**Hip Heritage and Heritage Pasts**

**Re-Fashioning Institutional Culture**

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**Abstract:**

When museums of cultural heritage are no longer defined in terms of their collections and cultural environments, how much may they change before they cease to be museums and what do they become then? This article focuses on two institutions of Swedish cultural heritage, The American Swedish Institute (ASI) in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Kulturen in Lund that have spent the first part of the 21st century thinking and rethinking what heritage under their auspices can be in contemporary society. Although these institution operate in two national contexts, they have many similarities in organization, financial models and operations. In doing this, the article problematizes the manner in which these museums as elements of history and identity are being re-thought, re-framed and re-fashioned in the cultural and economic context of the museum market in which they operate. In line with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the article views heritage making as a metacultural practice (1998, 2004, 2007, 2017) that is in flux and asks: how is heritage affected when it is increasingly framed as a marketable commodity? How are new and developing ways of thinking about heritage re-fashioning museum audiences? As part of the analysis the article discusses and problematizes the impact of official Swedish and American cultural politics as well as the manner in ASI and Kulturen are intensively and consciously striving to position themselves in the growing and competitive market of what we call *hip heritage*.

*Heritage: The Changing Meaning of a Concept*  
The manner in which the past is legitimized and reframed in the present has been discussed both within the museum sector and the academy for decades. Cultural heritage has been used to legitimate and support different forms of collective identity and allegiances linked to nations, places, sites, families, artifacts, rituals and traditions from the past. Although the concept of heritage has been used in Scandinavia to discuss culture and heritage preservation at least since the late nineteenth century, the academic study of heritage and the development of heritage as an analytical concept to discuss how the past is mobilized in the present is a fairly recent phenomenon.

This study thus builds on ethnographic scholarship that approaches cultural heritage as a practice in the making, in vernacular settings as well as in and by institutions (Aronsson & Gradén 2013, p.12; Gradén 2003; Gradén & O’Dell 2018). This approach builds further on the understanding of heritage, where cultural heritage is perceived as a process created in the present, draw on the past in order to shape the future (Lowenthal 1985 & 1996, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Klein 2000; Siikala 2000). Since its booming years of the 1990s, heritage studies has grown into an established field, which engages scholars of various disciplines and heritage sites alike. As the edited volume *Rethinking Heritage* from 2003 readily states, heritage engages widely because it concerns both experts and practitioners, each with their own conception of what heritage entails (Peckham 2003). Often understandings of heritage and the expectations of what heritage can and cannot do, cause friction. This is particularly true in museum settings. Heritage practices perform values, articulate priorities, and ensue soft power, where the museum as institution becomes a key tool (Nye 2004). Thus, the emerging critical perspectives on heritage in the last decade can be seen as a response to the compartmentalizing of heritage in the wake of its professionalization. By compartmentalized we mean the shaping of collections and subject matter such as global heritage, national, regional, local as well as breakdowns ethnic identity, migration, art, religion, social estates etc., and the ways in which these museums were founded and how they were are organized. Further complexity is added with the division of tangible, intangible heritage, cultural and natural heritage. In addition, as we shall discuss below, new professions develop to steward and operationalize such compartmentalized heritage e.g. development, HR, digital specialists, in addition to collections, education, and programming.

Museum practitioner and scholar Candance Tangorra Matelic has argued, that there is a need for museums to engage with their communities, but this requires a shift in thinking, a new approach which, because of the museum’s heritage as institution, may be “downright scary - in part because they challenge traditional professional standards, roles, and practices” (Matelic 2017, p. 356). In the American and European context, scholars and museum professionals writing on the relationship between museums and communities in the twenty first century have pointed out that groups which had been previously invisible in society in general and in museums in particular no longer accept that status. Consequently, new groups and communities are increasingly claiming space in museums. As a response to demands for increased visibility and diversity, publicly financed museums have been held accountable to a broader society (Bennett 1995, Dewhurst, Hall and Seeman 2017). However, in Sweden as well as in the US, museums’ efforts to be inclusive have often resulted in an additive model, where new social and cultural groups are recognized in token temporary exhibitions and programs without making any marks in collections, core exhibitions, or long term community engagement. Meanwhile, many social groups in the United States have followed in the footsteps of previous immigrant and activist groups and created museums of their own, adding to the rich cultural and artistic fabric of the United States, and claiming their space in the world of museum and heritage politics. This has not occured to the same extent in Sweden.

In this context, what should be noted is that, the power of heritage is intimately linked to curatorial selection, a self conscious selection of what at the particular time in history is considered highly valued objects and practices. Moreover, heritage making in the museum context is tied to economic considerations that are rarely acknowledged in the literature. Heritage making is no neutral act and museums no neutral place for such acts to happen. Understood as such, museums become arenas where heritage politics is played out (Siikala, Klein 2000, Hafstein 2004). Heritage making and heritage politics, of which museums are part, are explicitly or implicitly embedded in forms of economic thinking that are affected by the (competing) political values of the time.

***The Museums***

The analysis that follows is based upon two ethnographically based research projects that have focused on how heritage institutions that feature historic houses are affected by processes of commercialization. The first project was a brief eight week long pilot studying investigating two museums located in the United States featuring Swedish and Nordic Heritage: The Nordic Heritage Museum (NHM) in Seattle, and the American Swedish Institute (ASI) in Minneapolis. At the time of the study, both museums were undergoing dramatic developmental changes and processes of professionalization. ASI had recently completed the development of a new state of the art multi-million dollar facility (called the Nelson Cultural Center) to complement the century old Turnblad Mansion which had been the heart of the museum for the better part of the 20th century. NHM, for its part, was in the process of moving from a one hundred year school building that it had converted in the 1980s into a museum, to a new purpose built 45 million dollar ultra-modern facility.

The second study (in answer to a call for research studying on the effects processes of commercialization were having on Swedish environments of heritage) was a two year research project financed by the Swedish Heritage Board that focused on four museums in Sweden that featured historic houses as well as collections. These were: Skokloster Castle, a 17th century castle and museum located in the countryside outside of Stockholm, Hallwyl Palace, a turn of the 20th century museum located in central Stockholm, Kulturen, an open air museum featuring dozens of buildings from the 18th and 19th centuries; and Kulturens Östarp, featuring an 18th century Scanian farmhouse, and agricultural fields that were being cultivated via techniques from the 18th century. In the following, for reasons of space and time, we will more closely present only ASI and Kulturen, which share the organizational form and forms of ownership. They both have a board of trustees, operate as foundations with official and private stakeholders. They both engage volunteers. We are building the analysis on the ethnographic studies we have conducted there, but we underline here, that the conclusions we draw in this paper, correspond tightly with results we have come to in relation to the other three museums we have also studied.

***The American Swedish Institute***

In public documentation such as the website and annual report, the American Swedish Institute (ASI) describes itself as a museum, historic house and cultural center located on Park Avenue in the Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The museum complex includes the Swan Turnblad Mansion, completed in 1910, and the adjoining Nelson Cultural Center, completed in 2012.

Today, ASI’s mission is to serve “as a gathering place for all people to share experiences around themes of culture, migration, the environment and the arts, informed by enduring links to Sweden”.[[1]](#footnote-1) In working toward their mission ASI leadership asks:

**What** responsibility does ASI have to shed light on the contemporary values of the Nordic Countries while still celebrating the stories of the past?

**How** can ASI balance the ‘old’ with the ‘new’ so that each is accessible for diverse audiences?

When addressing these questions in practice ASI offers to the public exhibitions from Sweden and the Nordic region, programming for youth and family, and in recent years with the new Nelson Cultural Center, ASI has expanded its programmatic offerings to include concerts, outdoor festivals, performing arts, and food events. The museum's restaurant, FIKA, was named "Best In Minnesota" by the Minneapolis newspaper *Star Tribune* in 2014 for its New Nordic cuisine.

The story of the organization starts when Swan Turnblad (Sven Johan Olofsson was born in 1861 i Tubbemåla, Småland and died in 1933 in Minneapolis), a Swedish immigrant to the United States who had amassed great wealth as the founder of the Swedish language newspaper, *Svenska Posten*, used his resources to construct a large three story castle-like home for his family: the Turnblad Mansion on affluent Park Avenue. However, he did not live in the mansion for very long. In fact, historians who have studied Swan Turnblad’s and the American Swedish Institutes history, are unsure if the mansion was ever used by the Turnblads as a permanent home.

In 1929, formal papers were filed with the State of Minnesota that converted the Turnblad residence into *The American Institute of Swedish Art, Literature, and Science*. An initial intent was to use the facility to promote Swedish high-culture of music, art, literature, and science. However, soon after the mansion was turned into an Institute, it began to change to accommodate various community clubs and programs. The changing community needs were reflected in the changes of the interior. In the early 1930s rooms on the first floor were covered with wallboard. Polychromic ceilings were painted white. In 1949, the name was changed to the *American Swedish Institute*. Between 1960 and 1980s, membership grew from 975 in 1959 to 7,000 in 1981. This occurred with the aid of a collaboration with Scandinavian Airlines in which members could get reduced ticket prices for trips to Scandinavia. Due to this growth, there was a need for space to arrange meetings and activities. Thus, the lower level of the mansion was turned into an auditorium and a working kitchen with a kaffestuga. By the 1980s, changes in the mansion reflected the appreciation of traditional Swedish folkways in the Midwest, and kurbits painter Bengt Engman from Sweden was commissioned to depict in kurbits tradition the migration Sweden to Minnesota with “to Amerika” in the auditorium. Simultaneously at this time, membership began to stagnate and the median age of ASI’s members proceeded to rise. This in turn caused concern amongst ASI’s leadership. And raised the question of how to rejuvenate the institute before its membership died-off, and its economy collapsed. As the institute’s director explained:

ASI was experiencing a gradual decline in membership, and interest. Attendance was never terribly robust, no matter what we tried to do. Whatever the exhibition or special program was. It was pretty much flat. Attendance was primarily, historically comprised of 75 % members and 25 % non-members. And that just never changed. And with the declining membership, that’s ¾ of your attendees, you know.

In order to avoid a further downward spiral a decision was made to update the institute with a new multi-million dollar wing, now called “The Nelson Cultural Center” in recognition of a major donation. The new addition not only hosts the Osher gallery (to recognize the donor who enabled the building of the gallery) but even a state of the art auditorium, several meeting rooms, the Wallenberg Library, the restaurant FIKA and a gift shop. Temporary art and design exhibitions were brought in to fill the gallery spaces, and programming was re-oriented towards younger groups of professionals and a families. With joy in his voice, ASI’s director explained the consequences these changes had, “Our revenue from admissions has gone up from 20,000 a year to over 300,000 a year!”

The development of the gallery brought with it a renewed interest in the museum, which the leadership acknowledge was spurred in part by the edgy and and modern architectural form of the building, but which is even reinforced by investments made in developing and fortifying a number of professional categories at the museum including, human resources, pedagogy, marketing, and retail management. Indeed while curatorial staff complained about shrinking resources, and the museum’s leadership acknowledged that all too little is known about the museum’s founder, Swan Turnblad, the history of the mansion itself, and even the artifacts in the collection, leadership enthusiastically point to the growing roll the programing department has in attracting visitors by working in a trend sensitive manner with hot issues of the day. As a board member explained, “As contemporary cultural issues come up, the mansion itself tells a different story that responds to people’s interest at that time.” Seen from this perspective a lack of knowledge about the mansion and its collections is only of secondary importance as long as visitors numbers are up and target groups keep returning.

In order to replace the ageing core members, and meet external demands to be more relevant to the community ASI set out to build a core audience that was financially robust, culturally interested, socially active, and well connected. In order to do this, ASI leadership focused its efforts on targeting five audience categories whom they defined as:

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| ***Heritage Brokers*:**  •Interested in Swedish, Nordic, Scandinavian-American cultures  •Swedish nationals living in or visiting U.S. | ***Visitors with Children:***  • Seek out fun, inviting activities to do as a family or as a group visiting with children |
| ***Socially Active Adults:***  • Frequent museum galleries, exhibitions and openings  • Go out often  • Socially active, network-minded, A-listers  • Mix of nightlife, museum, theatre and performance art | ***Makers****:*  • Craft enthusiasts – actively pursue art & craft activities as a hobby or profession  • Heritage craft and contemporary craft  • Foodies and co-ops |
| ***Neighborhood:***  • Mix of residents and employed in Phillips and Whittier  • Early childhood education and whole student learning  • Bike By, But Never Been  • Mix of New Immigrant / Elder Care / Social Service / Community Arts  • Active community members | |

Emphasizing the significance the changing role of programing has had, a well endowed senior board member reflected on the museum’s expanded work with programing:

Our children’s programing is held in the mansion, and usually includes some exploration of the mansion. The kids have a scavenger hunt, they have to go find something. So that families and children are becoming familiar with the mansion as a place, not as an austere museum where you can’t touch anything, but as a place that is alive and is possible to explore. And I think that has been very cool.

Members of the curatorial department, however, had a different understanding of the situation. When we spoke with them a few days earlier, without prompting, they took up the same issue and gave it a very different interpretation. From their perspective they recounted with horror and disbelief coming to the museum to find throngs of children running around, in, over and through exhibitions and artifacts, moving items around looking for hidden clues, or “treasures” on their treasure hunt. And while one curator appreciated the programing staffs’ attempt to engage the public, he shook his head and recounted the time he found a group of children under programing supervision playing dodgeball on the third floor of the mansion. Sculptures on exhibition had been so badly battered and damaged by the balls being thrown around that they had to be removed from the exhibition, and he concludes, “I mean, what were they thinking?!”.

Another staff member reflected upon some of the effects of changes made at the Turnblad mansion to accommodate the expansion.

So we closed for six months (to open the Nelson Cultural Center) and a lot of the clubs and groups were older and they needed a place to meet, so there were places that were set up but then they came back and the prices had gone up and age wise they started to dwindle so a lot of them just dismantled. But then a lot of the older people, they didn’t come back and they didn’t feel that welcome either. (with locks on cupboards in the kaffestuga and price tags on every meeting room). Because it was this idea that all we have is younger people here. But younger people don’t have any money and they may come for the big events but not for day-to-day volunteer work and programs. And becoming members...they might not even live here in six months. They may go to another city! So why would they ever put any ties down, and engage in a membership. But there are all these older people. *This was their second house*!

The opening up of the Turnblad Mansion to new activities and groups was a step towards audience development and reaching new groups. As museums are no longer measured by their traditional resources such as collections, facilities, endowments and staff, but increasingly by the external value they are able to create for communities at large, thinking of new ways to get people in the door became a key issue. Demands emanating from funding agencies on the museum to be increasingly relevant to a wider audience and more engaging for children and underserved audiences, the augmented programmatic efforts present a challenge for the Turnblad Mansion as they do for all Historic Landmarks more generally.

Whereas leadership and curatorial presents divergent perspectives on how to use the Turnbland Mansion, staff in education and programming find themselves caught in the middle, when trying to measure up to the anticipated needs of the new audience groups. As one manager in education explained:

I think for us it really comes down to our mission. To serve as a gathering place for all people. It doesn’t say to preserve, interpret and share the history of *the Turnblad Mansion.* /.../ So it is not, this is the product (choice of words reveals that ASI see education as a commodity) we have now, let’s figure out which audience we are going to target. For instance, when we are looking at youth and family. Kids that come here, do they really need to know about the Turnblad mansion. No, they don’t. They don’t have a concept of time. It doesn’t fit into where they are at developmentally. Things that they are interested in: shapes, colors, stories and play. So what we do in that case is we start with the child and we say what does the child need and then we build up from there.

When the education manager highlights ASIs mission to serve as a gathering place for all people, and being sensitive to what services the community needs, ASI is featured as being among the growing numbers of museums that engage in learning how to make their organizations more meaningful to the communities they serve, and to be more inclusive of families with children and underserved communities. Continuing our discussion, the education manager emphasized an awareness that the goals of curatorial and programing departments did not always align:

Curatorial and I recently had a conversation about birthday parties because birthday parties are something that happen here at ASI. How is it that you are gonna get families involved and engaged in your institution? It is not necessarily because they want to come and learn about the Turnblads. But what can we do to get them in the door that makes them happy, and that shows this place as the vibrant spot they want it to be? And then we have to work together to make sure we are being respectful to the historic mansion. So I would say it is a very complex web that we are looking at when looking at programs and how we best meet the needs of the audiences that we have identified. Can we serve everyone at the same time? Absolutely not! Nor do I think we need to. But what we need to do is to be very practical and realistic about things.

Involvement, inclusion, serving audiences needs, engaging families as well as local citizens in the museum’s Minneapolis neighborhood, these were all things to which the education manager returned. However, there was also an astute awareness of *separation*, of working to include different groups at different times with different programs. The ambition was not necessarily to bring people together. As the educational manager emphasized “Can we serve everyone at the same time? Absolutely not! Nor do I think we need to...” Keeping folks segregated was in a sense a more sure way of keeping them happy, feeling comfortable and coming back to the institute. Dodge ball in the morning, cocktails in the evening, with a temporary exhibition of a local Somali artist somewhere in between - this might sound like a smug way of summarizing the situation, but not entirely off the mark either. It also falls in line with previous research that points out that most people do not go to museums to have their world view challenged, but to have them confirmed (Smith 2015, pp. 459-484). The segregation of audiences at ASI can be seen as an extension of this phenomenon.

***Kulturen***

In 1882 Georg Karlin founded Kulturen (together with a number of associates) as a collection of artifacts which was folded in under the auspices of the Cultural Historic Association for Southern Sweden that same year. The association, under Karlin’s leadership then proceeded to accumulate a number of Southern Swedish culturally historic buildings, and in 1892 Kulturen, opened its doors as one of the world’s first open air museum: opening just a year after Skansen in Stockholm.

Over the years that followed, Karlin and his colleagues continued to collect culturally historic buildings as well as culturally historic artifacts from around the world. At present, Kulturen is responsible for operating eight different museums and destinations. It is organized as a membership organization with multiple stakeholders financing it that include regional and municipal sources, as well as donations from private persons, membership fees, and income from admissions fees. In their annual report from 2016 (the latest published) they state that they see their goals as striving to strengthen democracy, collect and preserve cultural heritage, enrichen and move peoples through the spread of knowledge, and to advance national, regional and municipal cultural policies (Verksamhetsberättelse 2016:7).

At a time when museums speak of user centric design and personalization as part of a democratization process, they even find themselves under demands to collect demographic data to prove that they are succeeding to move in this direction. However, the Swedish museums we have worked with all wish that they knew their audience better, where the visitors live, their gender, age and so on. They find the automated visitors statistics too blunt, regardless what system of number counting they use: cameras, people counters, sensitive mats or manual counting. Everyone asks for more qualitative research, which is done periodically through exit surveys. But these surveys are expensive, as they cost both time and money.

As one member of the leadership at Kulturen said:

I would like to know how many and who visited a new temporary exhibition, that was rather costly to produce. What kind of audience did we gain? Was it worth the price we paid in terms of loan fees, design and staff resources to adapt the exhibition? How many visitors did we have from Lund, from the countryside, from abroad? Who did we not reach with this exhibition?

When speaking with the leadership team they repeatedly came back to temporary exhibitions and programs being their strategy to increase the number of people who visit the museum, and to build and broaden the audience, which would then translate into financial support for the organization through admissions and ticket sales. Recent temporary exhibitions have included an exhibition on clothing from Jane Austen films, designer Gudrun Sjödén as a female entrepreneur, Pettsson & Findus as fictional characters, and exhibition on breasts to raise awareness of breast cancer. All of these were trend sensitive, but not directly in touch with the cultural historic ambitions of the museum or its collections.

Kulturen, like ASI (and most museums) is trying to find ways to attract new and larger audiences. Unlike ASI, Kulturen does not have the possibility to even entertain the idea of building an architecturally stunning flagship facility, but the idea of doing so would collide directly with their cultural historic ambitions and preservation goals. For Kulturen the objective is to continually maintain an historically accurate cultural and ecological environment around each house within the museum’s park area. The challenge they face is to preserve and hone the museum’s collections, while attracting larger publics and striving to protect their historic houses and the landscape in which they are located from the strains of large numbers of people walking through them. Rather than building new facilities, their budget is oriented towards preserving what they have, and as a member of the leadership team at Kulturen explained, this requires not only economic resources, but even long term planning:

The up keep of the buildings doesn’t follow the financial year. Rather, it’s a continuous process, so you have think in ways that assure you have the resources needed for the whole journey. So that it’s not stop and go. That requires long term planning. That’s what is needed, a long-term perspective. We recently received some very disappointing news from the municipality of Lund. They are diminishing their financial support for the maintenance of our buildings in 2018 by two million crowns. That is a huge amount, and then what we have left is only to keep things going, and that is pretty tough news to receive.

The problem which this manager points to concerns the economy of colliding time-scales, and the difficulties involved when a museum is dependent upon the priorities made by external actors such as regional and municipal governments. As it turns out, 2018 is an election year, and the case may be that the problems facing a museum’s upkeep seem less compelling to a local government that wants to win an election. Kulturen strives to maintain a long-term preservation plan, but short-term priority changes on the part of the municipality of Lund are difficult to foresee, and even more difficult to counter in the short-term.

The potential for these types of shifts to occur, however, make it seem even more pressing for the museum to understand the effects temporary exhibitions have in drawing in larger publics. A loss of 2 million crowns from the city of Lund, might be compensated by increasing attendance by 20,000 paying visitors. But is the development of new temporary exhibitions an effective way of doing this, or are there other alternatives that would involve new programming strategies (as was the route that ASI chose to work with) that would be better? And what would the conservation and preservation costs be for an open air museum of cultural history like Kulturen be if an additional 20,000 paying visitors began to stream through the treadmills in addition to the 185,000 visitors who came in 2016 (of whom approximately 30,000 were paying visitors)?

**When the numbers count, is it enough to count visitors?**

In their annual report, Kulturen delineates its mission (at least in part) as striving to strengthen democracy, but the principals at work here are similar to those at ASI, as the museum often finds itself creating specific exhibitions and programs for specific but different groups. It is hard to think how a museum could work otherwise, when their goal is in part to fulfill the expectations of their stakeholders, in this case the region and municipality being very important stakeholders, and also partial financiers of museum operations.

An important factor to reflect upon is how Swedish museums, such as Kulturen, are bound to report their achievements, also at a national level (which is then scrutinized by their regional and municipal financers). Behind the exhibitions, planning activities, and practices of strategy development, hidden far from the public’s eye lies an annual report to the Authority of Cultural Analysis/Myndigheten för Kulturanalys (MYKA). In reporting to MYKA museums are required to report numbers of visitors both to the museum and to the grounds, numbers of adults and children (up to age 19) and school classes as well as and the visitors regional/national distribution.

The orientation of this reporting is primarily directed towards gaining information from Sweden’s national museums, all but two (The museum of world culture, Gothenburg and Moderna, Malmö) are located in Stockholm. While the government cultural policy underscores a need to reinforce democratic processes, and processes of inclusion, there is no measure of how different groups are *brought together or separated* at events, no measure of how the local population is included in the museums’ development or planning, and no measure of how citizens tried to become engaged in a museum’s activities. Democratic engagement, as measured, is left to the number of people entering the museum, which is a sympathetic goal for Stockholm museums to count their success, but a less sympathetic way of measuring the activities of smaller regional, municipal and private museums, whose livelihood is contingent upon activities that inclusively pull in the local population. Here project’s which Kulturen has engaged in, such as a large scale documentation project of the influx of refugees during the fall of 2015 and spring of 2016, provide museum personel with a sense of achievement, but has little opportunity for others to appreciate it as an achievement in the statistical report filed with MYKA at the end of the year .

At ASI they do measure other criteria than just the number of people coming through the treadmill. In addition to measuring the number of visitors to the grounds and to the exhibitions, they even break the numbers down into their five target categories to see how they are performing at that level. Separating people into categories and approaching them as strategic target groups is not without problems of its own. However, when compared to the situation in Sweden it does raise question as to how different museums and museum contexts can learn from one another, and how these factors can affect the cultural and economic feasibility of cultural institutions in different contexts.

**Paying attention to community needs pays off**

Along with the strategic efforts to widen Kulturens audience has come a new way of thinking about the role education and programming can have for the museum, equal to (or overshadowing) the role that research, collections, preservation used to have. Folklife museums with extensive open air facilities have unique opportunities to engage with community members and strengthening the relationship with them. At Kulturen, the division between departments resembles the divisions at ASI, each department works hard to fulfill their expectations, but just as at ASI there is an emerging dialogue not only about how to identify audience groups and serving their needs, but also about how staff can work together to accommodate these needs. As one manager in the facilities department explained.

We would like to get programs and education interested in preservation, and they have showed some interest lately, but it has not been spontaneous. They are more focussed on programs for children and youth, and have not engaged with preservation of buildings and grounds.

However, we are in a privileged position as we have craftsmen with experience in education. Thanks to them we have embarked on educational efforts. Previously, the craftsmen have been more focussed on results, on completing the work on the buildings and grounds. In the last few years, we have seen an increased interest among all of our craftsmen in sharing with the public what they do and why.

Historic preservation is an entry point into other stories and other questions. It is not only about building techniques and timber jointing but it spurs dialogue. How should I say this...I think the threshold of engaging in dialogue is lower when you actually meet people. Particularly people who are not avid museum visitors may find it easier to approach a craftsman or archeologist working on the grounds, than to seek out a curator to ask questions.

The manager speaks about an increased interest among Kulturens visitors to learn about the hands-on experience that the preservation of grounds and buildings entail. He reflects upon the fact that visitors who are not avid museum goers appear less apprehensive to engage in conversation with staff working on a building or on the grounds, than to approach a curator. In describing audience interaction, the manager implicitly articulates traditional divisions between departments and staff roles within a museum. There is an assumption that education works primarily with programs, children and school groups, curatorial and facilities with collections, building and grounds, where the curators are recognized as theoretical and conservators and craftsmen as crafts oriented. Most apparent in his comments, however, is how important staff presence is for visitors, and the degree to which staff proximity can translate into engagement. In an age of digitalization of museum collections and increasingly streamlined numbers of staff who are knowledgeable about collections and grounds, such presence is scarce. Kulturen, however, finds itself potentially positioned to tap into the opportunity it has. This is facilitated by a recognition they have that local audiences (as well as their general audience) show an increased interest in crafts and preservation techniques. A staff-visitor dialogue appears to be a resource to be tapped into if Kulturen wish to increase audience development through community engagement.

Kulturen has fewer employees today than in the 1980s and 1990s, a shift that at first glance looks as a reduction of staff, but actually means a higher number of full time employees and fewer employees employed by the hour (timmisar), student internships, short term contracts and on subsidized work-placement positions (*arbetsmarknadsåtgärder*), which were prevalent in the 1990s. This shift is particularly evident in areas of programming and collections. This is a shift towards an increased professionalization of its staff which is also reflected in the process of moving towards the employment of more staff with masters and doctoral degrees. This latter phenomenon is a process which is a countermovement and dramatically different than that which we have witnessed among the other museums we have studied.

***The Changing Story - from heritage to hip heritage***

It is well known that maintaining financial health at non profit organizations can be challenging. Perhaps that’s why museums that are more dependent on support from their immediate community (less than tourists) are more apt to rely on collaboration with others in order to stretch their resources further. In the United States, seeking funding from municipalities, city government and state level organizations has become increasingly challenging for museums in the last decade, donations from citizens and members play a larger role in the U.S. than in Europe. As a recent article in the New York Times has shown, although museums have witnessed that philanthropists have stepped up, for example in supporting new purpose built facilities and events, they feel pressured to seek out other avenues for fulfilling expectations from their stakeholders (Fabrikant, 2016, p. F22’). Collaboration and community engagement has become highly prioritized, so also among the museums we have worked with. As Tangora Matelic argues, community engagement means ongoing involvement in planning, governance, making decisions, resource acquisitions, resource allocation, and delivering of exhibitions and programs. It is a long-term strategy (2017:359).

At ASI, Kulturen, and the other museums we have studied, there are two contrary processes at work. On the one hand we see the increased professionalization of museum staff (Gradén & O’Dell 2017 & 2018), but on the other hand, we see a diminishing ability for museums to generate new knowledge and perspectives on their collections. An exception has occurred at Kulturen in relation to their need to preserve some of the houses under their auspices. This is a context in which emergency efforts to save the buildings in question, were even converted into an opportunity to learn more about the buildings they were preserving and communicate that knowledge (as well as exhibiting the hands on knowledge of traditional craftsmanship) to the visiting public. The work in progress was packaged as a program, which in turn was facilitated by an awareness of the growing interest that understandings of traditional forms of craftsmanship has at present. This trend helped turn emergency preservation actions, into an exhibition and programatic opportunity.

In this article we have explored and problematized the manner in which elements of history and identity are being re-thought, re-framed and re-fashioned in the cultural and economic context of the museum market in which they operate. Whereas the article views heritage making as a metacultural practice (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007) that is in flux and demonstrates how heritage changes the relationship to its objects, practices, and practitioners, it also explore what happens to heritage practice when increasingly framed as a marketable commodity. There are numerous forces propelling this change, including the challenging global economy and the demands on museums to serve an increasingly diverse and multicultural society. In the wake of these external demands and measures, museums focus on audience development and visitors numbers while fighting their own fear of being perceived a “mossy museums”. Short term solutions include the tapping into trends and traveling exhibitions, and searching for blockbusters.

The processes at work here are not unique to the two museums we have discussed in this text, but are even ongoing in the other museums we have studied, and can be gleaned in between the lines of the ongoing public debates over what heritage museums are and should be. The processes we are pointing to represent an intensification in the manner in which museums are trying to play to broader audiences through the production of what we call hip heritage. Hip heritage is a term we use to indicate a disposition to heritage that increasingly focuses upon its potential as a fashionable commodity with a broadly marketable aura, rather than its potential as an identity marker with strong ties to the past of a particular and delineable group of people.

The article demonstrates how new ways of heritage making strategically re-fashion not only the museums but also the museum audiences, and how such forging of select but broad audiences is financially driven. Thus the impact of official Swedish and American cultural politics, that advocate an inclusive audience development, proves to have its limitations. When ASI is consciously striving to be cool, chic, and fashionable as they position themselves in the growing and competitive market of what we call *hip heritage, this position requires forging a cool, chic and fashionable audience*. Similar to strategies used by art museums to foster community, the museum becomes a place to see and be seen at, to recognize and be recognized. While heritage sites, in their effort to serve a wide audience, customize and compartmentalize exhibits, programs, and events to serve specific groups - one at the time, this is an act of dividing visitors up into segregated groups, similar to what Richard Florida describes as segregation in the wake of bringing together creative class through the act of gentrification (ref here). The museum becomes a place where events and activities comes with customized content as well as price tags - where Kulturtanter meets kulturtanter, hipsters meet hipsters, families meet families, young active adults meet young active adults, history nerds meet history nerds and *und so weiter*. By working strategically with target groups for audience development, the museums, in their efforts to be inclusive to increase visitors numbers, simultaneously characterize, organize, divide, and separate communities, an act that demonstrates whose heritage matters when numbers count and whose heritage is left out.

Keywords: Hip Heritage, Heritage Making, Cultural Economy, Museums, Curatorial Agency, Class, Migration, Sweden, Swedish-America.

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**Newspapers**

<http://www.startribune.com/best-juicy-lucy-fika-2014-best-of-mn/257987851/>

1. The mission statement has changed over the years, and reflects the changes the organization has gone through. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)