

# COLLECTINGNET

*An international museum network for collecting issues*

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Collectingnet is an international museum network for collecting issues created at the conference *Connecting Collecting* at Nordiska Museet, Stockholm in November 2007. Collectingnet invites museum professionals and scholars to take part in developing the network into a vital association and mouthpiece of international cooperation. The Newsletter is published four times a year and distributed to members of Collectingnet, and is also available online at <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/Publication.asp?publicationid=4213&topmenu=143>. We welcome contributions with reflections, conference/seminar reports, project presentations, specific questions you wish to raise, literature tips, invitations to cooperation or other themes. Please send your contribution to the next issue by **1 October 2010** to [collectingnet@nordiskamuseet.se](mailto:collectingnet@nordiskamuseet.se). You can also contact the editors personally: [catherinemarshall5@yahoo.com](mailto:catherinemarshall5@yahoo.com), [eva.fagerborg@nordiskamuseet.se](mailto:eva.fagerborg@nordiskamuseet.se)

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## From the editors

Welcome to this issue of *Collectingnet Newsletter*. As we informed in No 9, it will later on be transformed to *COMCOL Newsletter*, the newsletter of ICOM's International Committee for Collecting (COMCOL). The committee is now also presented at ICOM's website:

COMCOL is the International Committee with the mission to deepen discussions and share knowledge on the practice, theory and ethics of collecting and collections (both tangible and intangible) development. COMCOL is a platform for professional exchange of views and experiences around collecting in the broadest sense. The mandate includes collecting and de-accessioning policies, contemporary collecting, restitution of cultural property and respectful practices that affect the role of collections now and in the future, from all types of museums and from all parts of the world. COMCOL's aims are to increase cooperation and collaboration across international boundaries, to foster innovation in museums and to encourage and support museum professionals in their work with collections development. COMCOL organizes annual meetings and working groups and engages its members in dialogue through a newsletter.

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<http://icom.museum/international/comcol.html>

We welcome our readers as members of COMCOL. The committee will organize its first meetings, with elections, during ICOM's General Conference in Shanghai 7-12 November 2010.

Those of you who are already members of ICOM can simply join COMCOL by filling in an application form and send it by e-mail to ICOM's Secretariat. See [http://icom.museum/join\\_int\\_committee.html](http://icom.museum/join_int_committee.html) for instructions and application form. If you wish to join COMCOL but not yet are a member of ICOM, the first step is to become a member, see instructions at <http://icom.museum/membership.html>.

**Contents of this issue**

Sofia Seifarth: *A Taste of Europe – why do we eat like this?*

Tanja Roženberger Šega: *Don't throw pots away*

Ylva Jannok Nutti & Anna Westman Kuhmunen: *Sámi youth in three countries*

Ilze Knoka: *A comment on the role of collections in museum identity*

*Just launched: Collections Mobility/Lending for Europe*

**A Taste of Europe – why do we eat like this?**

*Sofia Seifarth*

Food production is, and has always been, a basic fundamental of all human societies. Past and present, it has been a source of joy and struggle, hopes and threats connected to ideals and realities. In modern European society food production and consumption have become closely linked to existential, ethical and health questions. Issues of climate change, environmental development, sustainability, 'natural' food, animal breeding, gene manipulation and inequalities on a national, European and global level, are often in focus in public debate about food. These issues are also of increasing importance to all European citizens in their everyday life and consumption.

The project *A Taste of Europe* involves nine museums across Europe, in Sweden, Finland, Scotland, Hungary, Estonia, Slovenia, Denmark, Czech Republic and Portugal. The project is funded by the EU Culture Programme and is coordinated by the Museum of Work in Sweden. The aim is to produce an exhibition about European food production and consumption that sheds lights on the question – why do we eat like we do?

By highlighting national differences and similarities, changes over time, climate and environmental issues, the aim with the project is to stimulate intercultural dialogue about food, heritage, environment, production and everyday consumption.

The target group of this project is young Europeans, which is indeed a challenge. One central task for the project is therefore to develop educational activities suitable for young people, closely connected to the exhibition production.

**Nine stories together**

Each museum will focus on one food product, its production and consumption, that is of special national importance for their country. The museums have chosen the following products:

<b>Honey</b> Slovenia	<b>Milk</b> Sweden	<b>Wheat</b> Hungary
<b>Pork</b> Denmark	<b>Beer</b> Czech Republic	<b>Potato</b> Estonia
<b>Bread</b> Finland	<b>Fish</b> Scotland	<b>Olive oil</b> Portugal

Each museum will tell their national story by using their chosen product as point of departure. These nine national stories based on historical material, photo documentation and interviews with people employed in the food sector and with consumers, as well as economic statistics and information of environmental effects, will be put together in a joint-exhibition by the coordinating museum in Sweden. When forming their national stories all museums use shared questions that highlight:

- Historical change: Modernized/traditional production and consumption
- Gender and power aspects of production and consumption
- National importance of the products from economical, social and cultural perspectives, historically and in contemporary society
- Environmental aspects such as pollution, gene manipulation and impact on the landscape

### One exhibition with nine variations

The exhibition area will be 120 m<sup>2</sup>, consisting of two parts:

1) **an overarching story** sketching an overall picture of the agricultural development in Europe in terms of modernisation, industrialisation and globalisation. The overarching story will outline overall trends in Europe and highlight differences and unexpected similarities between the countries. The national stories from each country will illustrate examples within this overarching framework. This part of the exhibition will be built in Sweden and will be shown in all museums.

2) **a local part** (app. 20 m<sup>2</sup>, produced and shown in the different museums). The exhibition also contains an extended story of the national production focused by each museum. In this part of the exhibition each country will use objects, films and other material, to further illustrate their national stories.

The overarching story will be produced in nine copies and will be shown at the same time in all the participating museums. The joint launch will take place on 26 January 2011 and the exhibition will then be shown during the spring and summer.

### What have we achieved so far?

The project participants have met twice during the first six months of the project. The first project meeting was held 16–18 September 2009 in Slovenia and was hosted by The Technical Museum of Slovenia. The agenda included discussions about the overall exhibition ideas, coordination and financial reports. The second meeting was held 10–12 February 2010 in The Scottish Fisheries Museum in Anstruther, Scotland. This time we focused on educational work and continuing discussions about the exhibition content and design.

### Young Europeans—how do we reach them?

In order to reach young people the project will also develop educational activities, interactive elements and ways to encourage dialogue between pupils in the different countries. We want to encourage young people to contribute to the exhibition. One way is to invite them to take photos of their typical eating situations and to create a gallery of those photographs in the exhibition. The photo gallery will develop along with the ongoing exhibition. The photos will illustrate differences and similarities between the countries, as well as stimulate reflections upon our eating habits and choices.



*Picture from the second project meeting, The Scottish Fisheries Museum in Anstruther, February 2010. Photo: Sandy Mackie.*

Thanks to support from the Nordic Culture Fund, the Nordic educators were able to meet again on 20–21 April 2010 to further discuss exhibition interactivity and how to connect people across Europe in order to encourage intercultural dialogue.

### What are the results of the project?

By raising questions about our food consumption and food production the project deals with urgent questions highly relevant to contemporary European everyday life and identity.

The project will contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing our food production and consumption on individual and societal levels. It will also increase the understanding of national similarities and differences. By illuminating these questions in cultural forms and in continuous dialogue with partners – researchers, cultural workers, societal organisations and the public – we hope to develop creative ways to present these issues from unexpected angles and perspectives. On a long-term basis we hope that the highlighting of European consumers' choices and attitudes connected to food will contribute to more conscious and environmentally-friendly ways of producing and consuming.

One of the most important and immediate results of the project is the establishment of the international networks and the valuable collaboration between the European museums and schools. We hope this

project will result in further cooperation between our museums, and between the school-classes that have established contact during this project.

*The project is supported by the Culture Programme of the European Union, the Nordic Culture Fund, the Swedish-Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Swedish Research Council Formas.*



For more information about the project please visit [www.atasteofeurope.eu](http://www.atasteofeurope.eu) or contact project coordinator.

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## Don't throw pots away

*Tanja Roženberger Šega*

The identity of every museum is very dependent on its various museum objects and collections, whose expressive and communicative power depends on exhibition concepts and different forms of interpretation, which trigger interactions and suggestions among visitors. At the Museum of Recent History Celje we keep many different collections formed on the basis of precisely determined criteria of the museum's collecting policy. One of them is also the collection of Emo-Westen kitchenware, which documents the history of the town and helps to shape its identity.

### The Emo-Westen kitchenware collection

The collection comprises products of the typical Celje industry of enamelled kitchenware which marked the industrial growth of the town of Celje at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was part of the industrialization and urbanization of the town at the turn of the century. The recognizable enamelled kitchenware with a characteristic coat-of-arms which

depicts two lions (the additional initials A.W – August Westen – mean that it was made before the Second World War, and the additional five-armed star shows that it is from the post-war period) and white dots on a red or blue background presented an indispensable aspect of households in the area of former Yugoslavia. It is precisely due to the »presence« in every household of pre- and post-war generations of it up to the 1980s that this kitchenware triggers numerous personal, warm memories and reminiscences connected with childhood, family and home.

The collection of Emo-Westen kitchenware comprises 1500 objects of various shapes, sizes and intended uses – plates, pots, cups, pans, ladles, baking tins, juicers etc. as well as items used for farm work, containers for personal hygiene – washbasins, kettles for water, and also medicinal and other containers. The collected objects are from

different time periods and it is interesting that the shape and design changed very little over 100 years.



Museum object ID form.

Only a part of the collection is on display, most of the objects are stored. To make the collection more accessible, recognizable, topical and to systematically complete it, this year the Museum of Recent History Celje started an interesting project of artistic interpretation of collections and their completion. We wish to employ a novel approach to draw attention to materials, which unfortunately, are not on display, bring them closer to society and thus raise awareness about the importance of heritage protection. In collaboration with three artists, we started a project in January 2010 under the title *Don't throw pots away*.

### A project in three phases

In the first phase of the project we invited people through media, events and posters to take part in collecting Emo-Westen kitchenware. At the museum hall we opened a special container also designed by the artists, where the items were collected. Each object got its record sheet with basic information and a record number, and we also made records of how the item was used as well as stories and memories linked with it. Every donor received a symbolic present. The collecting campaign was concluded in May and in this way we managed to collect 1 000 objects of kitchenware.

In the second phase of the project all objects were inspected and classified into two categories – kitchenware supplementing the collection and kitchenware intended only for this installation, which can also be modified or changed by artists in the process.



Container for collecting kitchenware in the hall of the Museum of Recent History, Celje.



Poster inviting people to take part in collecting kitchenware made by artists. "Ne mečte piskrov stran!" means "Don't throw pots away!"

The third phase of the project and its goal is an exhibition – an artistic installation *Don't throw pots away*, which opened on the occasion of *Museums on a Summer Night*, on 19 June 2010. The artistic installation being created by three artists from Celje – Manja Vadla, Mark Požlep and Jure Cvitan – is a monument to the Celje working culture, it popularizes the collection and makes it topical.

The basic exhibition element is kitchenware of the existing collection and newly collected items which are placed in different contexts and ambiances. A museum object is a means for designing an installation and making it tangible; the installation with its concept addresses visitors to the museum. It is complemented by AV records, projections and sound accentuations. The installation is clear and recognizable in its message. The exhibition at the same time talks about work culture and consciousness, contemporary social issues and raises the question of whether work is still valued today. In this way we engaged the collection and turned its mission towards the future.

### **Art is a media of presenting heritage and heritage is an inspiration to art**

The artistic installation is a novel one and a powerful form of interpretation, when heritage and museum objects address visitors and viewers through artistic language; art is a media of presenting heritage and heritage is an inspiration to art. The collection objects preserve memory, their artistic interpretation encourages critical social deliberation.

## **Sámi youth in three countries**

*Ylva Jannok Nutti and Anna Westman Kuhmunen*

*Sámi Youth* is a collaborative project involving young Sámi, schools, and Sámi museums on the Swedish, Finnish, and Norwegian side of Sápmi. (Sápmi is the name of the Sámi area in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula.) In 2009/2010 some forty young people and museum staff have worked with the question: What is it like to be a young Sámi today? The Sámi society in which the young people live varies both across the national borders and between different groups of Sámi, and this is reflected in the project. What they share in common, however, is that they face the challenge of expressing their cultural belonging in a society dominated by a majority culture.

In 2007 the children's ombudsmen in Norway, Sweden, and Finland conducted a survey of the situation of Sámi children and young people in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as regards participation and influence. The report shows that young Sámi feel very proud of their culture and identity, but it also points out a number of improvements that ought to be made. Participation was an issue highlighted by the young people in the survey. One foundation stone in the design of the project and in its work has therefore been the wish of young people to participate. The aim has been that young people will have greater influence in the museums'

The heritage of modern society is often non-material and thus consideration of innovative approaches and forms of interpretation of museum material is all the more appropriate.

With this campaign we also stress the museum's communication with the environment in which it serves. The category of an »inclusive museum« means that a museum strengthens the feeling of contributing to culture and life in the town and is part of social processes and an important instrument of communication in an urban environment. In this way, the museum is becoming one of the places of socialization and expression of contemporary social issues – both as a warning and as a message.

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documentation of young people so that they can participate in the creation of Sámi cultural heritage. In addition, an effort has been made to increase the amount of exchange between young Sámi. The project gave the museums an opportunity to work out new forms of cooperation, and also to obtain ethnological source material which has previously been lacking. Moreover, there was a desire to develop and strengthen cooperation between Sámi institutions.



*Isak at work during the first conference in Nesseby in November 2009. Photo: Emeli Elfving.*

### The course of the work

To begin with a conference was held at Várjjat Sámi Museum, where the participants in the project met to plan the work together. The documentation done by the young people was then exhibited in spring 2010 at a closing conference at the Swedish Sámi museum, Ájtte. In between these two conferences, there were local activities and documentation work in Snåsa and Nesseby in Norway, in big towns in Finland, and in Jokkmokk, Sweden.



*The first conference in Nesseby in November 2009, Sanne Marja and Anne-Maret. Photo: Emeli Elfving.*

The project website, [www.samiyouth.org](http://www.samiyouth.org), has served as a platform for communication. Results of documentation have been published there, and the working process has been discussed through a blog. In Jokkmokk the young people asked for short courses in film making, photography, and editing. This resulted in several films and in photographic documentation of the young people's life. This included cooking and coffee drinking, special occasions such as Christmas, the winter market, and Easter celebrations, work with reindeer herding, participating in the work of youth organizations, and travel. The results of the documentation reveal a local and global commitment that is characteristic of youth culture in the Western world, but they also show the great responsibility that the young people take for Sámi culture, and their great knowledge and interest when it comes to the subject.

The young people's participation in the project proceeds from this interest, but also from a desire to make the project fun. They also want to show others what it is like to be a young Sámi today and they are interested in learning more about Sámi culture and traditional skills. Traditional knowledge is in focus in some of the documentation efforts, in which older generations – parents or grandparents – tell what they know. The young people view the museums as an important place for the communication of knowledge. *Are museums just places for storing old and useless objects, or...?* was the title of a lecture held by participants in the Jokkmokk project. The young people regarded Sámi objects as being highly valuable and thus found the museums' collections

important. This was particularly clear from a visit to the artefact archive at Ájtte, where the significance of the objects was stressed by the young people. The answer to the provocative question in the title of the lecture was therefore “no”.



*Leila in the artefact archive at Ájtte. Photo: Emeli Elfving.*

### Participation in theory and practice

In both museology and the methodology used with indigenous peoples, theories and methods are developed to find and test new forms of cooperation between institutions and between the institutions and society (Smith 1999). How are young Sámi to participate in the work at Sámi heritage institutions, and in what way can they be represented? The basic premise of the project was that young people are the ones who will be in charge of the Sámi heritage in the future, and participation is therefore an important issue for the museums. In the course of the work, however, we have revised our view. Instead of seeing young people as the “future” stewards of the Sámi heritage, we see that they are already active today and taking responsibility. Participation means in practice a shift of power, as the museum profession in certain spheres is moving from being the specialist to become a participant in the production of knowledge. In practice this may mean that we will have to forget about some of our pet issues and instead work with matters that both sides find important. Increased participation for young

people in the project leads to new questions about collecting and about the collected material.

### Collecting

Collecting for the future is an expression that is well known in the museum world, but it must be reappraised when we work together with new professions and young people. Collecting for the future is not a relevant response to young people's question why we do documentation. It must be relevant to the present and visible in the present. The young people want to do their documentation so that it can be used in schools as teaching material, and so that they can paint a more multifaceted picture of Sámi life. They think that there is a general lack of knowledge about the Sámi and that prejudices and stereotypes are passed on. In addition, there is a desire that the work should let them learn something themselves, with the documentation giving an opportunity to acquire traditional knowledge and skills. It is thus obvious that the documentation is a part of the production of knowledge at the very moment when it is done. This does not mean, however, that the young people in the project do not see the benefit of collecting for the future; instead they think that the present, the future, and history are present in the concrete work of documentation.

Making the collected material available almost instantly has also felt like a more natural way to work for the young people than for the museum. The challenge is to publish quickly and simultaneously give the space that is necessary for an analysis. Showing and sharing documentation via the Internet also creates a different kind of material and raises different questions about what should or should not be a part of a museum collection. Behind the website [www.samiyouth.org](http://www.samiyouth.org) there is not only traditional archival material such as documents, photographs, and films but also digital logbooks, chat sites, and Facebook pages. These reflect the working process but also contain narratives about what it is like to be young today. In an initial phase it is easy to say that everything should be saved since it is digital and does not take up any space in our archives. But is it reasonable or even desirable to keep everything on such grounds? Another question is whether the sorting of material to keep or discard should be done in collaboration or if it is the responsibility of the museum profession.

## A comment on the role of collections in museum identity

*Ilze Knoka*

This short story is offered as a small comment on van Mensch's article in *Collectingnet Newsletter* No 9 about the unwitting role of collections as the main

### Pimped objects, do we always need to collect?

On a visit to the collections one young person said about the older objects: "they carry a history, a soul, they have an identity." These objects were perceived as bearers of a history to a much greater degree than contemporary and unused Sámi objects in the collections. The visit led the youngsters to "pimp" or change newly produced objects based on the discussions in the collections. They bought or made objects that they could use themselves, including a sweater, a pair of shoes, and a shoe cupboard. Through the change or the addition they gave the objects a new identity. This made it difficult for us not to let them use the objects. But we explained that the museum would be glad to include the objects in the collections when the owners had tired of them. Perhaps we should have said: "We want your boots in our collections, but you are welcome to come and borrow them when you want to wear them to a party." By not adding these objects to the collections we did not reduce the value of the objects; instead the young people became concrete bearers of their cultural history.

*The museums participating in the project have been Stiftelsen Saemien Sijte and Várjjat Samiske Museum in Norway, Siida Sámi Museum in Finland, and Ajtte, svenskt fjäll- och samemuseum in Sweden, which also owns the project. The project was financed by the European Regional Development Fund and a number of national grant-giving organizations.*

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factor in self-defining and identifying museums as specific heritage institutions. As presented by humans, the unconscious aspect of institutional

identity, expressed through seemingly minor misunderstandings on a daily basis, characterises the true perception of where the power of museums lies.

#### **Collections as a result of curators' work**

On October 1, 2009, the reorganisation process of the Literature, Theatre and Music Museum in Latvia came to an end, bringing into effect a preliminary two-year plan to optimise the function of the museum. This is important since the museum, in practice, used to be a difficult multi-layered union of eleven departments, nine of those quasi-independent memorial houses with centralised administration. Under the reorganisation, the former structure was divided into three institutions that, it is hoped, will be more transparent and easier to operate.

Nevertheless, the museums of the new formation share a mutual heritage and a common source of pride – the centralised collection of literature, theatre and music that has been amassed since 1925 and which, over time has grown to be a unique archive of Latvian culture. One of the essential characteristics of the internal organisation of the collection is its integrity, with the whole body of its 800 000 plus items described, filed and, above all, linked by a system of internal cross-referencing. If – for instance – an actor has performed in a play written by a playwright which has been staged in a theatre involving a composer and a designer in the production, then all these persons or, to put it more accurately – collections of these persons are given a reference to link one to another. Needless to say, this network of knowledge-keeping is handy and profitable to researchers of every level.

#### **Collections as an instrument of curators' work**

So that the system of registration and – for the greatest part – the accessibility ensured by the system of correlative processing should be maintained and continued, the solution was to keep the collection as a centralised body used and developed equally by all the former branches of the reorganised museum. As the national legislation allows only two possible statuses of heritage items – ownership and that of loan – one of the institutions created through the reorganisation became the legal owner, keeper and treasurer of the collection, charged with the responsibilities of providing it with databases, storage and restoration. The other institutions will continue to replenish the collection with items relating to the field of specialisation (be it theatre or writing) and interpret it via all the possible technologies appropriate to museum work. Thus the essential difference between the former relationship of the particular museum and its collection and the

new situation after October 1, 2009 is nothing more than the legal formulation of it. As a result, an exclusive stipulation was added to the national legislation concerning museum collections, stating that the collection of a specific museum can be held in another institution. This situation is completely new in the country. Nothing has been actually withdrawn or removed. There is no apparent change apart from a technical one that optimises use of public money, and facilitates more transparent management of heritage institutions.

#### **Collections as the core of curators' work**

However, the emotional impact of the reorganisation in general was a natural one and had to be considered. Even though the collection signature remained unchanged and every object from the collection still bears the history of the huge intellectual and personal investment put into the collection by former associates; although there are no legal nor practical obstacles to the use of the collection for any museum service; and on a rational level everybody in charge understands the positive outcomes of keeping the collection together; nevertheless the awareness that the collection is legally possessed by another institution was upsetting for the former 'owners'. The necessity to mention the new legal owner in the exhibition labels and to arrange a new order of endorsing documents regarding the accession process was also truly heartbreaking for all the bodies involved. This was true even for the one institution that became the legal keeper and owner of the collection. For the latter there were unexpected misunderstandings about where the problem actually lay. All the misunderstandings have been gradually solved and demands for acknowledgment have been satisfied as far as possible (for instance an article in the collective mission statement about the equal significance of all bodies in the development of the collection and the sequence of the signatures of the persons in charge on the documents has been agreed). However, the agreement achieved is ultimately fragile as every step of daily cooperation still masks unforeseen risks that wound historically built-up professional pride by understating the scale of a museum's collection or expressions of ownership.

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**Just Launched: [www.lending-for-europe.eu](http://www.lending-for-europe.eu)**

10<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

**For all museum professionals that work with (international) collections mobility, a website is created that offers all information available needed for successful international collections mobility.**

Museums have a long tradition of sharing the cultural heritage in their custody with other museums and institutions. Lending objects to other museums is considered one of their most important tasks. Through the mobility of collections Europeans can become acquainted with; can appreciate, enjoy and understand their own and other cultures and are able to pass on this heritage to future generations

On this website, aspects of lending and borrowing such as: due diligence, indemnity schemes, (non)insurances and immunity from seizure, are explained and possible solutions how to handle them are offered. Different documents, standard forms and all available regulation and legislation per country can be found, facilitating the process of the mobility of collections.

This website is part of the European project: Collections Mobility 2.0, Lending for Europe, 21<sup>st</sup> Century; a project funded with the support of the Culture Programme of the European Union. Next to this website, the project exists out of organizing multiple training sessions in different member states, following the Train-the-trainers principle, making sure that all information needed will cascade down to every museum professional that deals with the exchange of museum objects. In September 2010 the theoretical handbook on the subject will be published, as third part of the project.

**For more information, please contact:**

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Where you can find up to date information about the "mobility" of museum collections - the borrowing and lending of cultural objects - within the European Union.

On this website you can find relevant information about aspects of: lending, borrowing, non-insurance, indemnity, insurance and immunity from seizure in general, as well as various guidelines, standards, publications, contract templates, legislation and more.