Europe’s national museums have been at the centre of on-going nation making processes since their creation. These museums have successfully negotiated conflicts and contradictions to obtain the support of citizens and taxpayers, domestic and foreign visitors, scientists, art connoisseurs, and policy makers. National Museums and Nation-building in Europe 1750–2010 assesses the national museum as a manifestation of cultural and political desires, rather than a straightforward representation of the historical facts of a nation.

Examining the degree to which national museums have created models and representations of nations, their past, present and future, this book proceeds to assess the consequences of such attempts. Revealing how different types of nations and states – former empires, monarchies, republics, pre-modern, modern or post-imperial entities – deploy and prioritise different types of museums in their making, it constitutes the first comprehensive and comparative perspective on national museums in Europe and their intricate relationship to the making of nations and states.

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NATIONAL MUSEUMS AND NATION-BUILDING IN EUROPE 1750–2010
Mobilization and legitimacy, continuity and change

Edited by Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius
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In addition to this particular book other main publications were produced within the Eunamus programme and are listed below.


Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius
Sweden and Britain, May 2014
INTRODUCTION

Making museums and nations

Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius

National Museums and Nation-building in Europe 1750–2010 is placed at the heart of the intersection where the socio-political and the scientific logics meet in the context of nation-building, representing and legitimizing nations in and through national museums. National museums and their representations have therefore within a world of nations become an international standard of nation-claiming and nation-branding. We approach the study of national museums as a historic and contemporary process of institutionalized negotiations of dominant values that constitute a basis for national communities and dynamic state formations. The national museum is thus a knowledge-based socio-political institution, with corresponding collections and displays that ultimately claim, articulate and represent dominant national values and myths. National Museums and Nation-building in Europe 1750–2010 will respond to basic questions about the establishment and dynamics of national museums by investigating the trajectory, context and timing of their establishment. It will also answer more complex questions. To what extent and with what consequences do the trajectory and timing of nation- and state-making processes interact with museum initiatives, creations, societal challenges and justifications? Our comparative approach constitutes a first comprehensive analysis of national museums in Europe and their intricate relationship to nation- and state-making. It will highlight relevant historical developments and socio-political contexts, museum typologies, frameworks and models that provide a unique point of departure and empirical substance, shedding light on the role of national museums in the nation-building process. This volume reveals how national museums are tied to nations and deciphers their role in the nation-building process. Through a series of arguments, this book maps how different types of museums (based on art, archaeology, culture, history and ethnography) are deployed by different types of nations and states – empires, monarchies, republics, pre-modern, modern or post-imperial entities. National museums
create models and representations of nations – their past, present and future – the consequences of which may also be assessed.

**Analysing museum- and nation-building**

The national museums of Europe have, since their creation, been at the centre of nation-making and nation-building processes. The demand for national museums followed in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars with the creation of national states, a process in which nations justified the autonomy of the state on the basis of being distinctive, unique and necessitated by historical logic. As a result, regional differences within nations were ‘rearranged’ to fit new modes of affiliations and loyalties that, in turn, created new forms of negotiating science, politics and social conditions. National museums have thus developed into significant institutions turning empirical evidence into consolidating perceptions of membership, ultimately related to nationhood and citizenship. The role of nations, within a system of other nations, makes some periods and contexts especially conducive to museum-building. In the contemporary world, national museums continue to engage communities sufficiently to obtain support of scientists, art connoisseurs, citizens and taxpayers, policy makers and visitors alike, and will attempt to negotiate conflicts and contradictions relating to ongoing nation-building processes. Today, one of many challenges is found in the tension between the articulation of nationalist fervour, on the one hand, and accelerating diversity and globalization on the other. National museums need therefore to be analysed as manifestations of cultural and political desires, rather than straightforward representations of historical or national ‘facts’.

National values and notions of a ‘Western civilization’ are expressed in the national museum culture in Europe, including the values of the Enlightenment, which results in a variety of interpretations about universal, national and transnational phenomena, values, loyalties and identifications. The implications of such interpretations have taken different forms and have had different consequences depending on the formation of transnational ideas. For example, in the Scandinavian context, the cultural reconstruction of *Norden* (referring to Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland) as a complex and collected *lieux de mémoire* played a significant role in the production of a peaceful environment in the midst of a political climate of rival nationalisms that might have encouraged revenge and/or territorial reacquisitions. Other transnational loyalties and ambitions – of different ages – include Pan-Slavism, Scandinavianism, notions of Central Europe or of a British identity on the British Isles and have in various ways attempted to negotiate tensions with varying degrees of success. It is within such contexts, among many others, that our study of national museums – as means of representing national communalities, pride and high culture – provide us with illuminating and comparative data on processes of nationalization in Europe. In a comparative light, the trajectories of European national museums provide us with accounts of what we may call ‘generalized values’ of the museum-nation-state nexus and of the interactions between these entities. Exploring this nexus and its associated interactions
facilitates an analysis of national museums as constituent components of *negotiated cultural constitutions*. Nations express their yearning for a proud and legitimate past and, while balancing perceived needs for continuity with a reality of challenges to this alleged unity, an agenda for facing the future is set. Some national museums are both more relevant and successful than others in meeting such challenges, with important implications for the ability to negotiate needs for integration with dynamism and change.

**The Eunamus research programme**

The aim of the Eunamus research programme, funded by the European Commission, was to illuminate gaps in existing research by adding a comparative perspective to the study of national museums. This book draws on such groundbreaking research conducted within several large-scale research projects. *The European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen* (Eunamus 2010–13) collected empirical material of national museums in the European countries, dealing with long-time national trajectories and the negotiation of conflicts. Contemporary political utopias were thus mapped in addition to following the experience of visitors and opinions of non-visitors. All reports on the national museums in Europe were published as two Open Access volumes (www.ep.liu.se/eunamus/outcomes.html), which we hope will provide useful material for further research. This material has yielded multidimensional comparisons with this book as a first synthesized conclusion of the longitudinal interaction between national museums, nations and states. This volume will mainly use material from the Eunamus research programme and compare actors and interests that established national museum institutions on the national agenda across Europe (Aronsson and Elgenius 2011). We will take advantage of related research and publications instigated by Eunamus, such as the intricacies of grand narratives (Poulot et al. 2012a, 2012b); national museum policymaking (Eilertsen and Amundsen 2012); modes of multimodal communications museums (Knell et al. 2012) and studies of visitors’ experiences assessed with the help of survey and focus groups (Bounia et al. 2012; Dodd et al. 2012). Summaries are also available for the informed public, which may provide a point of departure and a visual companion to this book (Aronsson et al. 2012).

**Outline**

*National Museums and Nation-building in Europe 1750–2010* is divided into three analytical sections providing chronological and thematically structured presentations of our vast material: (1) the historical development of national museums in Europe from 1750 to 2012 (Stefan Berger, Péter Apor and Tony Bennett), (2) the roles played by different types of museums (Dominique Poulot and Ilaria Porciani), and (3) conclusions from the comparative analyses exploring the roles of national museums in nation-building (Gabriella Elgenius and Peter Aronsson).
Part I Establishing national museums 1750–2012

The first analysis relates to the formative stages of national museum-building from 1750 to contemporary times up to 2012. The history of this development is linked to the pursuits of establishing empirical cultural sciences and nation-building in times of the competing loyalties and rivalling movements of regionalism, nationalism and imperialism. We commence with national museums in the long established European states and what may be called ‘pre-modern’ nations, followed by the analysis of the national museums in Europe’s ‘modern’ and ‘post-imperial’ nations. National museums are also analysed within a framework of nations-empires-religions, from the late eighteenth century to the present time.

Stefan Berger’s chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the development of national museums in Europe between 1750 and 1914, with special emphasis on the pioneering role of new nation-states in the construction of model national museums in Europe. This chapter demonstrates how nations conducted energetic and vigorous campaigns to nationalize their newly founded states and how they became engaged in civic education with the help of their national museums. A range of thematic museums, from army to colonial museums, and from archaeological to folk museums, pursued nationalizing strategies together with heavy engagement in the geopolitical issues of borderlands. By the First World War, many European societies had been thoroughly nationalized and regions were transformed into building blocks of national discourses. Although many national museums were founded in the nineteenth century, the national discourse was one among many spatialized discourses at a time full of tensions between regionalism, nationalism and imperialism. Berger’s chapter locates the development of national museums within the context of the manifold tensions produced within such spatial identity discourses and explores the growth of national museums in this first period of museum-making and concludes with a survey of the transnational elements of national museums and the processes of cultural transfer at play as they were constructed, revised, designed and reimagined.

Péter Apor’s chapter analyses the transformations of national museums in Europe following the two world wars, a period marked by the dissolution of composite states and empires after 1918, the formation of new national states and identities, the establishment of socialist dictatorships, the collapse of the colonial system during the 1950s and 1960s and the Cold War. Apor’s chapter addresses intersected themes, such as the reshaping of territorial-regional patterns, changes in Eastern Europe negotiating rivalling teleological universalist and communist metanarratives alongside the growth of national identities, the commemoration of victims after the Second World War, the acknowledgement of increased diversity with a resurgence of neo-traditionalist ethnic identities in the 1990s, and the visualization of post-colonial and post-imperial representations. By these developments national museums were transformed into windows through which communities were represented to the world and thus moved from being sites of knowledge. Throughout the twentieth century, sensitivity to loss and guilt also developed among many elites and communities.
Mourning the loss of human lives in the two world wars, the Holocaust, together with the loss of territory, reshaped the visual and ideological outlook of national museums and contributed to new museums being established. Nations whose pre-war structures and frontiers remained intact (Britain, France and Spain) had to address the remodelled international context reflected in war and military museums, whereas the new nation-states and elites in the Baltic republics, Poland and Czechoslovakia refashioned existing museums to represent new national aspirations. Many nations had to rethink identities to reflect new or redrawn states (Germany, Hungary, Austria, Romania and Turkey).

Tony Bennett’s chapter offers a synoptic account of various relational aspects between national museums, nations, empires and religions over the whole period dealt with in this book. Bennett raises significant questions about the dynamics of national museums and reinforces the arguments of transnationalism made by Berger. Bennett also explores the religious dimension, invoking secular governance, as has been recently witnessed in multi-faith policies. He notes that the relations between museums and nations have proved unstable with collections renegotiated and on the move, representing changing communities and policies. The unstable aspect of national museums applies to the restructuring of the European empires and of the relation between Europe and its former colonies. Taking Michel Foucault’s general assertion of the transformation from Christian pastoral into secular governmental authority as a starting point, Bennett locates the national museum at a central point of its transformation, set in a network of other infrastructures of communication. National museums become spaces – churches – for the new order of secular governance, incurring a civic economy of faults and merits. Recently we have witnessed a dramatic growth in the intensity of identifying community ties and religious belonging. This poses a challenge for museums to renegotiate their capacity to represent political community across borders. Increasing diaspora movements have lent an increasingly visible religious dimension to cultural diversity. In short, the imagined community of the nation has never completely displaced the transnational imagination of communities of different religions.

Part II Museum typologies: art and cultural history museums

A cluster of museums can be found in each nation’s capital performing a concerted or contributing role under the overall label of ‘national museum’. It is clear that museums of the types that have been significant for the nations in Europe reflect, in one way or other, the nation-building process. A maritime museum was vital to Portugal, whereas an ethnographic museum was deemed essential for the Slovak national movement, and, similarly, the technological museum of Munich played a role in defining German modernity. In the two chapters of the second part of this volume, two dominant museum types, the art museum and the cultural historical museum and their thematic contribution to nationhood will be analysed.
Dominique Poulot’s analysis of the changing roles of art museums provides a European typology of these. The first defining feature of the art museum is the provenance of art collections, royal or princely, ecclesiastic or private collections donated to the state. The transfer of ownership from private collectors to the state contributed to the establishment and development of the national museum tradition in Europe. Artwork related to universal ideas of beauty, as defined by the Western classic canon, gave way in the late nineteenth century to ideas of schools that celebrated the nation (and in some cases its regions). As such, art schools formed artists as well as educated citizens, and they competed with other museums and nations for the progress and success of their national culture, taste and erudition. The art museums in London, Vienna, Berlin and Paris became temples of national identity and simultaneously lent themselves to cosmopolitan trends. In this process the curators played a significant role with regard to the acquisition, display and interpretation of objects within the art museum framework. Art museums differ significantly from historical museums in their interplay with private galleries and with the market, where they feed ideas about values that are transformed into capital both culturally and financially. The significance of national art museums in the accommodation of universal ideas has generated global interest. On the one hand, post-colonial issues, international art fairs, celebrations of jubilees and other manifestations are becoming increasingly important in the marking of cultural and international relationships, while, on the other hand, aesthetic norms of contemporary art travel the globe as a rejuvenated lingua franca for cultural competition.

Ilaria Porciani’s chapter addresses another museum archetype: the cultural history museum. Porciani deals with representations of the past and with how the present interacts with the representation of the past. This chapter analyses the ways in which national museums react to the drastic changes in the perception of time and the various regimes of historicity. History museums put the past on display, often shifting from a longue durée perspective to a retour de l’événement located at the crossroads of research, the production of master narratives to the popularization of public history – shifting between history and memory. Using the perspective of German Verfassungsgeschichte, Porciani explores the governance pursued by museums as zones of contact and multi-voiced and decentralized approaches as being more relevant today. Porciani’s chapter, which describes the transformations of cultural history museums during the past two centuries with a particular focus on the past 25 years, comprises traditional nationalistic initiatives in Europe as well as the recent dynamic establishment of post-colonial museums in North America and Australia. It also offers an analysis of Italy and of the recreation of Italian history in honour of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Italian nation-state. Opposing trends are shown to be at work, including the move away from rigid understandings of the monolithic notion of national identity towards more complex approaches, interactions and cross-fertilizations. However, evidence from Eastern and Western Europe tells us that monolithic nationalism is a recurrent format of cultural historical museums that has been mobilized in today’s recession-hit Europe.
Part III Conclusions and national museum analysis

The capacity of national museums to interact with nation- and state-making is analysed in the final part of this volume. The editors of National Museums and Nation-building in Europe 1750–2010 explore national museums as national symbols and as cultural constitutions. National museums are analysed as national symbols that justify national boundaries and sustain notions of oneness by claiming through their existence that the nation is distinct from and yet on a par with other national museums (and nations). Thus, a survey of the first national museums in Europe has much to tell us about the strategic nation-building process and the role that national museums play in the politics of recognition. In the final chapter, national museums are analysed as cultural constitutions, intertwined with identity politics and nation-building. The variation in performance, it is argued, shows the plasticity of cultural institutions, some of which work more efficiently than others in complementing the more formal political constitution of each nation-state.

Gabriella Elgenius’ chapter provides a novel context for the analysis of national museums as national symbols and as part of the nexus of symbolism through which nations authenticate boundaries. National symbols are often misunderstood to be decorative but represent at their core imaginations and interpretations of the nation’s origin, its past, present and future. National museums are no exception and constitute therefore strategic markers of nation- and/or state-building engaged in nation-building at pivotal times. The inaugurations of the first national museums are of particular relevance here. With the alleged crisis of and recent debates relating to a British identity, it is noted with caution that the first national museum in Europe was the British Museum that opened in 1759, while one of the more recent museums, established by the Sami nation (Ajtte, Mountain and Sámi Museum), was inaugurated as late as 1989. To add complexity, the national museums of Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have remained closed for significant periods since 1995. National museums are uniquely placed to tell us about nation-building and its imaginations and illuminate, through collections and displays, that which Anderson (1991) identified as ‘imagined’ or Hobsbawm an ‘invented tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). They, moreover, highlight the crucial role of high culture in nation-building (Gellner 1983). A comparative framework is useful here and the inaugurations of the first national museum are analysed within the socio-political context and the ‘politics of home’ (Duyvendak 2011). Placing national museums in the context of other national symbols, often introduced with independence after the break-up of empires, makes it possible to draw attention to the strategic undertakings of nation-building, identity-politics and the patterns of symbolism with the help of the symbolic regimes approach that highlight the complexity of nations and the ongoing nature of nation-building (Elgenius 2011).

Peter Aronsson’s concluding chapter analyses national museums as cultural constitutions. Aronsson argues that national museums are integral to cultural constitutions, as a more plastic but also more stable cousin of the rather rigid political constitution. Their general historical context is understood in terms of cultural
negotiations feeding the argument that national museums constitute a central component of the cultural constitution that helps to inform and shape the political constitution. This chapter places the argument in between a narrow critical account of the power of the museum as a formal heritage institution, at the one end, and the apologetic defence of the institution at the other. In terms of a conceptual framing, cultural constitutions are constructed by the proximity to, difference from and interaction with the constructions of political constitutions. This chapter assesses the actual role of European museums and highlights the formative moments in museum history. National museums vary in the degree in which they contribute actively to the formation of nation-states, help stabilize policymaking by negotiating dilemmas and conflicts or fail to play an instrumental role due to incapacity. Two major ideal types of national museum representations can be identified: the Symphony and the open Concert Hall. The relative success is not, however, related to the format, but rather to the relevance and interaction made possible in relation to contemporary challenges through the cultural constitution. Three impact scenarios towards well-functioning cultural institutions and contexts in which national museums have the potential of contributing substantially through their legitimacy and negotiating capacity are as follows: (1) promoting cultures of tolerance, creativity and integration, (2) promoting higher levels of trust between civil society and state or (3) negotiating a negative impact with the failure of the cultural constitution that would lead to the failure of the state.

References

