

Documentation in museums in Sweden
- a brief background history

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S W E D E N

In 1960-ies the Nordic museums started the computerisation in Sweden. Göran Bergengren, who passed away two years ago, and known to many of You as one of the earlier chairs of CIDOC was one of the forerunners. There is CIDOC traditions here in Sweden. It led forward to making a computerized system for the collections at Skokloster castle in 1970-ies. A model and form that were used of many museums taking the first shaking steps on this technical path.

In mid 80-ies some central initiatives took computerisation really a big step forward. Logically in a commission of inquiry on common documentation standards for all sectors of Swedish museums. The SAMOREG is a milestone in the meaning that it supposed the possibilities of treating all heritage objects in the same manner. I dare to say that all development up till today is based on the Samoreg, even if the forms and tables are left for more modern screens and user interfaces. Technically the SAMOREG led to experiments with distributed computerisation, a mainframe based system for several users was taken into use, and developed further by Bohuslän county museum. There was even an early digital image system - as always with system experiments run over by time and reality. The PC boom took these experiences into a range of home made systems. Many in-house systems, and in fact one real commercial system, Adrian Album were taken into use on a semi-experimental level. At this phase - and the coincidence in time where a lot of museums at the same time discovered the needs for CMS - the mass market can be regarded as open.

Around 1990 there was an initiative taken by three persons taking part in the CIDOC documentation standards WG. Anne Murray, present here today as one of the organizers, together with Christer Larsson at the Nordic museum and Cary Karp at The Swedish Museum of Natural History were redeveloping the thought of the CIDOC data model - which they earlier also had been involved in. The result - SWETERM - has been of great importance in being a practically usable model for data element notation in a flexible and strong way. The knowledge, brought up to common understanding of these difficult matters, has been the groundpoles for a handful of museum systems - One of them - Carlotta - living in good shape at the Etnographic

museum in Stockholm, The City museum here in Gothenburg, Kulturen i Lund and some other collections. Being a quite academic and unorthodox model, SWETERM maybe had its heaviest impact as an opener for terminology discussions and the awareness among curators for new demands in museum documentation. Still there is a development going on in Carlotta.

During 1990-ies the INSAM secretary at Nordic museum canalized and supported the development of IT in museums. Unfortunately Insam was discontinued 1999.

1995 there was a large initiative, SESAM, focusing on documentation in Swedish museums. Some 25 million Euro were put into unemployment support for Young professionals and the aim was to support digitization and open the museum collections. In a way good - but it also took the museums by surprise in not having the infrastructure ready for such a large new piece of work. Sesam really opened a door for a wider spread discussion and awareness of digitisation and museums understood that they had to use modern tools in a much higher sense. By that time other IT artifacts were popular. Remember all development of MULTIMEDIA, i.e. CD-rom with both text and images at the same time.

The Västerbottens Museum put in a large effort in developing a combined system for collections and photos, and later on even archives and more. Sofie is now the largest system in use here. Sofie was, rapidly, advancing from a local system to Swedens most wide spread CMS. The user group has been important in developing and discussing standards and routines and to move these questions out in the everyday work at museums. Sofie has also helped many museums to publish their collections on the web.

Interesting to notice though, is that all systems used in Sweden today - with just a very few extraordinary exceptions - still are home made, or at least defined and developed as an integrated part of the internal work. d'Art at Nationalmuseum is another, later, large example of this kind.

From this base of internal systems it is interesting to notice that The Nordic museum has taken PRIMUS into use. Primus is an Norwegian system which were converted into Swedish conditions. The museum of modern art has taken the TMS system in use - giving them a chance to interact with other large art museums in the world and I think the Museum+ is on its way here as well.

We have a Swedish tradition, one can say, in more concentrating in collecting information about the objects, saving the tellings about the owner and such info, and less on the accountability and the administrative routines in the collections management. Together with a language issue, I think we have a major answer to why we still stick to our own systems.

During this year and next we have a new unemployment initiative running. ACCESS focus this time on digitisation and the recruitment base is academics in a wider sense than for example SESAM. This means that also system development and research can be a part of the digitisation process. The Access projects in various museums will focus on digitization and moving the museum forward to a new work process. One mentionable project within Access is KMM, trying to think in new directions, both catching the traditional CMS and documentation approaches, formatting info for levelled users, and in the same time with a vision about enforcing new management routines in the museums.

The Royal library and The Royal Archives are not to be forgotten as partners in heritage digitisation, housing projects and initiatives with use even for the museum sector.

Sofie, Carlotta and Primus are to be seen at the database battle on Wednesday.

To sum up:

We have seen quite impressive technical experiments and some early initiatives in museological sense and we have a history of small and local systems that may not have enforced the standardisation. Also, we have a weak national museum policy in the documentation area and no real executive body for these issues, unlike for example in Norway and UK.

Today we see regional initiatives in ALM collaboration and the ABM-centrum is indeed a good start for general and common initiatives and projects like KMM are taking new approaches into consideration.

Having the CIDOC conference here in Gothenburg will also be a milestone as a chance to show, share and discuss our initiatives as well as getting new influence from the global community of international experts in a forum, such as a conference like this is .