

THE CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM AS A SITE FOR DISPLAYING VALUES

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ABSTRACT

Museums constitute an important cultural and social resource. The main objective of museums is making certain objects in the collection visible or, on the contrary, leaving them invisible. In contemporary society the institution serves many important roles, being a place for displaying historical and contemporary values, an institution for preserving and displaying personal and collective memory, cultural values, for collecting tangible and intangible values, an institution for creating identity and ethnic kudos, a work place, an educational environment, a framework for promoting ethnic handicraft and art, a place for integrating different folklore festivals, exhibitions, shows; they are connected to tourism patterns and museum business. The article reflects the changes in the development of museums in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, focusing on the main key words being multifunctional museum, the museum as an open classroom, presentation of tangible and intangible history, the relation and mergence of permanent and temporary exhibitions. The issues of digitalization and preservation and the role of the exhibition curator and the person represented on displays have increased in the museology of the past few decades. The museums' tradition of self-replication and an increased interest in museological anthropology indicate that museums fulfil an important role in society.

KEYWORDS: multifunctional museum • museology • presentation of tangible and intangible history • digitalization • museological anthropology

On the event dedicated to the opening of the new repository rooms of the Estonian National Museum in my hometown of Tartu two years ago, I discussed with my friends the influential and ever-changing role of museums in the contemporary world. Today, as the so-called museum boom has assumed serious proportions, museums have changed considerably over the past century as important institutions for preserving collective and individual memory and have transformed into multi-functional institutions. Museums constitute a unique network. Currently there are 258 registered museums in Estonia alone (the number is particularly significant considering that the native population in Estonia is approximately 1 million, and together with various minorities the total Estonian population is nearly 1.5 million), and very likely, there will be more museums to come. Compared to the beginning of the twentieth century the current number of museums in Estonia is quite significant and the museums are also more versatile. Various societies, fields of life, hobby groups, and regional organizations make use of museums as a means for preserving history, folklore, intangible heritage, for self-expression

and self-identification. In contemporary society the institution serves many important roles being:

- A place for displaying historical and contemporary values;
- An important institution for preserving and displaying personal and collective memory, cultural values, for collecting tangible and intangible values;
- An institution for creating identity and ethnic kudos;
- A work place;
- An educational environment;
- A framework for promoting ethnic handicraft, art, etc;
- A place for integrating different folklore festivals, (art) exhibitions, shows;
- Museums are connected to tourism patterns and museum business, etc.

To sum up the above, museums constitute an important cultural and social resource.

The following overview will reflect the changes in the development of museums in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the main keywords being multi-functional museum, the museum as an open classroom, presentation of tangible and intangible history, the relation of permanent and temporary exhibitions and their merging. I will also briefly mention the issues of collection and preservation, as well as the role of the exhibition curator and a person represented on displays in the museology of the past few decades.

MUSEUM AS THE CREATOR OF LOCALITY

Modern times are generally characterized as the era of globalisation, hybridisations, multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity. This list suggests the main keywords and speciality areas used at the end of the twentieth century to characterize the period. Still, none of the mentioned keywords, such as globalisation, for example, are in any way new phenomena (cf. Yans-McLaughlin 1990), even though discourse about globalisation alludes to the all-inclusive influence and spread of international corporations, the World Bank, new types of media (television, radio, cinema, World Wide Web), major waves of migration, and also to the fact that the consumption of similar fashion and foods, the expanding international corporate and hotel chains, etc., assimilated cultures and nations.

Globalisation started with the migration of travellers and construction of roads in the early Modern Age. This mediated the adoption of new ideas, symbols, objects and rituals, integrated in the local culture. Good examples here would be the northward migration of plants from the east and south, Chinese porcelain, or roses that were brought from China to Europe in the fourteenth century, and contemporary museum, etc. Many traditional Estonian dishes, which are usually unquestionably referred to as ethnic food, such as potato and coffee, arrived in Estonia relatively recently. These previously unseen cultural phenomena caused misunderstandings and funny incidents, which are described in folk tales preserved in the archives, such as making porridge out of coffee, or serving coffee grounds as dessert, eating raw potatoes, etc.

Locality, the antonym to globalisation, interrelates with an intricate socio-economic complex. Locality is defined through a concrete dimension of territory, time and space;

within this framework, history evolves according to the peculiarities of characteristic social relations and economic progress. Locality signifies specific social values, and is expressed most explicitly in the form of museum – an institution which collects, preserves and displays the best part of locality. Although the number of global museums (modern art and science museums) is constantly increasing, the local museum has preserved its status and significance in representing locality and constructing local identity. Local museums create an intricate network for passing on knowledge about preserved tradition.

THE BOOM IN MUSEUMS, CULTURAL CENTRES AND THEMATIC PARKS

It is a basic characteristic of all dynamic phenomena to expand and evolve in different directions. Proceeding from this statement, the growth in the number of museum types has only confirmed the need for, and vitality of, these institutions. Many museums are closely connected with the development of a specific field or area of research; some serve as monuments for the fields of life or lifestyle that was once important. These collections preserve the cultural image of a given period by means of objects, recordings and visual images. Ethnographic museums, for example, have been closely connected with advances in the area of study, as well as with the construction of ethnic identity and nationhood. A national museum is an emblematic institution of state, and has often given rise to research in the field. The Estonian National Museum, for example, gathered material collected by amateurs, organized further collection work, and displayed the collected material already in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century; the collections had already become the source of research and overviews (Õunapuu 2001a) before Estonia gained independence. Ethnology and anthropology alike saw their beginning in the nineteenth-century museums, from where the disciplines shifted, with the growing body of material and the introduction of higher education, to universities and later also to special research institutes. Contributory factors in Europe and America were also the general popularity and importance of fieldwork, as in the beginning of the twentieth century fieldwork formed the basis of modern anthropology, folklore studies and ethnology. In Estonia, scientific work did not shift to universities but strong research groups and researchers, with a tradition of intensive fieldwork continued at several museums (besides the Estonian National Museum, also the Estonian Literary Museum) and research centers (Institute of the Estonian Language, Institute of History).

In the 1960s, the number of museums started to grow all over the world; the period also saw a growing interest in constructing cultural centres and theme parks and national heritage preservation. This change marked the multifarious visualization and appraisal of the past and the past culture. Among the newer tendencies was the increased importance of visualizing and, in more general terms, demonstrating culture, the attractiveness and conceptuality of exhibitions. The relation and structure of permanent and temporary exhibitions underwent critical changes, with temporary exhibitions becoming predominant, as they attracted visitors to return to the same place, enabled the displaying of different phenomena and processes, and expanded the profile and function of specific museums.

The most characteristic feature of the second half of the twentieth century was the construction of expensive state-of-the-art museums on the one hand and, on the other

hand the transformation of an exhibiting mono-cultural museum (natural history museum, art museum, maritime museum) into a multi-functional museum, where different means of exhibiting and interactivity were being used. Characteristically, aesthetics and attractive presentation of exhibitions and items on display have become increasingly important. Presentation, in particular, requires an effective cooperation of a curator with a vision, a scholar and an artist, and, even more so, a skilful and imaginative plan, and entertaining exposition – in other words, good visual literacy.

In addition to museums proper, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed the spread of science parks and museums combining research and exposition. A science park enables a visitor to observe the development of an academic discipline, look at complex solutions, physically test how things are done and measure one's physical and intellectual abilities, test one's perception and responses. A visitor is informed of the results of years of research in a clear and comprehensible manner. The Finnish Science Center, Heureka, for example, introduces the same sentence in different languages to demonstrate the similarities of related languages. Next to natural sciences, a modern science park also introduces discoveries in the field of the humanities and social sciences; at the same time regularly organizing temporary exhibitions, demonstrations (of science theatre), special documentaries, etc. Science theatre demonstrations, as well as the permanent planetarium, introducing, among other things, the stellar sky of prehistoric Estonians, have proved extremely popular in the Estonian science centre AHHA. As to the intangible heritage, the AHHA also mediates droodles (visual riddles) from an online folkloric database. Thus, a science park, which has no collections, databases, etc. of its own, visualizes and mediates the achievements of other scientific institutions. Performances and demonstrations are not only characteristic of science parks and museums, but have also become an inherent part of modern art museums (Kiasma, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Finland, for example, entertains the visitors with a nightly dance performance), and institutions for preserving intangible heritage or ethnographic museums (the Estonian National Museum, for example, provides a comprehensive program of folk calendar holidays and other performances, competitions, etc.; the Setu Museum in Värskla has performances of local singing culture and tradition on folk calendar holidays, but also for tourists).

The presupposition of aesthetics in an exhibition about a specific period leaves ethnographic museums in a complicated situation. Such museums collect and display not only high culture and the related objects, but also the practical culture of common people and the related objects. Notwithstanding the current interest of the social studies and the humanities in everyday culture and, especially, the ordinary life of an ordinary person, the rest of culture, media and the majority of museums are more focused on recording the history of famous figures and professional high culture. This lays on the ethnographic museum and the curator the responsibility to come up with the best solutions for introducing the field of study and presenting folk culture (cf. Shukla 2001: 33).

In the final decades of the twentieth century, the former extensive and versatile permanent exhibitions, based on vast collections of material, were often replaced by displays in which the material was presented at an unusual or a personal angle, and usually in lesser scope. An exhibition of the ethnography of aborigines in the Melbourne Museum, for example, has been compiled of selected objects collected only by few persons (not even ethnologists). The exhibition focuses on the collector's biography and

personality, photographs about the collector, collection principles and the place of collection. The level of information given by the accompanying texts equals that of a proficient tour guide: for example, informing a visitor about what the musical instrument didgeridoo is and how it was named after a witty scholar who corrupted the original name and made his version famous all over the world. The exhibition's visual and audio demonstrations allow the visitor to participate at funerals and weddings, look at former sacred places, everyday life, and working. The abundance of textual facts is replaced by visual and auditory material.

A change in the role of museums has introduced new approaches, but is also the cause of problems that have so far been left unresolved (such as, for example, the issue of which target audience?). The main questions are: How to attract the young? How to function as an educational tool for people of different age, or for schools? How to keep people coming back to the museum? How to attract foreigners and how to present material to them?

MAKING OBJECTS VISIBLE

The main objective of museums is making certain objects in the collection visible, or, on the contrary, leaving them invisible. A single person – the compiler of an exposition or exhibition – is responsible for choosing and assigning meaning to the texts, pictures, objects. This person will single out objects and facts from the vast corpora of material to introduce them to the museum visitors. Without introduction and interpretation (or translation of the context which is understandable for the contemporary visitor), these objects would remain invisible to us; quite like the efforts made to obtain the object remain invisible and intangible to us, unless it is specifically emphasized. Further emphasis is important, be it by means of photographs, documentary, accompanying texts or figures. The interpretation must be based on the contemporary period, since objects and activities of the more distant past are more difficult to understand, and also placed in an appropriate time frame, proportions and scale.

The number of objects displayed on contemporary exhibitions is limited not only due to the lack of exhibition space, but also because of the limits of human memory and reception – namely, displaying similar objects does not add any new information for the viewer. Exhibition compilers, however, have favored the presentation of a few different examples of a same object, to inform the viewer of the variety of ornamentation or form. Visitors are often allowed to touch the original material or observe a product characteristic of the period (e.g., hand-made paper, feathers, pieces of leather), because modern urbanized viewers often lack experience of wild nature or technological processes of the past. In Sweden, for example, a museum of archaeology in Falköping (Falbygdens museum) has reconstructed the Viking clothes and restored the authentic gold and silver jewel items, which should facilitate the understanding of the period (ninth–eleventh century). Owing to the lack of written resources, the basic sources of information about the period are archaeological finds. Of course, Northern sagas shed some light on the period, but they are written much later on the basis of oral accounts.

Exhibitions, where objects are stored as if on archive shelves, which used to impress with a huge number of analogous objects, have become a thing of the past (Shelton 2001: 224).

In modern times, the collection work is followed by interpretation of the material in the form of an exhibition and catalogue, forming, at best, the beginning of a new consumer cycle. Many museums sell replicas of objects on display (ranging from soap bars and candy to lamps and other commodities). The museum stores of many smaller Swedish museums, for example, sell hand-made sweets, handicraft, toiletry, and other items of local production.

In some museums, history is presented attractively from the entertaining, visual and commercial aspect. The Ballarat open air museum, Sovereign Hill in Australia, for example, manufactures objects in nearly every museum building; products with an air of the past are sold in a pharmacy, and a post office; museum visitors can participate in a performance, preparation and marketing objects in a nineteenth-century school or cinema, church, or a gold-washing cabin. Many of the replicas on sale are manufactured right under the eyes of museum visitors. The show is rendered true to life with horses eating hay, old maids doing handicraft at the fireplace, horsemen, townspeople, children in costumes, occasionally appearing on the streets. This is an authentic imitation of life during the 1850s gold rush (<http://www1.visitvictoria.com/displayObject.cfm/ObjectID.000D2B85-3F27-1D81-B32080C476A90000/vvt.vhtml>).

Exhibiting phenomena of intangible heritage is, no doubt, the most challenging. This is particularly true in everything connected with ritual and religion, as these are surrounded by unwritten rules, which are difficult, if not impossible, to pass on by means of static objects. Objects associated with group identity and mentality, passed on from one generation to another, belong to the same category. Such objects are often associated with various non-verbal rules and principles, which are naturally known to people who have grown up in a specific culture, but which may not be understood outside the context.

The evolutionary museum accumulates in itself the entire past and presents an overview of the earlier (natural scientific, cultural, scientific, technological) developments, indicating future trends and providing an educational program representative of the dynamic progress (Bennett 2001: 58). Many museums of the younger generation are built according to this principle, such as, for example, the Museum of Archaeology and History (Aboa Vetus) in Turku, Finland, the Sámi Museums, Siida in Finland and Ájtte in Sweden, but also the Melbourne Museum (<http://melbourne.museum.vic.gov.au/>), which, among other things, integrate the best museum objects and solutions of science centers and museums. Next to attractive solutions and novel ways of displaying the material, the museums have attempted to avoid anonymity, presenting the material from a personal angle (in Siida – Sámi museum and Northern Lapland Nature Centre in Finland, for example, the changes in local history and the institution have been demonstrated using the example of a giant local oak tree).

Within the limited opportunities, several small and town museums represent the evolutionary museum, presenting peculiarities of local history, natural environment, traditional ways of life, objects, subsistence, customs, folklore, social life, etc. As such, local museums are often institutions of mixed profiles – types of archaeo-ethno-historical-natural-art-personal museums. Small museums are the most accessible places for introducing the past and cultural history to the locals, and are, as such, highly valued.

DYNAMIC MUSEUM

The museums of the new generation are distinctly different already in outward appearance, demonstrating either post-modern or conceptual, often clearly ethnic architectural solutions. The interior design of Ájtte, the museum of Sámi culture in Jokkmokk, for example, imitates reindeer herding fences. The museum's modern office space remains invisible for the visitors, as the entrance is in the middle of the exhibition but is concealed by textile. Ájtte bears closer resemblance to a modern art museum rather than a traditional museum of ethnography in several other aspects – namely, design, music, video installations, bright displaying of objects. Typically to a contemporary museum, there is an ethnic food restaurant, a book and road map store and the souvenir store on the premises, offering a wide selection of products – the Sámi folk music and improvisations on traditional tunes, books on the Sámi culture and religion, newspapers, photographs and postcards, traditional Sámi confectionary and beverages, handicraft, beads, etc. The most interesting part of the exhibition is a Sámi artist who, as if integrated into the exposition, moves around and sketches the objects. Concerts, conferences, and other events held in the museum transform it into a constantly functioning versatile cultural center. The fence around the museum building surrounds a miniature open air museum with different types of traditional houses. Ájtte is almost a unique representation of the Sámi worldview, a perfect ethnic world, the riches of which can be overview with web databases (<http://www.laponia.info>).

One of the characteristics of a dynamic museum is greater emphasis and focus on an individual. A modern museum introduces also the creator of the exhibition, presenting the exhibition's curator, who was formerly present only at the opening. In perfect circumstances the compiler of the exhibition would be given as much prominence as an informant or an object on display.

The same applies to exhibition catalogues, which inform of an object's parameters, technical data, construction technology and age, and also presents its history of origin and explains its function. If possible, the comments and explanations of meaning, which enable the presentation of different cultural aspects, are given by the creator of the object. Such tales, or other renditions (instructions how to play an instrument, or making an instrument), related at exhibitions, may become a new archival item, a valuable piece of information about the mentality of the period.

Images, sounds, and computer technology expand the possibilities to achieve a multi-dimensional result, which would appeal to different senses, to acquire additional information. In the Swedish Sámi museum, discussed above, different parts of the exhibition are illustrated by sounds of nature, tales and comments of people, and music. In addition, documentaries about the working tradition, living and twentieth-century historical events of Lapland are projected next to the museum objects. Programmed slide shows introduce the nature and people. Also, in the museum of the Setu culture in Värskä, Southeast Estonia, which is an area of active singing tradition and ethnic customs, it is a common practice that the local singers perform to the visitors of the exhibition (cf. exhibitions at the Smithsonian – Shukla 2001: 34ff). This kind of public programming means that the Setu singers help the museum with their singing performances on many traditional folk holidays – on St George's Day, for example, singing recitals, dancing, playing of instruments, taking of ceremonial meals on the graves of departed relatives,

and swinging are organized. The contact with live performers is far more capturing than the versatility of sounds and levels achieved by incorporating multimedia solutions, like radio, video or computer technology, into the intellectual exposition. The function of singers, storytellers, etc. who serve in the museum as experts of tradition, is even more useful, considering that the recording of their spiritual heritage is considerably easier in the museum. The situation, however, is more complicated in case rituals are reconstructed and sacred objects are displayed on the exhibition.

One of the ways to make an exposition more attractive is interactive solutions, enabling the visitor to be involved in the exhibition, share oral and written personal opinions, if possible, reconstruct objects or processes, touch the objects on display, or sing along. Many Estonian museums have made use of these solutions, although in widely different ways, since the first permanent exposition of the Estonian National Museum, at which children, families and adult visitors could sing folk songs, make masks, play folk games, go masking and "mumming" in the town on St Catherine's Day and at Martinmas (Puistaja 1999). In several smaller museums a visitor can weave cloth on a hand-operated loom or participate in a traditional performance.

Holding traditions in esteem is often of critical importance – for example, in a museum at Värskä, in Estonia, receptions for high school graduates are held on different occasions, including the graduation ceremony and the first day of the school year. The traditional custom on these days is to plant trees of remembrance. The most important thing about such events is the opportunity to share the tradition with the older generation, relatives, to be a part of archaic customs and singing culture through experience and emotions – in other words, the museum values the emotional memory of people.

Programs targeted at local town citizens and schoolchildren on special popular calendar holidays have become quite common. The Estonian Open Air Museum has staged the so-called night performances of life and activities in the nineteenth century, which the visitors can follow through windows (Lang 2005). County museums have started to organize (staged) traditional weddings with real brides and grooms. Lecture series, exhibitions and conferences, associated with the local cultural life and intended for the general public, are also very common and attract more people to the cause.

Characteristically of other countries, the larger museums in Estonia have developed a Friends' Society – a group of supporters, who organize educational tours and public events, value the culture and intellectual heritage, as well as the museum as an institution. The Friends' Society of the Estonian National Museum introduces traditional heritage and local informants in county schools, but also organizes cemetery commemoration days, get-togethers with Estonian emigrants, and helps municipalities carry out the celebration of folk calendar holidays. Overviews of the activities of the society are regularly published in *Lee*, their series of proceedings, and the held events are recorded on video.

The phenomenon of museum stores and manufacturers of objects for sale originate in the 1880s' America, where the Hopi Indians weaved cloth and made dolls, later also silver jewellery specifically for sale in the museums. The same phenomenon – mediation of commodities like handicraft items, tapes, etc. – has occurred throughout Europe, in Australia and elsewhere. Partly owing to tourism and tourist trade, the production, distribution and sale of museum goods began to grow in the twentieth century.

Once again, I would like to stress the importance of presenting things as if they

were unique, which in the case of spiritual cultural phenomena has proved extremely complicated, because often the presented thing is a part of process or an analogous phenomenon (e.g., a similar song type, ethnographic object), the different sides and social meanings of which need to be pointed out. One of such examples is attributing a phenomenon outside a ritual state a position, where its aesthetic appeal would become perceptible, so that the viewer would understand why it has been preserved.

RECORDER AND PRESERVER – THE BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

While evolutionary and dynamic museums support networks like friends' societies, events held by the museum, and several other phenomena described above, this guarantees the continuity and availability of examples of intellectual culture, their preservation in the tradition, integration into the contemporary society and so it is therefore of critical importance to create digital databases of relevant collections and archives, their demonstration on the Internet, and their long-term preservation. Objects function as a bridge between a spiritual and material world, as well as between the conscious and the subconscious.

Central and local museums hold objects but also photographs, recordings, films, and manuscripts. Usually, the original archival materials are not available for public users in order to guarantee maximal long-term preservation and quality of the authentic sources. Instead, the users are provided working copies or microfilms. Preservation of more than 1.4 million pages of folklore texts, 23,238 photographs, 11,895 audio recordings, 434 documentaries and video-recorded material in the Estonian Folklore Archives requires constant work. Since 1995, the materials of the Estonian Folklore Archives have been regularly digitised. Various genres of lore are incorporated into online databases. A large part of the digitised material is going to be made available online for the general public, so that the material would be accessible from everywhere. My experience of the past few years has shown that the Internet is increasingly used for finding material of interest all over the world. However, modern times have witnessed new problems in preserving the material, such as the convertibility of the preserved material, the large financial and time resources required for implementation of new technology, compatibility of programs, language.

The activities and means of material accumulation employed by museums have changed and widened, as I will show below in some examples. The organization of folklore festivals is usually financed by town or county municipalities, who often also finance the recording of these events. In the case of state financing, the copies are often stored in central archives or local libraries, so that local people could have access to them. Often the entire run (of printed publications or, for example, the CD of South-Estonian children's songs) is distributed in schools free of charge. Among the financed projects is the recording of more skilled instrumental musicians, shooting home videos for museum purposes, etc.

In recent years, many city governments have supported the collecting of intangible heritage, legends, customs and songs, traditions, biographies of prominent and eccentric citizens, and related lore of the given town (or district). The most popular genres at the moment are legends connected to a specific geographical place: local tradition is

used in education, tourism, and cultural industry. At the same time, city governments have supported competitions for creating and writing new legends. Regular collection campaigns are announced in local newspapers, or, if possible, by other means of media.

As already mentioned, several museums in Estonia constantly record intangible heritage, recollections, tales, and songs from representatives of older generations, accounts about customs which are known through family narrative history, and rituals. Museums maintain close relationships, exchanging information, if necessary. Nevertheless, the smaller local museums have proved to be the best promoters and preservers of local and regional lore.

An important aspect of collecting folklore in Estonia is the fact that since the year 1935 the President of the Republic of Estonia has awarded the annual Folklore Collection Prize, and, circumstances permitting, handed over the prize in person. The awarding of the prize is usually held during the Independence Day celebrations and is therefore very prestigious. The Estonian National Museum (ENM) has regularly offered seminars and celebratory correspondent days with awards to its correspondents. The contributions are overviewed in the publication edition of the Friends of the ENM *Lee*, briefly in the annual yearbook of the ENM and introduced in local media. Such activities give value both to the museum and its co-operative partners.

Many countries are mono-cultural and correspondingly the museums present monoculture. However, such countries also have global museums, such as the Thomas Alva Edison museum in Gangneung, South Korea (Chamsori Gramophone Edison Museum). The owner, and creator of the museum, presents the inventions of Edison, especially the further development of gramophones and sound transmitters. The excursion in this museum, probably the most perfect in the field, ends with a musical hour in a comfortable hall. The guide plays three famous opera stars from a record, one of these a Korean, an Aryad. Leaving, there is ample motivation to thank T. A. Edison for the light and riches that he has preserved for us.

The official discourse of a nation state is multi-culturality with the aim to express respect to national minorities, depoliticise and support their culture. The oldest of our minorities, coastal Estonian Swedes, is represented in several museums established after regaining independence. An important part of the Estonian-Swedish Museum in Haapsalu is a humorous embroidered rug on the ethnic group's history from Estonian Swedish women. There are also museums for the second oldest minority, the Old Believers, their culture and everyday life. We could ask whether cultures and nation groups are better united by separate museums for minorities and the main nation or temporary exhibitions of the minority in central museums. Both have their target group, a place in culture and in creating locality.

Is it possible to record, preserve and study everything around us? The answer to this question is – no, it is not. Documenting the daily life of a single human being takes 24 hours a day and different types of media and several recorders, not to mention the people who would supply the recorded material with metadata, decipher and interpret it, etc. Thus, the emphasis is on the distiller of culture (Bouquet 2001), but also on the selector/censor, who determines what is worth preserving in the culture of the past and present.

MUSEUM AS AN OBJECT OF STUDY

Beside the many other functions, the recording of the museum's history has become important. The video chronicles and photos of the events of the Estonian National Museum are a unique source for studies of museum history and museum anthropology, but also a basis for the image of the museum as a legend. The repeatedly mentioned rural museum in Värskas also uses media, among other things, to record itself. Recording oneself chronicles of activities and events accompanied by photos are a part of any well-functioning institution representing the state and as such are not characteristic of museums only. Continuous recording of activities is also important for the identity or ideology of groups. Often, such recordings represent an alternative means of history writing. For example, there is precise documentation on the activities of the Melbourne Estonian House and its hobby groups and societies, along with photographs.

Since the national museum is among a state's emblematic attributes (Gupta 1992), the recording and ethnographic study of its museum culture is of utmost importance, reflecting contemporary discourses. The number of museum anthropological studies has grown everywhere. But the question is not so much in the number of museum anthropological studies as in their setting and framework. In the 1990s, museum anthropological analyses were published in collections of high reputation (e.g., Hodgkin & Radstone 2003) and they were in dialogue with other studies. In Estonia, museum anthropology is a new paradigm, opened by Heiki Pärdis's (1996) article on the empiricism of the national museums and the thesis by Merike Lang (2005) based on the empiricism of the Estonian Open Air Museum, also lectures by Andres Tvauri (2005) at the University of Tartu, and an overview of study classes and museological activities at the Estonian National Museum by Terje Puustaja (1999).

Another contemporary trend beside museum anthropology is museum pedagogics with trends of its own. Visiting two exhibitions of modern art in Kiasma – "Popcorn and politics" and "Kalervo Palsa" – I met class groups of pupils of different age who were having a lesson in the art museum. While I do not believe that drawing, crouching on the floor, would be a better means of expressing oneself, and the older pupils studying art history were at an advantage, using interactive programs and films, the setting as such was inspiring. Also, for me as an exhibition viewer, the living museum was an interesting experience. Museum lessons require the integration of the museum into the curriculum and corresponding additional education for the teachers and museum workers. Undoubtedly this is a phenomenon that is characterized by Vilmos Voigt as "[i]f the terms are of a later origin, the phenomena themselves might exist in an earlier age" (Voigt 2004: 183). Museum lessons for schools are not new in Estonia: e.g., in the 1970s–1980s the Estonian Literary Museum gave lectures on folklore and literature for pupils, the tradition is still alive today. A state's wish for lessons in the open air and in museums was part of the 1960s' curriculum. In recent years, museum pedagogy has started to become more an applied science field and more theses are expected to follow Virve Tuubel's (2002) on museum pedagogy.

One aspect of museum anthropology crosses literary history. Fliers and brochures, introducing an exhibition and additional literature added to this, are an old tradition in our museum practice. There are fliers with a witty or splendid design. According to a nice tradition, a ticket may also serve as a postcard, photo or souvenir worth sav-

ing (e.g., visitors to the Slovenian national library's exhibition, dedicated to the oldest printed object in Slovenia, receive a postcard-cum-ticket). For their quality publications, the Estonian National Museum is without competitors among other Estonian museums – in addition to scientific publications there are, for example, a visual overview of Estonian folk culture by Virve Tuubel (2002), a colouring book teaching traditional colour names by Jane Liiv (2002). Additional literature suggested to the visitors is a strategic questioning on its own since often the museum shop offers a good selection of publications on the local history, arts, art history. Estonian museums have a lot to strive for on this account. In the Setu Museum in Värskä, there is a good choice of books, sound recordings and postcards related to Setu cultural space. Ideally, every museum shop should sell topical books published by both publishers and themselves. The colouring book by Jane Liiv and the treatise on folk calendar holidays by Piret Õunapuu (2001b) are among books that should be always on sale. Sales points in institutions carrying national identity and memory should also include the uniquely designed publications on national handicraft, Estonians and their customs by the Estonian Institute (e.g., Reemann & Õunapuu 2004).

SUMMARY

During the last five decades, much has changed and become up-to-date in museums. Macdonald and Silverstone (1992) call the last decades of the twentieth century a cultural revolution in museums, accompanied by their reorganization, including a balancing of the relation of collections and exhibitions, the increase of the curator's authority, and had emphasized the growing importance of temporary exhibitions and public service. Many of the mentioned changes began earlier, some even in the stormy 1960s, which is often dubbed the period of museum disdain.

We can not claim about any change that it will stand the test of time, but some must and it is likely that the liberalization of the museum as an institution will continue. Museum buildings and exhibitions have become contemporary, the celebration of filling architectural monuments with cultural and artistic objects has been replaced by buildings designed to be museums. Hopefully, the recent tradition of reconstructing and presenting the social life of different times and social groups (e.g., the Swedish museums-cum-ancient villages) will be among the things that will stand the test of time.

A museum is a concentration and distillation of culture, more specifically a part of culture illustrated with artefacts and ritualized. A boom in museums means application of different means and a creative approach to the museum as an institution, its tasks and displays. So far, there has been no adequate explanation for the boom. It is worth investigating why the museum, a place for maintaining and presenting history, a means for building up a nation and a state, also the creator and keeper of national identity in the case of a minority or colonized people (Appadurai 1995) has become a subject of extensive reforming. The museum of today is more and more an educational centre and performer, a syncretic establishment. Exhibitions have long since become not the distant past, professional art elite and high class but are now centred on the profession and phenomena presenting social groups important today, the lifestyle of the middle and lower class. The keyword exotic is become extinct with globalisation, being replaced by I, the personality.

What has the boom of museums meant in the Estonian case? There are no new museums of revolutionary architecture as yet. The first Estonian science centre AHHAA, unlike the Melbourne Museum (art museums are the most valued and relatively conservative) is not planned as multi-functional and will include no museum part. Every year, new museums are opened offering jobs and living in different rural regions and are often surrounded by a developing economic network. In the case of existing museum rooms, new and innovative solutions have been used, additional space and enterprising activities have allowed for the opening of new workshops and shops. Internal design solutions by professionals have offered surprising results even in buildings that were not built to be museums. A good example of this is the renewed permanent exhibition of the Estonian National Museum, the concept by Piret Õunapuu and Vaike Reemann, carried out by the company Laika, Belka ja Strelka. Temporary exhibitions and their publication are also increasingly more made in cooperation of the curator and artists with unique style.

Estonian museums are relatively well integrated with local schools and some of them also with patterns of internal and external tourism. Local museums are central institutions helping to value local history and cultural heroes by organizing topical conferences and lecture series, taking part in local days, organizing cultural hikes, etc. For ten years, Tartu Old Observatory has organized gatherings for astronomy amateurs, in addition to the monthly lectures and free observation nights (for further information see www.obs.ee). The widening of the action scope is also indicated by the fact that, similarly to museums elsewhere, it is possible to hold a traditional Estonian wedding at some museums (cf. the corresponding Slovenian custom in Kõiva & Kuperjanov 2004, 2005) as well as the increased celebration of calendar holidays. Many Estonian museums have their own collection of legends and folklore used for self-presentation.

In this form, and in this context, museums are an important cultural and political capital.

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