Forord

Forordet er skrevet af redaktionsmedlemmet for Island, Sigurjon Baldur Hafsteinsson, der har været medredaktør på hele numret.

Ane Hejlskov Larsen

In his keynote presentation at the ICOM/CECA 2009 annual conference in Reykjavík, Iceland, George E. Hein argued that around the turn of the 20th century, political leaders in the US, as well as scholars such as the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, envisioned a democratic role for museums. Museums were perceived as places of significant potential for providing their guests with opportunities for learning about the benefits of the democratic ideal in human societies. Even if we are far removed from the early 20th century, Hein's presentation – and his published work, such as *Learning in the Museum* (1998) – reminds us about the importance of looking at contemporary ideas and programmes in museum education from both historical and theoretical vantage points. Historically, the pendulum of museum education has swung in relation to cultural and societal forces that have determined how and to whom its pedagogical activities should be addressed. By examining examples of such activities, we learn what is possible – and what can fail, at times utterly and without exception. Theoretical questions in relation to museum education, on the other hand, inquire into issues such as museum officials' beliefs concerning the nature, process and outcomes of patron education. Hein advocates that theoretical questions must be factored into the museum's procedures if it wishes to be considered a contemporary institution. Today, Hein's contribution to the field of museum education sticks out even more insistently than ever, as museums have increasingly come under pressure to introduce numerical parameters (such as the number of

FORORD

2

children, the number of visitors, the number of programs, the number of sources of external funding, etc.) that measure and justify their success as public institutions. Such schemes, however, can cloud fundamental questions about quality, as well as concerning the question of whether museums and museum educators are truly achieving the goal of improving people's lives – the ultimate goal of museums, as Stephen Weil and others have argued.

The articles in this issue of *Nordisk Museologi* are devoted to the exploration of museum practices in relation to museum education. They offer historical and theoretical inquiries and interventions from Scandinavian perspectives. The articles are as diverse in subject as they are in approach. Their scope, however, reveals the depth of the subject, and at the same time showcases the vibrant research activities currently taking place within what we can call Scandinavian museology. The articles by Hellvik, Ravn, Leino and Strese contribute an additional theme within this issue, and in doing so touch upon a chord that is challenging for museums as well as society at large. The conception of cultural heritage as 'alive' will inevitably sound familiar to museum practitioners who work at zoos and botanical gardens. But what are its implications for other kinds of museum practices, such as art and cultural programming and curation? The questions raised in these articles complement the other work selected from this area of museology, including that of Pere Alberch (museum potential, biodiversity inventories) and Robert B. Janes (material culture equivalent to bio-diversity). This issue is bound to generate interesting debates in the field for years to come.

Sigurjon Baldur Hafsteinsson