Preface

In the last few years the politics of collection, representation and curation of Sámi heritage in museums has received increased attention and is now engendering new opportunities and challenges for both museum theory and practice. In order to reflect critically on these processes, an international research conference entitled *Rethinking Sámi Cultures in Museums* was held at the University of Oslo in November 2014. This initiative was a response to a felt need to bring academics and museum professionals in contact to build upon and valorize research on Sámi collections and displays conducted in museums, colleges and universities throughout the Sápmi area and beyond. The conference attracted more than 60 participants and 17 papers were presented on topics such as: Early modern/colonial relations; collections and repatriation; Sámi materialities; representation, ethics and identity; and Sámi exhibitions. Five keynote speeches were held, by Christina Kreps, United States, Gunlög Fur, Sweden, Birgitta Fossum, Norway, Stein R. Mathisen, Norway, and Henrik Olsen, Norway. A compendium with the abstracts of the papers, a list of the participants and other information is available online.¹ We hope that this initiative will support the development of a network among scholars and museum professionals in this area.

The idea behind this issue of the journal *Nordisk Museologi/Nordic Museology* is to uphold and further develop the ethos of the conference by providing another arena for the expression of different perspectives on the politics of representation of Sámi cultures in museums, in both a historical and a contemporary perspective, and by fostering multidisciplinary dialogue. Thus, the issue includes both revised and extended versions of some of the contributions to the conference, as well as additional articles and reports on ongoing or recent projects.

We are happy to open this issue with a contribution from one of the keynote speakers, Christina Kreps. In her article, Kreps uses a range of international studies from recent decades to discuss the development of the handling of indigenous heritage in majority museums. The progressive museological practices not only have placed Western standards in a critical perspective, but have also generated new knowledge about, and respect for, indigenous definitions, categorizations and ways of using and curating heritage. Kreps contribution acts as backdrop for the other articles in the issue, placing the Sámi in an international context, as one of the world's indigenous peoples.

The representation of Sámi in museum exhibitions is a common theme

linking some of the articles. In her critical study of the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm, Marte Spangen shows how the Sámi have disappeared from the prehistoric and Viking exhibitions there. For fear of talking about ethnic categorizations and national identifications at a time when there were no nations, early Sámi history has been left without a trace in the Museum's presentations. Vidar Fagerheim Kalsås article is a critical comparison of how the Sámi and the Romani peoples are represented in two Norwegian museum exhibitions. While Romani history may be a relatively new topic for the heritage sector, the history of the Sámi has for long been both displayed and collected – a difference that has been reflected both in the design and in the content of the two exhibitions. One aspect of the Sámi history of being on show is Cathrine Baglo's discussion of the impact of the touring "living exhibitions" in the 1800s. She argues that these phenomena provided models for the dominant mode of display in the following folk museums – the reconstructed setting. This is indeed a seldom acknowledged legacy.

Another recurring theme in the articles featuring in this issue are exhibitions of art, handicraft and Sámi *duodji*, as expressions of ethnic identity and as political tools. Anne Heith analyses a Sámi art project, as a part of the Swedish city Umeå's year as the Cultural Capital of Europe 2014. Heith's focus is on two of the participating artists, each with a political agenda, taking issue with racial biology and the exploitation of natural resources in Sápmi, respectively. Charis Gullickson and Herminia Wei-Hsin Din dedicate their article to the exhibition *Sámi Stories: Art and Identity of an Arctic People*, produced in Norway and later travelling to New York and Alaska, thereby making a Sámi contribution to a circumpolar indigenous context.

As a consequence of the national assimilation policies, many Sámi have experienced a loss of language, cultural heritage, and corresponding identities. With the help of museums, initiatives have been taken to counter these effects – not least locally. In her article, Liisa-Rávná Finbog focuses on a Norwegian area and its people, where traditional knowledge and heritage work are used to support the creation of a modern local Marke-Sámi identity. Similarly, Kajsa Kuoljok, in her project report, describes how Ájtte, the Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum in Jokkmokk, worked together with young Sámi in order to find ways to integrate the Sámi language in everyday contexts of the city. Sámi cultural heritage is not only about traditions of the past, it is also contemporary and urban.

As the final contribution to the Sámi theme of this issue, a current Swedish research project is presented by Jonas M. Nordin and Carl-Gösta Ojala. The project explores the collecting of Sámi material culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Critical issues will be raised concerning colonial histories and relations in Sápmi as well as the rights to Sámi cultural heritage and its management today and in the future.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue offer a range of fresh perspectives, both theoretical and curatorial, on the representation and curation of Sámi cultural heritage in museums. We feel confident that they will help to enhance the understanding of the roles that museums have played and can play in the (re)definition, interpretation, and representation of Sámi cultures. In this way, this special issue also aims to contribute to a broader debate on Sámi cultural heritage and museums. At the conference in Oslo, this emerged as a much needed and critically important factor in the development of future museological research, practice, and policy pertaining to Sámi cultural heritage.

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1. <http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/center/museum-studies/events/2014/conferences/representing-and-collecting-sami-cultures-in-museums.html>

As the spelling of *Sami* – *Sámi* – *Saami* varies in different countries and contexts, we have decided to retain the authors' chosen style of writing. Also the original denominations of exhibitions, artworks, institutions, place names, etc. are kept.