of Northern European cultural heritage. Both museums were also originally constructed to function as transnational gathering points for their founders, those who emigrated from Norden to the United States over the past half century in the case of NHM, and the diasporic Wrangel kin of the 17th century in the case of Skokloster. But the museums face very different challenges as they move forward. The NHM is a privately owned and community initiated museum, struggling to adjust to the shifting trends of the American market of cultural heritage and “edutainment” by striving to attract a broader public, that reaches beyond the Nordic community. This occurs as it plans to move from a schoolhouse (built in 1907) to an entirely new purpose built facility. In contrast, Skokloster is a State owned, rurally located museum in which the castle housing the collection is inseparable from the collection itself - a reality that has significant consequences for the museum as it strives to ever adjust to the neo-liberal economic demands the government places upon museums state run museums in Sweden. While focusing on these two museums this article argues for the need for museum studies to more thoroughly analyze the culture/economy nexus.

## **A Cultural Economy Perspective for Cultural Institutions**

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Museums are institutions that have been richly studied and theorized in cultural terms. The research in this field has addressed a broad series of highly important questions concerning such issues as: museums and contestations of cultural heritage; the cultural processes behind the marginalization of cultural identities in institutions of collective memory; the gendering of museum collection; and the processes through which exhibitions and displays of material culture can provide agency to specific ethnic groups and/or local communities, etc. (see for example, Alzén & Hillström 1999; Aronsson & Meurling 2005; Conn 2010; Forsberg & Sennefeldt 2014; Karp & Lavine 1991; Karp et al 2007, Kirshenblatt Gimblett 1998; Knell 2007; Knell 2011; Macdonald & Fyfe 1996). Such a list of the significant issues addressed in the field of museum studies could be made quite long. However, a central problem with this work is that while these types of processes are inevitably constrained and affected by the economic circumstances in which they develop, the question of how they have been affected by their entanglement in economic and cultural processes has been neglected.<sup>3</sup> The ability to broadly correct this bias in the literature is beyond the scope of this article, but by working to develop theoretical perspectives on the cultural economy and its effects on the manner in which museums utilize their collections, our aim is to stimulate further scholarly interest in entanglement of cultural and economic processes in one another in the world of museums.<sup>4</sup>

There is here a need to better understand museums in a context which appreciates the markets which they operate in as “hybrid forum” (Callon et al. 2002) that are the basis of their daily activities. A need to move in this direction is underpinned by the fact that increasingly museums are working in hybridized forms of the cultural economy that rely on both state funding as well as privatized forms of income generation (Schuster 1998), both of which are increasingly punctuated by an exchange economy – bordering at times on a form of gift exchange (Mauss 1967) – of shared services, facilities, and collections. In short, there are a wide range of sources and forms of income that support operations such as accession and deaccession of collections, volunteer services, philanthropy, material and immaterial donations, collaborations between museums, the production and “selling” of touring exhibitions, local community engagement, and forms of corporate sponsorship.

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### **Nordic Heritage: A View from Seattle**

The Nordic Heritage Museum, with its current lease expiring in 2017, is in the process of moving from an old school building to a new facility. At present, the Nordic Heritage Museum is located in a sleepy Ballard residential neighborhood in Seattle. This is an area of the Pacific Northwest with a particularly dense population of Nordic immigrants and their descendants as well as current expats. Indeed after Oslo, Ballard is home to a number of Nordic traditions, including the world's second largest celebration of the 17th of May, The National Day of Norway. The museum itself was founded in 1980 by emigrants from the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) who sought a platform to present and highlight their cultural heritage and emigrant experience. Phrased in the Museum's own words:

The Nordic Heritage Museum shares Nordic culture with people of all ages and backgrounds by exhibiting art and objects, preserving collections, providing educational and cultural experiences, and *servicing as a community gathering place.* (<https://www.nordicmuseum.org> authors' emphasis, read May 19, 2015)

The heart of the Nordic Heritage Museum's collection represents the everyday practice and accomplishments of a large and influential immigrant community. The core collection of over 65,000 items (objects, photos and archives) represents the material culture brought to Seattle or produced there by Nordic immigrants in the period from 1840 to 1960, but it also includes more recent objects from descendants of these immigrants (such as souvenirs from trips back to the old country, and contemporary design such as Marimekko fabrics, Orrefors glass). Although the majority of the objects have Pacific Northwest provenance, and of which many artifacts were brought to this country from overseas, the collection includes items from the Midwest and the East Coast as well. The character of the collection reflects the secondary migration pattern when many Nordics moved from the Midwest to the West coast in the 1920s, and is particularly strong in folk art and costumes.

The artifacts exhibited in the museum today have been donated to the collection by local supporters, volunteers and founders. The first floor of the three story museum holds a core

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exhibition – the Dream of America – built by the Moesgard Museum in Denmark in the early 1980s. This exhibition was brought to NHM in 1986 and subsequently extensively refashioned by volunteers in Seattle to better fit their interpretation of their local identity. The exhibition features many of the possessions the immigrants brought with them to the United States. The core exhibition continues on the second floor, focusing on the fishing and logging industry, which the immigrants became part of in the Pacific Northwest. Indeed these are occupational categories of Nordic immigrants who played and still play a significant role in contributing finances as well as their own time to the museum. The floor where this exhibition exists also hosts three galleries for temporary exhibitions. At times these exhibitions feature the work of local artists that in one way or another are related to aspects of Nordic identity and culture, at other times, temporary exhibitions are arranged collaboratively with other Scandinavian museums in the United States and put on tour. The entire third floor has been made available to émigrés of the Nordic countries to organize and present their own interpretation of their respective cultural heritages in consultation and collaboration with the museum's curatorial department. The content, origins, and compositions of the Nordic's exhibitions have traditionally worked to interweave aspects of Nordic identity and heritage, with perceptions of local identity, and community spirit.

Indeed these are the qualities that the museum frames in its appeal to potential visitors:

Visit a place where history comes alive and contemporary artists and community activities are celebrated with vibrant exhibits and events. Dedicated to collecting, preserving, and educating since its founding in 1980, the Nordic Heritage Museum is the only museum in the United States to honor the legacy of immigrants from the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. (<https://www.nordicmuseum.org>, read May 19, 2015).

Originally, as Stephen Weil has argued, museums were designed to care for and to showcase their collections and artifacts they housed, (2002:30), however in the post war era, museums have shifted their emphasis from a focus on artifact to a focus on visitors. As a result they have become meeting places for diverse constituencies, interests, goals, and perspectives. NHM was born of this need and has, since its opening in 1980 continued to function as not only a place in which artefacts are collected, preserved and exhibited, but just as importantly,

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as a place in which members of the Nordic community in Seattle have gathered and performed Nordic identity.

However, in addition to functioning as meeting places, museums have even been called cathedrals for culture, articulating social and material hierarchies and regimes of values. (Myers 2001:3-64, Appadurai 1986:3-63). Nonetheless, their collections are often referred to as either treasures or scrapheaps, heritage resources or financial ulcerations, places of community building or places of segregation. The tension at play here, as Fred Myers points out, lies in the degree to which the publics a museum serves shape the social value of a museum. One ambition of modern national museums in the 19th century Europe, for example, was originally to teach the public a particular worldview, that was itself tied to a specific building of monumental size and symbolic significance (Bennett 1992, Hooper-Greenhill 1992). Increasingly, however, most forms of museums have found themselves in need of rethinking their role in society. Besides offering core and temporary exhibitions, digitized collections,<sup>5</sup> and a slew of programs and events, museums today are also used and expected to be available as backdrops for weddings, auctions, fairs, and other activities that generate rental income to support operations. To be relevant museums find themselves under pressure to transition from being places where patrons visit occasionally, to becoming flexible institutions and integrated partners in the surrounding local community.

Up to this point in time, the Nordic Heritage has done this by arranging affordable events that speak to their members in the local community such as their Viking Day Festival, and the Christmas celebration ('Yulefest'), as well as temporary exhibitions such as a photo exhibition of disappearing Scandinavian mileus in the Ballard area. All of these have been appreciated by the museum's core members, but have done little to attract new audiences beyond this base. And when the museum has striven to create exhibitions aimed to even attract new audiences (in addition to its core members) the stakes of have been high and uneven: an exhibition called *Bad art? Birch Board Pictures from Sweden*, attracted large numbers of visitors, while another on the designer Josef Frank and the company Svenskt Tenn, attracted almost none.



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As the role of museums is changing dramatically, it may be the institution's life as heritage that is at stake. It is well known that material objects have cultural biographies, in the sense that the significance attached to any particular object shifts as that object moves between contexts and spheres of daily life, accumulating its own distinct history (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). This processual perspective is useful when analyzing things, whose careers (as commodities) formally come to an end when they are accessioned into a museum collection, and their biographies enters a new phase as heritage. (Graden 2010a, 2010b & 2013). Objects enter a new phase of being in which their individual biographies leave a commodity exchange phase and become an integrated aspect of the collection they are placed. Indeed, in some cases, such as the castle Skokloster, they become part of, and inseparable from the cultural resonance emanating from the physical architecture of the museum itself. In what follows, we want to lift our analytical gaze a bit and spend less time on the role single objects may play in exhibitions, loans, or storage, and instead focus on the *challenges collections face* as museums go from being cathedrals to destinations. In order to do this, we turn to Skokloster Castle, and the context of its collection which is very different than that encountered by the Nordic Heritage Museum.

### **Skokloster: When the Collection and Museum Building are Inseparable**

Skokloster Castle is considered one of the great castles of Baroque Europe which was built between 1654 and 1676, as a monument to the Swedish Age of Greatness – a period in the middle of the seventeenth century when Sweden expanded to become one of the major powers in Europe. The castle is situated on the Sko peninsula, which reaches into Lake Malaren, strategically placed (at the time of its building) at the fairway between Stockholm and Uppsala. Once located at the geographical center of Sweden, with the castle intended as a social hub to gather nobility (members of the Wrangel kin who resided throughout Europe), the location is today described as remote and rural, being one hour drive from Stockholm.

Castles have always been built for many different reasons. They work as defensive fortifications, symbols of power and wealth, points of religious expansion/consolidation, among other things, and to varying degrees, these were all part of Skokloster's history. But more than this, Skokloster was a site for accumulating, collecting, and gathering members of

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the family on the first hand, but even objects that could consolidate that family's status and position. As a result, Wrangel and the castle's subsequent owners collected items like armoury, weapons, books, silver and textiles, as well as artifacts from the Americas, Asia and all the corners of Europe. Artifacts from around the world were essential in the founding of the cabinet of curiosities of the 17th century.<sup>6</sup> These were collections of thought-provoking objects, whose categorical boundaries were yet to be drawn by the emerging natural science of the time, but which gained significance to the extent that they spoke of the depth and breadth of their owner's inclusion in networks that reached far beyond the local and national setting to some of the most distance corners of the world. The objects of these collections were theatrically presented (two armories were assembled in two separate towers of the castle to house the war booty arriving at the castle in the 17th and 18th centuries, a ballroom that was never completed – due to Wrangel's death – was converted into a storage area, the tools left behind were stored and displayed in another tower, paintings, and mirrors came to fill the castle's walls) allowing visitor to walk through the collection, making his or her own path and conclusions – and to be wondered by the world. In short, as the bricks and mortar of the castle were laid, objects came to fill its interior, and as they did, the castle and its objects took form together.

In 1701, Carl Gustaf Wrangel's daughter, Baroness Margareta Juliana Wrangel, converted the castle and all its property into an entailed estate (*fideikommiss*), a consequence of which was the decision to forbid the selling or further distribution of the castle's objects and possessions. And although items have been added over the centuries as new generations of owners, such as the Brahe, and later, the von Essen family have lived there, the castle with its 77 rooms houses over 50,000 objects and constitutes one of Europe's best and most intact collections of baroque artifacts. The castle was purchased by the Swedish Government in 1967 and was subsequently converted into a museum, opening all of the castle's 77 rooms to the public in 1972.<sup>7</sup> In the decades preceding and immediately following the castle's conversion to a museum, the castle was a source of employment for members of the local community who worked there, for example, as docents, cleaners, repairmen, gardeners, and technical staff. They, in short, had a vested interest in the castle, but the situation has changed since the beginning of the new millennium. As one of the museum's curators recalls:

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Many people who lived out here were linked to the castle and those who worked there consciously strove to employ people from the local community. That doesn't happen anymore. The castle has lost that contact with them now. The new generation has (of people working at Skokloster, authors' note) no contact with the people living out here. Then again, many have move so it is not really like it was before.<sup>8</sup>

The museum's workforce has been professionalized in recent decades with staff commuting from Stockholm and Uppsala. A consequence of this has been that the museum staff, and the local community have lost touch with one another. The museum is more of an island with ties to Stockholm and Uppsala and similar museums of cultural history in Europe than an integrated meeting point in the local community. The engagement of the local community in the castle is minimal and volunteerism is non-existent, except through the association of museum friends.

### **The Challenges**

However, while the castle finds itself losing its anchorage in the local cultural geography of the Sko peninsula, the collection of artifacts at Skokloster is well anchored in the castle and its three hundred years of history. They are home here, but their status as a collection has been predicated upon their shift in status from the realm of private aristocratic belongings to that of public domain. By way of comparison, the Nordic Heritage Museum also finds itself working to consolidate a collection that is in a process of transformation. In Seattle, the processes at work do not entail a shift from private ownership to public domain (occurring within the confines of one and the same building), but a shift in the character of the collections as they are prepared to be move from the school building that has housed the museum since its inauguration in 1980 and the question of how to broaden its public its public without losing its current core of volunteers and supporters. The Nordic Heritage Museum relies on hundreds of volunteers to perform many of the fundamental tasks needed to run the museum ranging from its front desk operations, tours, exhibitions, and curatorial support to the arrangement of special events.

With its hundreds of volunteers, and aging core of beneficiaries, the museum now finds itself looking for an appropriate home for its collection and operations in a cultural geography that

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is in flux. Where Ballard was once a working class neighborhood populated by Scandinavian immigrants, it is now undergoing rapid gentrification where small bungalows give way to tall apartment buildings and cafes and upscale bars replace dime stores and workshops.<sup>9</sup> The museum's move to a harborfront, purpose built 60 million dollar facility<sup>10</sup> is part of this gentrification process, but it is fraught with problems. Procuring funding for a project of this economic size has borne with it a shift in perspective in which the museum's profile has been rethought as more firmly embedded in a transnational experience economy (cf. Pine & Gilmore 199; Hannigan 1998) for a creative class (Florida 2002) whose boundaries far exceed the local community. This has resulted in a move that is hoped to produce a facility that does much more than the current community based museum does.

Early funding for the project was directed towards a very well reputed architectural firm who was awarded the task of developing a spectacular facility to attract donor attention. While functioned to operate as a dream catcher for the endowed, the drawings produced by the architectural firm also raised questions among many volunteers, museum friends and members, as to what would be left of the charm and ambitions of the old museum. Focus group interviews amongst groups who had been active in the original museum's development voiced their fears. As the local newspaper reported:

The focus groups did not want the feeling of the early Nordic Heritage Museum to be lost so people don't forgot its roots. On the other hand, the architects and designers want to keep the younger generations interested.

<http://www.ballardnewstribune.com/2008/03/25/news/nordic-museum-hears-focus-group-design> (August 23, 2014)

For those who had helped establish the museum, and volunteered their time there over the years, hopes remained that the exhibitions that each of the five Nordic groups had been allowed to produce on their own, would be given space in the new museum. In a similar manner volunteers and active museum members anxiously wondered if the "Dream of America" exhibition, with its dioramas, traditional mannequin based form, and theatrically dramatic presentation would also survive the move to the new harbor front location. Museum leadership could promise that the exhibition would be included in the new museum "in some form" but could not promise more (Ibid.). At issue here lie the question of how existing

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collections could be mobilized in new contexts to draw in new audiences and thus increased resources, to cover higher costs of operations that would face the museum in its envisioned expanded form. This was not a challenge to the cultural heritages of the Nordic groups per se, but the challenge posed by the cultural economy has forced the question of how heritage assemblages can be re-invented to meet a new emerging context. As Jane Bennett has pointed out, assemblages are always bound in time by their historic preconditions (2010:24).

Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. They have uneven topographies, because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface (2010:23f.)

As the Nordic Heritage anticipates its future, the assemblages of its collections are dreamed of in very different ways. At times these envisioned assemblages include similar publics (of volunteers and museum friends) but increasingly the assemblages envisioned by the museum leadership include new, and very different publics than are currently participating actively in the museum and its activities. <sup>11</sup>As the museum finds itself at a crossroads, the potential cultural energy of the artifacts in the museum to remain assembled or to be reformed into new assemblages is activated by the powerfield that is opened between the museum leadership and the diverse groups that struggle to leave their mark on the envisioned museum of the future.

Among other things, a significant force which comes into play here involves new groups of highly educated and young Scandinavians coming to Seattle for longer and shorter periods of time to work at Amazon, Microsoft, and Boeing among other hi-tech oriented companies, and the question of what role they might play in relation to a future refunctioned museum. The stakes are high as the museum attempts to parlay the cultural and economic capital from a true and trodden ageing base of visitors and patrons (many of who have a working class background and now are investing smaller and larger fortunes in the museum's expansion) into a new (and to large extent imagined) public that has yet to have laid more permanent roots in Seattle, or showed a deeper economic or social interest in the museum.

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### **Crab dinner or tea?**

The tensions at work here are also apparent in the very different approaches used by the museum leadership and its volunteers to raise funding for the new facility. Where, for example the development department at the museum organized an exclusive King Crab dinner (co sponsored by Sig Hansen from the popular TV show *The Deadliest Catch*) at 50 dollars per person:

Doug Dixon and Tor Tollessen will host an exclusive seafood BBQ and VIP tour of Pacific Fishermen Shipyard, including the F/V Northwestern from Discovery Channel's *Deadliest Catch* on Saturday, May 30, 2015. Keep an eye out for Captain Sig Hansen and his crew! Up to fifty (50) people are invited to join in this unique Ballard experience, which includes a BBQ of alder-smoked king crab and salmon, and pan-seared wild Alaskan Weathervane scallops. This is an auction favorite, so be sure to snag your tickets fast!

The volunteers invited the local community over for tea:

Join us for the annual Spring Tea, hosted by the Volunteer Council! Proceeds of the tea benefit the Nordic Heritage Museum. Enjoy tea, light refreshments, and—last year's big hit!—a Chico's fashion show.

Cost: \$8 suggested donation at the door.

At play here were very different notions of who was welcome and included to participate in the production of the future museum. And while it would be nearly impossible for the museum to raise 60 million dollars, eight dollars at a time, the strategies used by the development office also reflected a shift in the manner in which the museum viewed its future patrons. Increasingly shifting their gaze from the folds of the local community, and founding emigrants, to new groups of transnational movers and shakers. In so doing the museum is implicitly (if not completely intentionally) moving from a stance of collaboration with the local community to one of capital accumulation with actors bearing linkages with the Nordic Heritage Museum's vision, but not necessarily with its community.

The difficulty for Skokloster, in contrast, is the fact that the physical environment of the castle is as important to an understanding of what it houses as are the objects it presents to the public. As the museum's home page explains:

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Experience the castles ornate rooms and salons! Walk around the Wrangel and Brahe apartments, admiring interiors that display the best of the period's craftsmanship, paintings, furnishings and textiles. If you would like to see more of the castle, take guided tours upstairs to Wrangel's armory and the unfinished room...

The problem here is that at the end of the day, it is the number of visitors moving through the castle's turn styles, and the geographic distribution of the school classes visiting it that play an important role in the size of the funding it receives from the state. Unfortunately, due to its remote location it lacks the public its leadership dreams of.

While the Nordic is in the process of trying to envision a new home, Skokloster finds itself locked into a cultural geography it is no longer in touch with. Simultaneously, its collections are dependent upon this location for their context. At the same time the museum's ability to obtain financing is not dependent on any measure of the quality of its collections, nor its ability (and *needs*) to care for those collections (as well as the castle itself), but in the capacity of the museum to move visitors through its entrance gates. It is these types of quantifiable factors that the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis measure and report to the government, in this case the Ministry of Culture, who are in turn the museum's primary employer and financier.

Worth mentioning in this context is the Ministry of Culture's assignment to all central museums in Sweden to digitize their collections to make them accessible to a wider audience. Skokloster is well underway with such project, with the database, photos and a panoramic images, one may well explore Skokloster from one's desk in Warsaw, Seattle or Shanghai. Yet, being digitally available to the public does not change the physical condition of the collection. And the number of digital hits it receives does not affect the museum's economy - physical visits are counted, not digital hits.

To better succeed according to the quantifiable measures used by the government, the collection would do better in a more central urban location, but the impossibility of this mix lies in the fact that the collection becomes meaningful (as a collection) when exposed in the castle and its surrounding cultural landscape. As situated in its original milieu it distinguishes

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itself from so many other collections in National Museums throughout the world. The castle is in this sense an instrumental and integrated part of the assemblage of the museum's collection, but also its Achilles heel. While, for example the Vasa museum in central Stockholm (housing the Vasa ship that originates from the same period as the Wrangel collection) attracted 1,088,135 in 2013, Skokloster "only" attracted 52,178 that same year (Myndigheten för Kulturanalys 2013:7).<sup>12</sup> And where the Nordic struggles with fundraising to expand its space to exhibit its collection, Skokloster does not have the same option, being dependent upon state funding, which is affected by attendance statistics. It is home to 77 rooms but only has the finances now to open a few of them to the public, and only during the summer season (from May to September). It houses 50,000 artifacts but has enough paintings to literally and statistically keep a conservator busy, full time for over 200 years. The potential of the collection is enormous, but its economic frame is claustrophobic.

## **Conclusions**

In this article we have focused upon two museums. The Nordic Heritage is in pursuit of larger and broader publics and it does so with the help of professional consultancies well versed in current globally anchored, but general theories of experience oriented edutainment. The question is how this is received in the local context of the museum, and how the museum is able to translate these broad theories from the experience economy without losing its base of volunteers that it is highly dependent upon. Skokloster is a museum that struggles to meet a different genre of global theory, that of new public management in which its budget is linked to its ability to account for what it produces. Statistics and quantifiable results are the basis for its livelihood, but it can do little to physically and geographically reposition itself to become more accessible to broader publics. At the same time, the processes of professionalization it has embraced to meet the demands of new public management have left it further distanced from the local community than it has ever been before. And in the end, the castle itself is perhaps not only the stage that frames the collection, but is the core of object of the collection, the attraction, and the museum as a destination.

In the material we have presented here we see how these two museums struggle to open their collections to broader publics, which can be seen as part of wider democratization process (a



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phenomenon many of us would automatically applaud), but at the same time, the economic pressures they work under are in the process of creating a further distance between the museums and their local communities. An important question here is how collections can speak to wider audiences as well as local communities in ways that are economically sustainable? This not an equation with a simple solution. One tactic which we have pointed to here is for museums to open specialized exhibitions and events niched towards smaller, specific audiences that may or may not attract new types patrons (even if this is often a hope). The risk involve in moving in this way is one of losing the old base of visitors as one pursues new audiences who come once, but do not become returning members.

A second equally important and complicated question we have highlighted here concerns how, and what can be measured and used comparatively when the parameters for the funding of museums are to be established? What happens when the cultural, economic and geographic parameters (as well as so many other parameters) can so radically differ from one museum to another? As we are arguing, museums have a history with long coattails, but exist in a market with rapidly changing preconditions. The two museums we have focused on here highlight to drastically different point of departure for their operations (one being state run while the other is privately driven), but these differences work to highlight the uneven terrain which museums have to traverse in contemporary society – a fact which is further complicated by the fact that very many state run museums find themselves in the same position as Skokloster, being forced to comply to the demands of the state that limit the degree to which it can experiment with free market models, at the same time that it is expected to present results as if it were an independent actor.

Issues of heritage politics and identity politics as they are performed by museums are important phenomena in need of study, and a great deal of attention has been devoted to them in museum studies, but greater attention should be expended on understanding the cultural economic preconditions that underlie those politics. In arguing for this position, we align ourselves with Doreen Massey's call for cultural theorists to do what they do best, and put cultural theory to work to understand economic processes and the manner in which those processes are culturally framed, and have implications for different groups of people (Massey

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1999, see even Seemann and Hall forthcoming) It is easy to demonize neoliberalism (and it may very well be worthy of demonization), but it is perhaps time to seriously study and analyze the manner in which cultural and economic processes are entangled in the world of museums in different countries and contexts, and address the question of what effects, challenges, and possibilities these entanglements cause.

### **Acknowledgements**

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyz6mkvIEgA>

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<sup>1</sup> According to ICOM and AAM the role of the museum as institutions is to contextualize objects and collections and to show and care for its cultural heritage for the purpose of education, study and enjoyment. A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purpose of education, study and enjoyment. (ICOM's definition of a museum, <http://icom.museum/the-vision/definition/>, read 2015-06-13.).

<sup>2</sup> See for example, du Gay & Pryke 2002; Lash & Urry 1990; McFall 2002; Nixon 2002; Ray & Sayer 1999.

<sup>3</sup> In stating this, however, we need to further explicate our position. In what follows we are not arguing that there is a complete absence of literature concerning the economic realities facing museums. However, much of this literature lacks an anchoring in the ethnographic study of the daily cultural context of museums, focusing all too often on general, more macro-oriented trends distributed over the sector, than the daily cultural realities faced by those institutions (see for example, Betzler 2015; Merritt 2008; Månsson 2009; O'Hagan 1995 & 1998); Simmons 2006). For examples of some of the few studies that have invoked an ethnographically based micro perspective on the cultural economies of see Greenspan (2002) and Kirshenblatt Gimblett 2007: 161-202).

<sup>4</sup> Our approach to the study of the cultural economy is aligned with such previous work as Amin & Thrift 2007; Aronsson, Bjälesjö & Johansson 2007; Baumol 1967; Baumol & Bowen 1965; du Gay & Pryke 2007; O'Dell 2010; O'Dell & Billing 2005; Ray & Sayer 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Digitalization is an important area of development that museums are expected to engage in and must engage in to remain viable in the contemporary context. However, as Simon J. Knell argues digital collections and digitization of objects can never be of equal value to the physical object, regardless how well produced it may be. The digital, according to Knell, is and remains distant because it provides an illusion of materiality. The virtual visitor may understand the object better but cannot explore the object's particular qualities, as the digital interaction with the object is limited to vision. The digital object can thus provide an effective introduction to the object but never replace it. (Knell 2010: pp 446-447). We believe that this standpoint is relevant for the museum as institution as well as the physical visit, the experience of interacting with the museum as place, engaging all senses, has its own value. Digitalization offers benefits in relation to the democratic access of collections, also globally, but the degree to which it catalyzes the movement of people through the doors of the museum is unclear. A longterm question, which needs to be addressed concerns the financial impact (whether it be positive or negative) that processes of digitization have upon museums and their material collections.

<sup>6</sup> An additional, and renowned, example in Northern Europe is the collection created by Danish Ole Worm, which eventually became the National museum of Denmark (Hafstein 2003).

<sup>7</sup> The castle was originally opened in its entirety to the public during the summer and closed during the winter. But at a later date the majority of the castle's rooms were closed to the public, and the museum came to focus upon a few rooms on the first floor of the property. Many other castles in Sweden experienced a similar fate over the course of the post-World War II era. However, many of them were re-functioned to "house" the expansion of public care of drug abusers, alcoholics, criminals, delinquent youths, and those in need of psychological care.

<sup>8</sup> The authors have translated this quote from Swedish. The original Swedish quote reads as:

*Väldigt många som bodde härute var knutna till slottet och de som jobbade där anställde medvetet personer i slottets närmiljö. Det sker inte längre. Slottet har tappat den kontakten nu. Den nya generationen har ingen kontakt med dem som bor härute. Sedan har många flyttat, så nu är det inte riktigt samma sak.*

<sup>9</sup> Ballard was its own township until 1907 when it was merged with Seattle. Significant for the Ballard neighborhood was its working class character with small bungalows, extensive vegetable gardens, and a Main street area that was lined with small family owned stores with Scandinavian foods, hardware stores, clothing stores and grocery stores. The area south of Main street, now recognized as Seattle's hub for microbreweries, exclusive boutiques and upscale restaurants, was known as the red-light district with hotels and multiple bars and meeting places for workers at the Cedar shingle mill and the fishermen from the industrial waterfront. Within the context of the Pacific Northwest Ballard has been subject to ridicule for an unsophisticated, backwards population with heavy Scandinavian accents, an equal amount of churches and bars, and numerous assisted living facilities. Produced in the 1980s the short movie the Ballard Driving School

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyz6mkvIEgA>), till generates laughs among Nordic themselves as well as

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Seatlites. The neighborhood still hosts numerous Lutheran Churches of which two still holds services in Nordic languages (The Finnish Church and the Ballard First Lutheran, Norwegian)

<sup>10</sup> This sum was later sunk to 45 million dollars. In part facilitated by the fishermen with a more frugal disposition, and in part facilitated by difficulties in raising funding.

<sup>11</sup> For a larger discussion of the significance volunteers play (economically and socially) in museums and museums' abilities to engage and activate the local community in processes of gentrification see Jackson 2002.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.kulturanalys.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/PM-besöksutveckling-2013-20140507.pdf> Clearly, the attendance statistics to these museums are affected by much more than issues of geography and location. Indeed the Vasa Museum was the museum in Sweden that attracted the highest percentage of foreigners, indicating the strong interest the museum has won from a broad public. Nonetheless, it is difficult to explain the extreme discrepancy in attendance statistics without assigning the marginal geographical position of Skokloster a significant role that is exasperated by the poor quality of public commuter services to the Sko peninsula. Compare for example the attendance statistics for other museums of cultural heritage located in central Stockholm: Skansen 1,437,609; The Royal Armory 239, 658; Prince Eugene's Waldemarsudde 165,570; Nordiska Museet 220,665.