A HUNDRED TEXTS ON NORDIC MUSEUMS IN 'MUSEUM'

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In 1948 UNESCO and ICOM started to publish «Museum». During 47 years this journal has been an important source of information to the world of museums and museology. The bibliography presented here gives access to 100 articles by Nordic authors in the period 1948 – 1994.

In July 1948 the first issue of *Museum* was presented by UNESCO, introduced as a successor of *Museion* (published before World War II by the League of Nations). A board of editors counted 29 distinguished museum professionals, also including two from the Nordic countries; Thorsten Althin and Bengt Thordeman, both of them from Stockholm, Sweden.

The first issue was a double issue (1-2/1948) and devoted to French Museums, since the first international museum conference after World War II – the first General Conference of ICOM – should take place in Paris in that year.

The first Nordic article was published by Gösta Selling in the second issue: «Educational Work in Swedish Museums» (3-4/1948). However the whole next issue (1949/1) is devoted to Sweden, – which according to the editor, has «one of the most interesting museum systems in the world»:

Museum people from the Americas and from other European countries, visiting Sweden have found

remarkable a number of aspects of museums development there. The recent rapid growth of the museums, their modern museographical techniques and general high standards, their influence on the population at large (70 per cent of the population is reported to visit museums in Sweden annually!) and the role they fulfil in the ordinary educational system of the country, have attracted attention (*Museum* 1949/1: 4).

Bengt Thordeman, head of the Medieval Department of the recently opened *Museum of National Antiquities* in Stockholm, wrote the introduction, giving both the history of Swedish museums and a nation-wide presentation, including the 700 open-air museums. Accompanied by 126 (!) illustrations this issue of *Museum* really made Sweden known among museum professionals all over the world.

It is easy to discover at least one important reason to the strong position of Swedish museums in the 1940's. During those years most European countries were deeply disturbed by World War II, Sweden had stayed outside the war, – and

- 204 in fact during these years realised a big museum programme introduced by the National Antiquary Sigurd Curman (in position 1923-1946).

Sweden was in several contexts presented in *Museum* as the most advanced museum country in Europe. In 1960 Sweden was also the first Nordic country to host the ICOM General Conference.

Hence it is not surprising that almost half the number of articles from the Nordic countries are written by Swedes. The exact figures for the period 1948-1994 are:

Denmark 26 articles
Finland 10 articles
Iceland 1 article
Norway 20 articles
Sweden 43 articles

Some other observations are also possible. The difference between Sweden and the other Nordic countries is not only quantitative; more or less half of the articles from Denmark, Finland and Norway are monographs of the author's museum. However, less than 20% of the articles written by the Swedish authors are this kind of monographs. They are more engaged in different general museum subjects.

One of these subjects is the environmental issues. The important United Nations Conference on the Human Environment took place in Stockholm in 1972. *Museum* published a double-issue (1973/1-2) on *Museums and Environment*. The Swede Kjell Engström, at that time President of the *International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources*, wrote the editorial. Here we can find one famous article of Georges Henri Rivière, introducing the *ecomuseum*, Bengt

Hubendick writes on *Natural history museums* and Bent Jørgensen on *The new Zoological Museum, Copenhagen*. Jørgensen's article can also be seen as an introduction to the ICOM General Conference in Copenhagen 1974.

Another observation is on how the articles are spread over the years. The Nordic articles as a whole are distributed like this:

1948-1959: 15
1960-1969: 10
1970-1979: 23
1980-1989: 35
1990-1994: 17

Until 1986 the Swedes dominate the representation from the Nordic countries. From then on the picture changes, and there are more Danish and Norwegian articles published than Swedish. The reason for this is probably that the Danish art historian Lise Skjøth entered the editorial board during 1985.

A very direct result from the energy Lise Skjøth put into the journal was the issue *Nordic museums today*, published in 1988 (1988/4). In her editorial introduction she gives the following reason:

The five Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – possess common roots. Our way of thinking is 'Nordic' and, with the exception of Finnish, our languages are so closely related that we manage to understand one another with a minimum of effort. Of course, there are significant differences between our countries, for example in term of defence or economic policy; but it is not entirely incorrect to view us as constituting a sort of European province (*Museum* 1988/4: 168).

The issue contains 16 articles covering many important aspects of the Nordic

museum reality, and should be considered an important source to anybody looking for information on Nordic museums. Thor Magnussen, director of the *National Museum of Iceland*, writes the only article from Iceland published in *Museum*; from the other four countries there are 4-5 articles from each one. What is typical Nordic and not presented in this issue, however, is the Sami museums. The Sami people living across the boarders between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia in the north have in the 1970s and 80s established their own museum system. Some of the Sami topics are covered in the article by Raili Huopainen (Finland) on *the Provincial Museum of Lapland*, – in the issue *Museums of the Far North* (*Museum* 1994/2), following the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Peoples – 1993.

Lise Skjøth also has succeeded in realising another of her ideas in the editorial board: an issue has been dedicated to *Focus on Women* (*Museum* 1991/3). This issue was produced in a way never tried before: all the authors (seventeen women and one man!) were invited to a workshop in Copenhagen in June 1990, after a year and a half of preparations. The workshop concluded in a strategy of action to strengthen equality and how to improve the status of women in museums (1991/3: 125). A major question discussed was also: What about special women's museums? One of the answers given to this question in the issue is by Jette Sandahl, curator of the *Women's Museum of Denmark*.

The bibliography of the Nordic articles in *Museum* that follows below counts 100 articles and should be almost a complete one. I suppose the total number of articles

published in *Museum* during almost 50 years should be between 2.500 and 3.000. The Nordic contribution in this perspective is less than 5%. However, as the reading of *Museum* shows, at certain moments and in connection with specific topics, the Nordic influences have been significant. Not least in bringing *new issues* on the agenda which are no doubt also linked to subjects the Nordic countries on the highest level of UNESCO and United Nations want to promote.

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