

The Poetics and Politics of the Swedish Model for Contemporary Collecting

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Abstract

Between 1977 and 2011 the Swedish organization Samdok presented a nation-wide programme for contemporary museum collecting, including an increasingly flexible intellectual and methodological framework. This article considers Samdok, its evolving programmes and self-presentations. It suggests that Samdok's self-image was one of inclusive progressiveness, social engagement and equality. It also suggests that they display four major rhetorical shifts: from an economic rationale to a social and cultural approach; from studies of a welfare state based on industrial production to fieldwork concerning the adaptation to a post-industrial economy; from modern to post-modern epistemologies; and finally from engineering collecting to networking collecting, connecting contemporary collecting in Sweden to a transnational professional community. It is suggested that the case of Samdok casts light on the ways in which museums negotiate managerial issues, professional values and needs for inspiration and friendship.

Key Words: museums, contemporary collecting, poetic, politics

Contemporary collecting is an elusive and fuzzy practice attracting museums in areas such as art and, cultural, social and natural history (Ryhs 2011). In their capacity as public institutions, museums answer to a variety of expectations from funders and visitors. Contemporary collecting is thus one among many competing and pressing challenges museums are facing. At regular intervals there are calls for clarifying the objectives in this area (Knell 2004). Some motives are social: museums have not succeeded in representing women, ethnic minorities, and queer or disabled people (Baveystock 2008; Ryhs 2011: 18). Others are cultural: museums have failed to collect popular culture (Ryhs 2011: 18). Yet others are economic: museums need to make collecting more efficient due to scarcity of room for storage and of resources for conservation (Knell 2004; Merritt 2008). In recent years, contemporary collecting has been placed in a broader context of collection management, and several initiatives have assembled the profession to network transnationally (Fåderborg and von Unge 2008; Pettersson et al 2010).

Between 1977 and 2011, the Swedish organization Samdok presented a nation-wide programme for contemporary museum collecting known in international museum circles for its remarkably rational approach (Meijer-van Mensch and van Mensch 2010: 52; Ryhs 2011: 59-63). Sometimes the reception of Samdok has been associated with the ways in which the international community has looked upon the Swedish welfare state and its Swedish model. For many years Sweden was perceived to be an ultramodern state where social issues were approached rationally and progressively. Some looked upon Sweden as a utopia, whereas for others Swedish social engineering represented a dystopia close to a totalitarian state (Andersson and Hilsen 2009). Correspondingly, as a model for collecting, the implementation of the Samdok model appears feasible only in Sweden (Ryhs 2011: 62).

This article is concerned with how Samdok presented itself to funders, members and the international museum community in order to assume the role as a sustainable framework for contemporary collecting. How did Samdok argue its case so as to be able to survive as an organization for more than 30 years? How are these arguments entangled in ways of

envisioning Sweden, the nation which the organization set out to encompass and to aid museums in representing? In other words, the article is concerned with the poetics and politics of Samdok's collecting policies. As suggested by Susan Pearce, collecting is a poetic endeavour, a creative activity and an imaginative effort practiced so as to construct the world as the collector would like it to be. As such, this endeavour is embedded in, and contributes to, the politics of collecting – the value of collecting practices and the recognition of the value of collections (Pearce 1995).¹

The argument that permeates this article is that Samdok survived thanks to the plasticity of the framework. The actual practices of collecting at Swedish cultural historical museums seem to have developed pragmatically, allowing for both local priorities and the ideas of individual fieldworkers (von Unge 2008: 19–26; Purkis in preparation). With regard to contemporary collecting, it was always business as usual at the cultural historical museums. Parallel to this, and with varying degrees of influence, Samdok presented its changing intellectual frameworks as progressive alternatives moving in pace with societal change (Axelsson 2011).

After introducing Samdok's organization, the article starts from the very heart of collecting – the guidelines for the selection process (Pearce 1995: 23) – and traces how these have changed over the years. With regard to sources, the article initially relies on the texts outlining Samdok. Later it draws on the recurrent evaluations the organization initiated, articles in the network's periodical and minutes from meetings of the Samdok council. Finally, the article seeks to understand the dissolution and reinvention of Samdok. The research presented here also relies on interviews with a current staff member at *Nordiska museet* (Sweden's most comprehensive museum for cultural history) and with two former members who now have assumed leading roles in forming a post-Samdok network. An e-mail survey to those active in the pools (Samdok's working groups) in the spring of 2011 indicates the development of Samdok's role for contemporary collecting in recent years.

There is a strong self-evaluative tradition within Samdok, in which earlier texts are referred to and reinterpreted (von Unge 2008: 18). The nature of these self-evaluations makes it difficult keep a distance, something that this author experienced. The evaluations have provided momentum for the activities, and at the same time, sheltered and protected the organization from the criticism of outsiders. These documents have also allowed the organization to have control over its own historiography, including reflections on the ways in which collecting policies have constructed Sweden. This work is, to some extent, continued by the former representatives of Samdok, who have generously given their time to interviews for this article.

The decision to present the article as an investigation of Samdok's poetics and politics, rather than a critical study of contemporary collecting in Sweden per se, reflects these difficulties. A study of Samdok's influence on collections in Sweden would definitely have needed a different set of sources. The situation is even more complex, as the author of this article has roamed in the same academic fields as her interviewees and the university-based researchers who were invited to act as friendly outsiders, scrutinizing how Samdok dealt with topical social concerns and lived up to academic standards.

A formal organization with members all over Sweden

In its final years Samdok presented itself as a network, but up until its demise in 2011 it was a formal organization led by *Nordiska museet*. The organization was a balanced compromise between parallel but contradictory tendencies of decentralization and centralization in Swedish cultural policy. Samdok had about eighty member institutions, most of them county museums, municipal museums and museums with nation-wide responsibilities in designated areas, such as technology, maritime life and military history. Samdok's working groups – the pools – encouraged these museums to take part in a network criss-crossing the surface of the museum-scape. Each pool gathered representatives from institutions all over Sweden around broad thematic areas such as Domestic Life and Leisure; Manufacture; Services; Local and Regional Spheres; Management of Natural Resources; Society and Politics; Sami Life; and Cultural Encounters.

In some respects Samdok appeared to be a dispersed and diffuse organization, difficult to pin down. Each pool continually developed separate guidelines to frame their scopes. They

met separately once or twice a year to plan and discuss on-going investigations. From the start, contemporary studies and collecting were carried out by staff at the member museums, balancing and adjusting their activities to their own museum's means and ends. Their institutions took part in Samdok's activities on a voluntary basis, and therefore some members participated only to a very limited extent. In later years, Samdok's members convened once a year at *Nordiska museet* to discuss common matters.²

The pool system, but also a secretariat at *Nordiska museet* and its activities and publications, formed the stable backdrop for Samdok's inclusive and flexible programme. A former employee at the secretariat commended Samdok as operating by means of democracy, diversity and dialogue (Steen 2004: 202). The secretariat's staff underlines that the network's activities were shaped in accordance with the interests of the member museums and with aims established by a council headed by the director of *Nordiska museet*.³

The secretariat also pulled all the necessary strings to hold Samdok together. It encouraged professional networking and the sharing of experiences by publishing methodological handbooks. It edited a periodical with articles on on-going projects and reports from the pool's meetings. It also administered webpages under *Nordiska museet's* website with documents containing guidelines as well as bibliographies. In addition, the secretariat ran a digital database in which the projects of the member museums' ideally were supposed to be registered.⁴

The secretariat's formative power is particularly discernible in Samdok's presentations of their own activities. Samdok's initial collecting policies were created by working groups of professionals from all types of museums of cultural history and encoded in print by people connected to *Nordiska museet* (Rosander 1977; Nyström and Cedrenius 1981). Eva Silvén began working at the secretariat in 1989. During her time in that position, Samdok adopted a reflective agenda and a number of evaluations were carried out. Silvén was succeeded by Eva Fdgerborg in 2003 who internationalized Samdok. During Fdgerborg's period, collaboration in NORSAM, the Nordic Network for Contemporary Studies and Research at Museums, continued. More importantly, in 2008 she took part in initiating the International Committee for Collecting (COMCOL), an ICOM (International Council of Museums) committee dealing with collection development, including contemporary collecting, collecting in general and de-accessioning policies and restitution cases.⁵ Both Fdgerborg and Silvén are frequently cited in this article, since they have been active in Samdok's presentations of itself.

It has already been pointed out that the recurrent evaluations formed a vital aspect of the poetics and politics of Samdok, displaying how the organization and its collecting policies adapted to changing circumstances. The evaluations were also codifying exercises, reproducing Samdok both externally and internally. When these were published and hence circulated, the members, scattered throughout Sweden at institutions with different aims, could look into the mirror and reflect upon their own practices. In a sense, the evaluations were rituals stimulating consciousness of the organization within itself (Meyerhoff 1982). As such, the evaluations also produced a sense of 'us' in a dispersed organization (Axelsson 2011). The sense of communality was underlined by the perennial reproductions of group photos in Samdok's periodical. These representations point to how Samdok bridged the Swedish museum-scape in collaborative work.

Engineering collecting

The way in which Samdok's originators planned for Swedish museums to collaborate stands out as a way of engineering collecting. The 1977 outline of Samdok's collection programme envisioned that each museum would see itself as a cog in a national collecting machine (Rosander 1977: 1). This outline was the culmination of three years of joint preparations including museums all over Sweden. The main argument behind forming a nation-wide organization for contemporary collecting was economic. The report put a proposition on the table that aimed at optimizing the collections by systematic selection at the lowest possible cost (Rosander 1977: 9). As with many other museums in the western world, Swedish institutions started to take an interest in mass-produced and everyday items (cf. Belk 2001; MacDonald 2011: 91-2). As consumer culture boomed in post-war Sweden, an ideal of disposable household utensils and interior design was embraced by younger generations. Museum people

hence discovered the urgency of taking an interest in twentieth century material culture before it disappeared. At the same time, the storage houses were full of objects from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Rosander 1977: 4-10). Samdok thus offered a way of solving the well-known dilemma of including a diverse material culture, at the same time as there were limits on storage (cf. MacDonald 2011: 92).

At first, material culture was placed at the heart of Samdok. Ideally museums should access objects both from the assembly line and from people's homes. In its entirety, this programme oscillated between the collection of objects and the use of limited ethnographic fieldwork to report on contemporary society. The settings for the objects, such as the home, the work place, and spaces for consumption and public life, were seen as keys to the scientific, museological and pedagogic value of the collected objects.

A list of sampling criteria was introduced as one of several approaches to sampling. Frequency, the typical and the representative were on the list, which, however, also included several forms of qualitative criteria, for example, the possibility of collecting contexts in their entirety, appeal, degree of innovation and variations of form and style. The report emphasizes that the collected objects should tell something essential about society as a whole (Rosander 1977: 14-20).

Outlining the first set of pools

The pool for Domestic Life had already started its activities in 1977, directing its members to the ways in which individual families created and furnished their homes. A whole set of pools then followed after a second programme for contemporary collecting was published in 1981. This programme directed attention to industrial production, the public sector and its associated working life with themes such as textiles; metals; agriculture and forestry; timber and paper; food production; building and construction; trade; communications; services; and public administration (Nyström and Cedrenius 1981).

The second programme placed the human being in working life contexts at the heart of contemporary collecting. It outlined how different strands of commercial and industrial life were to be selected and distributed among Samdok's member museums so as to encourage them to specialize and develop their collections in particular directions. For county and municipal museums, the ideal was for their choice of pool to correspond to the branches of production that characterized the territory for which they were responsible.

The lines of commercial and industrial life were based on a classification of economic activities (SNI – *Svensk näringsgrensindelning*) used by Statistics Sweden. The SNI statistics were compared with data from economic geography on the location, distribution and spatial organization of economic activities across Swedish regions. These two societal planning instruments, which were influenced by social science, were then complemented with the *Outline of Cultural Materials* (OCM), the standard system used by anthropologists, universities and museums for turning human life into cultural data. OCM was seen as a tool not only for categorizing collected items, but also for identifying and filling in, perceived gaps in existing collections (Nyström and Cedrenius 1981; Silvén 2004: 170-172).

The two first programmes outlined two different approaches. The difference between them corresponds to the choice between an approach to contemporary collecting centred on objects versus one centred on people as outlined by Ryhs (2011: 27-35). However, the question of how to reach a balance between collecting everyday material culture and concentration on depicting human contexts, continued to echo within the organization. In the wake of the turn to material cultural studies within ethnology and anthropology in the 1990s, there was a renewed interest in the meaning of objects (von Unge 2008, Silvén-Garnert 1992; Silvén 2004: 183-186; *Samtid & museer* 1998 [22/1]).⁶

In this discussion, the approach to objects was drawn into the politics of contemporary collecting, and it pointed out how Samdok progressively moved forward by repudiating its earlier approaches. For example, in an edited collection from 1992, Eva Silvén (Garnert) argued for the necessity for ethnologists to do more than collect objects for future generations as suggested in the 1977 publication. Instead, she urged Samdok to act in contemporary society utilizing ethnologic knowledge on the role and meaning of objects in everyday life (Silvén-Garnert 1992).

Reconsidering the approach to industrial Sweden

In the 1970s and early 1980s, there was a huge interest in workers and working life among progressive intellectuals (Alzj n 2011). It was a period of social involvement during which museums were asked to become involved in society and politics. Samdok's focus on the industrial production process rather than the produced goods was a way of pushing museums into the spirit of the times. There was thus a particular understanding of 'curatorial activism' in Sweden, directing contemporary collecting to everyday working life rather than to the hotbeds of protests for social and political change, as in the US (cf. Message 2012).

Typically contemporary collecting under the Samdok umbrella in the 1980s was carried out as short-term ethnographic studies at workplaces. They were often published in the format of a 'Samdok report', a hybrid genre of descriptive registration of material settings, structural arrangements, staff categories and work-related tasks, including photos, and sometimes also a scholarly informed analysis in more popular form. The reports were based on field notes, moving images, recordings and transcripts of interviews, photos, and to a limited extent collected objects, stored in the museums for future study. Fieldwork took place at factories, shopping centres and on ferries, as well as in hospitals and other public institutions, thus depicting the everyday life of a wide array of professions (F dgerborg 2006).

The above depiction of activities carried out within the Samdok programme is from one of Samdok's evaluations. Eva F dgerborg's text here refers to the economic historian Maths Isacson's evaluation of Samdok's first ten years. Isacson continued by pointing out how the pool system directed almost all the attention of the member museums to human beings in their capacity as producers of goods and services. He, instead, urged Samdok to step outside working-life and to look at the ways in which consumption and production intersect. Furthermore, he argued that contemporary studies had turned into broad reports on idyllic working life. From his point of view, they needed to deal with conflicts and poor working conditions. What he emphasized most strongly was a clear academic focus for each investigation (Isacson 1990).

Adjusting the intellectual framework

Isacson's quest for more problem-based studies was met with a new pool system that started in 1997. This new programme was collaboratively produced by the members but authored by Eva Silv n(-Garnert). She presented a chain of arguments for modifying the pool system. Firstly, Samdok needed to change in pace with Sweden's transition from an economy based on industrial production to the post-industrial society. Secondly, collecting practices ought to be influenced by university-based research in relevant disciplines. Thirdly, Silv n suggested that contemporary collecting is a means for museums to take an active role in society, to fulfil their democratic responsibilities and to prove their usefulness (Silv n-Garnert 1997: 3-5).

The change in the design of the pool system also responded to the difficulties involved in implementing the initial visions of rational contemporary collecting. Looking at the reports from the pools in Samdok's periodical in the beginning of the 1990s, it is obvious that the pool members struggled to carry out their assignments. Some pools stated that their areas of responsibility included too many fundamentally different obligations; others referred to a lack of funding and support at their institutions. Some pools had very few active members. Several pointed to the challenge of keeping up with societal change, indicating that their respective branches were being drastically restructured (the Metal Pool) or were even almost disappearing altogether (the Textile Pool).⁷

According to Eva Silv n, Samdok's initial organization was sometimes thought of as a form of centralization forced upon the member museums. At the same time the pool system was being re-structured, there was a major discussion within Samdok on whether or not pool membership should be flexible. Many members considered Samdok's initial programmes to be too narrow and coercive.⁸ Other members found it difficult to live up to the perceived demands of doing comprehensive studies of a considerable size. Their museums simply did not have the resources for such projects.⁹

The new programme was more flexible and allowed the members of the pools to also bring up self-defined projects in the Samdok context.¹⁰ The pools were fused into broader themes in order to also include shifts in patterns of consumption. The most decisive change

concerned the way in which a new set of mirrors and a line of social challenges supplemented Samdok's first division of society into branch-specific sectors. The mirrors were related to the identification of dimensions such as ethnicity, gender, social groups, work, lifestyle, generation, consumption, the body and space. To assist the museums in directing their attention to urgent societal issues, a list was provided. It included unemployment and the new poverty, racism and xenophobia, digitization and information technology, environmental issues, regionalism, nationalism, globalism, cultural heritage and tourism. The new outline of the pools was also initiated to include social categories such as children, students, sick-listed or retired people, all of whom had been excluded with Samdok's focus on working life (Silv n-Garnert 1997).

Postmodern epistemologies and realities

Articles in Samdok's periodical over the years and the recurrent evaluations of Samdok's activities make it clear that university-based ethnology provided ideals for how to study contemporary society with a critical approach. More specifically, ethnology provided the tools for presenting Samdok's framework as a continually evolving and progressive approach to contemporary collecting. Swedish ethnology is known for its approach to everyday life and for following international theoretical turns as well as finding new topical empirical fields (Hallberg 2001: 183).

Historically there are three overlapping phases in the discipline's approach: mapping rural cultures, cultural analysis influenced by social anthropology, and post-philosophical analysis under the influence of post-structuralism (Hallberg 2001). In her Samdok historiography, Silv n points to how Samdok was influenced by the anthropological turn taken by a new generation of ethnologists. In the late 1960s and 1970s, they took an interest in contemporary societal issues and distanced themselves from both earlier folkloric romantic strands and a factual approach to objects within the discipline (Silv n 2004). Samdok's initial influences from statistics and societal planning may well have been a means to lead museum-based research even further away from ethnology's folkloristic heritage.

In the 1990s, Samdok instead followed ethnology's shift to post-modern paradigms and started to focus on the aestheticization of everyday life, the experience economy, the flow of cultures and peoples, and the creation of identities and communities. In the new programme the idea of theoretically defined collecting, connected to societal change, supplanted the focus on industry and working life. Recent articles in Samdok's periodical confirm this shift. Several pools have taken interest in consumption practices, for example, by studying IKEA stores (Nyberg and Eivergerd 2006). Others have turned their attention to the ways in which provinces and places develop into attractive landscapes by investing in tourism and small-scale food production (Strandberg-Zerpe and Hansen 2009; Wahss 2008), or digitization (Du Rietz 2009).¹¹

The turn to reflexivity

The most conspicuous post-modern trait in Samdok's evaluations is perhaps the turn to reflexivity. Following the transnational trend with its origins in anthropology and the new museology (cf. Clifford and Marcus 1986; Karp and Lavine 1991; Pearce 1995), Samdok turned its gaze back on itself and its capacity to produce knowledge. The new programme from 1997 was reflected upon and related to the initial programme in the most comprehensive evaluation of Samdok, a research project also published as an edited collection (Silv n and Gudmundsson 2006). It was collaboratively produced by invited researchers providing outsiders' views, while pool members provided the insider's perspective.

Here the material produced in the Samdok framework was discussed in terms of: 'what knowledge of late twentieth-century industrial society has been created in this way, what has been included or marginalised, what methods have been used, and how the activities have changed over time' (Isacson and Silv n 2006: 191).

The reflections highlighted the ways in which Samdok had changed, and focus on how Samdok's ethnographies were determined contextually (choices of fields), institutionally (the traditions and methods the field workers acted within or against), and historically (changing conventions and constraints). Finally, the authors reflected on the politics of representation –

the ways in which the activities within the first 20 years of Samdok's existence contributed to construct a Swedish national identity around the nuclear family (in the pool for Domestic Life), and a white male worker's identity (in the studies of work places) (Isacson and Silv n 2006: 190; 197-199).

In later texts such as this one, the economic argument for collaborating on contemporary collecting has vanished. Instead, Samdok is presented as a critically engaged programme, following an international trend described by Simon Knell as a move to 'the morality of social action' (Knell 2014 in press). Studying workers and their daily life is no longer considered progressive enough.

In the case of Samdok, 'the morality of social action' has taken several, sometimes interwoven, directions. First, there have been strivings to turn collecting into an interface for engaging audiences in emancipatory practices (Isacson and Silv n 2006: 195; Silv n 2010). Secondly, Samdok's Group for Cultural Encounters was formed in 1993. It took a particular interest in cultural diversity, a field engaging museums all over world in the wake of cultural studies, the new museology, and social and cultural policy agendas (cf. Message 2006). Instead of collaborating with communities in collecting objects and narratives, the route for inclusion normally taken by the international museum community, Samdok's Group for Cultural Encounters directed attention to activities such as rituals and to places. This orientation was characterized by a performative approach, focusing on culture in the making in everyday contexts (Magnusson 2006).

Thirdly, Samdok directed attention to Sweden's difficult and dark heritage, to conflicts, power-saturated relations, national traumas and catastrophes in projects such as the touring exhibition *Difficult Matters* (*Svera saker*), initiated at *Nordiska museet* 1999–2000 (Silv n and Bj rklund 2006), and *Warning* (*Varsel*), a project with several related exhibitions all over Sweden 2010–2011 initiated by an art gallery. *Warning* here refers to the experience of having been given notice of being laid off due to shortage of work or the closing down of a plant (Aronsson 2010).

From a mosaic of provinces to the People's Home and beyond

The following section turns to the poetic sides of Samdok's self-presentations, to the ways in Samdok's bridged generations of national imaginaries. Samdok was conceived in the 1970s when the Swedish welfare state began to be challenged economically, socially and politically by the decline of the labour intensive industrial sector and the rise of liberal discourses and deregulation (cf. Andersson and Hilson 2009 based on Streth 1995). There is thus an involuntary parallel between *Nordiska museet*'s founder Artur Hazelius' will to salvage the vanishing rural Sweden, and Samdok's interest in capturing the working life of industrial Sweden in its restructuring. But Samdok deemed the salvage paradigm negative, contrasting last minute rescue actions to planned and carefully selected acts of collecting (Gudmundson and Silv n 2006: 181; Bj rklund and Gustafsson 2006: 27; Johansson and Londo 2006: 31).

By breaking away from the discipline of ethnology's folkloristic heritage and what was deemed as the work of old-fashioned museums, Samdok imagined a different Sweden than Arthur Hazelius did. *Nordiska museet*'s first interior exhibition and the open-air museum Skansen, as well as the county museums, represented Sweden as a mosaic of provinces. As cultural regions associated to folk culture and one's native place of belonging (in Swedish *hembygd*), the provinces played an important role in the nationalization of Sweden, organizing not only the museum-scape, but also providing reading books, literary images and tourist imagery (Aronsson 1995; H ggstr m 2000). *Nordiska museet*'s original displays of folk costumes and interiors introduced visitors to the varieties of provincial traits in Sweden (Hammarlund-Larsson 2004). Likewise, the spatial organisation of *Skansen* produced a miniature model of Sweden with homesteads representing the different provinces (J nnes 2005).

Rather than projecting a mosaic of provinces associated with pre-industrial production, Samdok's initial collecting programmes imagined Sweden as a land of modern industrial production, including a public sector and a domestic life. In this way, Samdok connects to the People's Home (*Folkhemmet*) and the Swedish Model, the twin tropes that have guided both the Swedish political consciousness and the nation's historiography, identity and self-image

(Andersson 2009; Kylhammar 2004: 113-115). They succeeded and complemented the cultural imaginaries of the provinces. As the figure of the home is vital in both, the two generations of guiding national imaginaries share an interest in domestic life

Nordiska museet's contribution to the shaping of national imaginaries is discussed in an edited collection co-edited by the staff at the museum (Hammarlund-Larsson et al. 2004). Samdok is positioned here as both a continuation of, and a piece breaking away from, the images of Sweden produced by earlier collecting and exhibiting practices. In her chapter, in line with the ethnologist Billy Ehn, Silv n proposes that both academics and museum professionals – up until the 1990s – confirmed the positive image of the welfare state. However, she concludes that both university- and museum-based ethnologists thereafter started to question the positive image of the Swedish Model (Silv n 2004: 211-218). The People's Home especially became associated with the loss of individual freedom and excessive social engineering. At the same time, Swedish historians and opinion makers draw attention to the darker sides of social engineering, such as sterilization policies and eugenics (Andersson 2009; Broberg and Roll-Hansen 2005; Runcis 1998; Туд н 2002). It is thus obvious that Samdok's turn to reflexivity and socially responsible collecting not only resonates with international trends in museology and cultural studies; it also reverberates with the questioning of the People's Home and the Swedish Model from within. The national and the international tendencies often coincide, as is seen in the reflexivity found in Samdok's self-evaluation in 2006. This collection moves in tact with scholars influenced by post-colonial perspectives who have pointed to the tendencies to exclusion and segregation within the Swedish Model, despite its strivings for equality and corporate social responsibility (cf. Andersson 2009; Lindberg, Samir and Dahlstedt 2002; de los Reyes 2001).

In contrast to the ways in which Samdok in its final years pinpointed the dark sides of the Swedish welfare state, a recent exhibition at the *Nordiska museet*, *The People's Home apartment (Folkhemsl genheten)* approaches the epoch with nostalgia by focussing on material culture and the improved standard of Swedish everyday life. It alludes to how the interior design of the 1950s now attracts new generations of Swedes, more than the political implications of the period. It could be read as a sign of changing directions at *Nordiska museet*.

The closing of Samdok

Everything points to a development in which local collecting policies and individualized practices based on institutional aims, on the one hand, and external factors, on the other, have gradually replaced the idea of a national programme for contemporary collecting. For example, *Nordiska museet* is currently developing a new programme for collecting based on its profile areas and in close cooperation with the construction of new exhibitions. Digitization, an interactive website and the management of the existing collection have taken priority over contemporary collecting or, in some respects, subsumed it, in cases when contemporary collecting is carried out digitally as part of new exhibitions.¹²

A similar pattern is discernible at the local level. Samdok influenced methodologies for contemporary studies and collecting rather than the areas to be studied. An e-mail survey indicated that rather than being motivated by Samdok's programme, contemporary collecting today is instigated by different types of local initiatives, such as the museum's mission, staff members' interests, access to project funding, or changes in regional industrial life, infrastructure and housing. Contemporary studies are also likely to be directed by reference to public activities, such as the creating of a new exhibition, the need to complement a permanent exhibition or the wish to follow-up an earlier study.¹³

Samdok was formally dissolved when *Nordiska museet* decided to close down the secretariat in 2011.¹⁴ The reasons for closing appeared to be financial and connected to a change of focus at the levels of governmental policy and museum management. *Nordiska museet* received limited targeted governmental support to staff the secretariat in 1978.¹⁵ However, when the decision was made to close the secretariat, *Nordiska museet's* director, Christina Mattsson, referred to a lack of governmental financial support. She pointed to the fact that *Nordiska museet* was no longer supported by the government to act as the museum responsible on a national level for the field of cultural history (Mattsson 2009). This particular – unfunded – duty was established in 1986-87 and was abolished in accordance with the

directives given in a governmental report in 2009.

In its final years Samdok was the concern of the individual professionals who were active in the network rather than of the museum boards that had taken part in the creation of the organization.¹⁶ Despite this, when *Nordiska museet's* director wrote to the directors of Samdok's member museums soliciting economic support to guarantee the future life of the secretariat, a majority responded positively. Fifty out of 82 agreed to co-fund Samdok's secretariat with a minor annual fee. But in the end *Nordiska museet's* director decided that the number of members supporting a prolongation would not provide a viable economic base for the secretariat (Mattsson 2011a; 2011b).

The official motive behind the closing of Samdok suggests a return to the economic rationale that once motivated the organization but, instead of acting in favour of the organization, it is now used against it. At the start, there was a perceived need to rationalize collecting on a national level in order to save money, now the organization that was created to do so is not considered to be economically motivated. The problem of storing and conservation is today met with measures other than a nation-wide collecting programme. Mattsson commissioned a working group to suggest means to attune Samdok to these changes,¹⁷ and as late as 2010 Samdok renewed its programme to also include collection management (Fägerborg 2011).

From engineering collecting to networking collecting

It is obvious that Samdok's members were sensitive to the winds of change. Over the years Samdok gradually re-organized according to a network model for social organization. Too much engineering of collecting made it difficult to sustain collaboration, and it appears as if the reorganization in the late 1990s introduced a necessary flexibility.

When Samdok was dissolved, some members felt that Samdok had become more or less obsolete, that they no longer relied on the organization for collaboration and professional development. County museums especially sensed that they had developed collaboration and knowledge of their own, whereas smaller institutions still needed Samdok's support. However, others found the dissolution of the formal organization both unnecessarily abrupt and not the only logical outcome of the museum managers' responses to *Nordiska museet's* request.¹⁸

Individual professionals have now re-invented Samdok, but after some debate the name Samdok has been abandoned. To mark a difference from the 'old Samdok', the initiative is called *The Network for Contemporary Documentation Sweden (Nötverket Samtidsdokumentation Sverige)*. The head of the new network emphasizes that its most important function is to provide spaces for exchange with regard to professional development, for example, by keeping up Samdok's tradition of annual meetings and pool work. For her, Samdok provided a forum for airing questions related to museum-based ethnologists including capacity building, inspiration and friendship. Samdok members learned that collaboration adds value to professional life, in particular with regard to skills in methods. The mere knowledge of the existence of colleagues all over Sweden had a positive impact on everyday working life.¹⁹

When former members of Samdok re-organized themselves in the form of a network, the collaboration became even more based on voluntarism and individual involvement. Networks encourage temporary connections within and across several interacting webs, connecting people and institutions to flows both within and outside an organization to serve identified current purposes (cf. Harding 2012: 105-106 after Castells 1998). Increasingly museums look for funding outside the national framework or for collaboration with other types of institutions inside Sweden.²⁰ The network model enables Samdok's former members to connect with their old pool contacts, as well as with the international museum community via COMCOL, NORSAM and other forms of transnational collaborations.

Final words

This article suggests that Samdok survived thanks to its inclusive and constantly evolving framework, and by producing careful reflexive self-presentations in which reflection upon and deconstruction of the organization's own politics of collecting moved the organization forward. At the same time, the evaluations as well as the reorganisation of the pool system also served a poetic function by producing a self-image of inclusive progressiveness, social engagement,

and adherence to equality, all of which coincide with the various ways in which the Swedish model has been viewed as positive.

Critical university-based research clearly served a political function in the context of Samdok as much as it was a sign of a serious intellectual engagement among the university-trained ethnologists at the secretariat. Samdok's first two programmes attached an intellectual programme to a cost-effective approach to collecting of a nation that was perceived to be homogenous. Then, evaluations initiated within the organization pinpointed areas for improvement, both in terms of methods and so as to better represent Sweden in its social and cultural diversity. The programme was reformulated, and later evaluations highlighted the organization's capacity to change and move in tune with social change, as well as methodological variations within the discipline of ethnology. Parallel to this, the initial plans of engineering collecting gradually evolved into a way of networking collecting practices.

It has been argued that national museums, like *Nordiska museet*, bring to life nations as political and cultural forms (Bennett 1995; Knell et al 2010; MacDonald 2011). The way in which Samdok was organized also included regional and municipal museums in this specific form of cultural labour (Axelsson 2012; Knell et al 2012). In line with new museology and critical cultural studies, Samdok highlighted its own role in the imagining of the nation, in particular how it dealt with the Swedish welfare state and the associated Swedish Model in its later stages. At the same time, when Samdok started to reflect upon and deconstruct its own politics of collecting, it was much harder to imagine and contain the nation within a nation-wide collecting programme and remain legitimate in terms of museum management and cultural policy arguments.

The closure of Samdok may thus be associated with a gap between the managerial issues of the museum, on the one hand, and the museum professionals' need for joint capacity building and 'the morality of social action', on the other. However, the case of Samdok's birth, evolution, demise and re-birth point to the necessity for those realms to interact and negotiate their respective values in productive ways so as to continue to negotiate the museums' competing commitments and missions.

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Notes

- 1 The foundation for the research presented here is compiled in Axelsson (2012) 'Swedish Studies of Contemporary Society', in Simon Knell et al, *Crossing Borders: Connecting European Identities in Museums and Online*, Eunamus Report No 2, 54-67, Linköping: Linköping University Interdisciplinary Studies No 14, 2012, <http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:516268>.
- 2 Interview with Eva Fdgerborg, interview by author, digital recording, 27 March 2011, Stockholm.
- 3 SAMDOK by-laws, collected from *Nordiska museet's* website, 30 August 2011, <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/Upload/documents/15.pdf>.
- 4 Due to reasons such as lack of time or a sense of not having carried out a proper Samdok investigation, many projects were left out. Eva Fdgerborg, interview, 27 March 2011.
- 5 COMCOL, ICOM international committee for collecting, Goals and objectives, <http://network.icom.museum/comcol/who-we-are/goals-and-objectives/>, last accessed 19 May 2013.
- 6 Harriet Purkis (in preparation) studies the shifting roles given to material culture in the Pool for Domestic Life.
- 7 This paragraph is based on the pool's reports in the network's periodical *SAMDOK-bulletinen* 1990-1992.
- 8 Eva Silv n, personal communication November 2011.

- ⁹ Interview with Anna Ulfstrand, interview by author, digital recording, 18 January 2013, Stockholm.
- ¹⁰ Eva Silv n, personal communication November 2011.
- ¹¹ These conclusions are based on references cited but more generally on the pool's reports in the network's periodical 2007-2010, and from interviews with Anna Ulfstrand 18 January 2013 and Esa Stenstr m, interview by author, digital recording, 24 April 2013, on Skype.
- ¹² Interview with Lena Palmqvist, interview by author, digital recording, 1 March 2013, Stockholm.
- ¹³ This paragraph is based on an e-mail survey with Samdok's member museums. The return rate was low: only 31 out of 82 members returned the questionnaire with 12 open ended questions.
- ¹⁴ Protokoll f rt vid samdokredets m te p  Nordiska museet den 17 January 2012. Nordiska museet's archive. No 54:20, serie A1, vol 3.
- ¹⁵ Protokoll fort vid Samdokredets sammantr de 24 maj 1978. Nordiska museet's archive. No 54:20, serie A1, vol 1.
- ¹⁶ Eva F dgerborg, interview, 27 March 2011 and Anna Ulfstrand, interview 18 January 2013.
- ¹⁷ Diskussionsunderlag och f rslag till Samdokredets m te den 25 mars 2010 r rande Samdoks verksamhet. 3 March 2010. Nordiska museet's archive. No 54:20, serie A1, vol 3.
- ¹⁸ Anna Ulfstrand, interview, 18 January 2013.
- ¹⁹ Esa Stenstr m, interview 24 April 2013, on Skype.
- ²⁰ Lena Palmqvist, interview, 1 March 2013; Esa Stenstr m, interview, 24 April 2013 and Anna Ulfstrand, interview 18 January 2013.

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