

Publika museirum

Materialiseringar av demokratiska ideal på Statens Historiska Museum 1943-2013

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Abstract

Public Museum Spaces. Materializations of Democratic Ideals in the Swedish History Museum 1943–2013

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate how public spaces in the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm have materialized in relation to cultural policy objectives and ideals of a democratic and inclusive museum. The investigated time period spans from 1943 to 2013. The Swedish History Museum is a state-run archaeological museum, where norms and values are expressed through various governmental policy- and control documents. Hence, entering the museum also means entering a symbolic national space. The fact that the museum has been politically regulated throughout the studied period makes it illustrative of changing democratic public ideals in the 20th century.

Unlike other similar studies, the empirical focus is not on exhibitions, but on other public spaces that visitors encounter; the entrance, the shop, children's spaces and the courtyard. These spaces are less invisible in the museum hierarchy. At the same time, they are often central spaces to visitors. The museum building is not as fixed as it might appear to be. Drawing on ideas from Bruno Latour and Doreen Massey – and their perspectives on space, materiality and power – I explore how the social and spatial changes of the museum affect each other. Efforts have continuously been made to alter these public spaces, and the outlines and uses have repeatedly changed.

By combining archival materials, interviews and observations, I investigate how democratic ideals have been negotiated in material forms, and what kind of audiences/visitors these spaces have conceptualized over time. Linking different kinds of sources, that speak from various levels and positions, has been an analytically important method.

The analysis describes the museum as a meaning producing network that materially embody different, and sometimes conflicting ideologies. The public spaces have been shaped by tensions; between education versus pleasure, collecting versus showing, and by the dichotomy between culture and commerce. What is communicated through various materialities and inscriptions in the shop, the entrance, and the spaces for children sometimes contradict perspectives produced in exhibitions and educational programmes. Hierarchies between professional positions and knowledges propagate as social extensions towards the visitors, and sometimes, reproduce structural hierarchies. Museum functions literally "takes place", depending on how they are valued and assigned meaning. The museum has increasingly included children, while also becoming a space for commerce. Various, and sometimes incompatible ideals on equality and inclusion have been implemented, simultaneously. At the same time, the public spaces carry unique spatial qualities, which can benefit inclusion. Concluding, the dissertation stresses that the entrance, the shop, the children spaces and other public spaces perceived as "peripheral" need to be viewed as central, not as superficial services or add-ons to the "real" museum experience, i.e. the exhibition.

Keywords: *Museum, public space, democracy, cultural policy, materiality, network, translation, gender, power-relations, children's spaces, museum shop, entrance.*

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