

NAMU: Making National Museums
Helsinki meeting 27-28 November 2006

Dear Colleagues

Many of you has already been contacted by me and asked about your interest to participate in the work with the NAMU program. Others I now approach for the first time, hopefully with success. The shape of the program is an extensive workshop program financed by Marie Curie, but aiming to a proper collaborative research program in one or two years time. The first planning meeting/workshop will be hosted by the Renvall institute of Helsinki University on the 27-28th of November and is made possible by grants from Nordforsk and Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. Hence some effort on making an inventory of the Nordic academic field and also to plan collaboration beyond the Marie Curie program.

In order to make a rapid launch of the first workshop already due at 26-28 February 2006, plan the whole program in more detail and not least get a good discussion of the intellectual challenges inherent in both this program and a development to a proper comparative project I would like to invite both the NAMU steering committee, the advisory board and a good selection of scholars to help sharpen the tools and give input on the selection of key-note speakers, format of the workshops etc. A document presenting NAMU as well as some of the arguments for the intellectual workshop is presented in the attached document and present the basis for the discussion.

Arrivals on Sunday evening or Monday morning, at your convenience.

Please answer within a week to Magdalena Hillström (magdalena.hillstrom@isak.liu.se) if and for what days you would like to participate. Please book flights on your own to be reimbursed later, using affordable flights by Blue1, SAS or others at your convenience. If you rather let us handle the travel, let Magdalena know so. We will together with Derek Fewster in Helsinki make reservations of hotels. If you cannot participate in Helsinki please answer so we can go one to invite other scholars to this first preparatory workshop in a series of events.

Schedule 27/11

9-12 Meeting only with the Steering Committee of Namu

12-13 Lunch

13-17 Meeting with the advisory board enhanced by invited guests on the intellectual challenges and comparative design, with focus on Workshop I.

19 Dinner

28/11

9-13 Discussions on the design of future workshops of NAMU and beyond.

13-14 Lunch

14-16 Visit at National museum

Departure Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning.

Preliminary content of the workshop programme 27/11-28/11

The two-day workshop aims at dealing with theoretical, methodological and organisational issues in establishing a collaboratory programme. While the issues will be discussed thematically, an introductory presentations relevant to the themes will be given by the participating scholars. Ample of time for discussion on the issues will be useful, since the number of participants will be quite small. Issues 1-2 deals with the four comparative questions presented in the outline, and 3-4 with methodology and organisation of comparative research. 5 ties back the questions back to the NAMU program of six workshops during 2007-2008.

1. Setting the frames: what constitutes a national museum?

How are we to understand and define the national museum concept? Can both self-definitions and structural functional features be pursued at the same time and how are these to be delineated more precisely?

2. What methodologies are relevant and efficient to map and compare performance narratives and assess their role in the public sphere?

A focus on narrative aspects of museum performance needs to be carefully considered not to be stranded on neither abstract functions of inclusions and exclusions or detailed iteration of exhibitions.

3. The structure of knowledge, the possibility for comparison and the need for research

Where is the most relevant research pursued regarding the two epochs and the three comparative questions presented above?

4. Comparing territories and epochs: the working of museum culture and public history

Concluding the workshop we should be in a better position to assess how the comparative scheme and ambition should be designed to capture different museum traditions and different nation-building processes to lay the foundation for the most fruitful comparison. A plan for how the selection of countries and collaborative partners best be pursued should also be outlined. An operational organisation of the furthering of the program will be outlined, ranging from network contacts to more ambitious plans of coordination on national, EU and international level.

5. The NAMU workshops: six events in the Marie Curie Context 2007-2008

A discussion of how the format and design of these best further the goals of the program.

The intention is to go further from this platform, both in depth to stimulate research where lack of knowledge hinders analyses, and to widen the comparative approach beyond the European horizon, since the museum culture has been expanded to both colonies and is rapidly reinterpreted in a post-colonial setting facing rapid change.