

NATIONAL HISTORICAL MUSEUMS

THE MUSEUM OF NATIONAL ANTIQUITIES
THE ROYAL COIN CABINET

POLICY FOR NATIONAL HISTORICAL MUSEUMS

(Following the decision of the board of 13 August 2003)

Mission

The “mission” of National Historical Museums expresses the agency’s fundamental purpose and objective.

The mission of National Historical Museums:

National Historical Museums administers cultural heritage and provides perspectives on our existence in order to strengthen the democratic development of society

National Historical Museums (SHMM) places people at the centre of the story. The prime purpose of the work of SHMM has been formulated as being “to strengthen the democratic development of society”. SHMM’s contribution towards the democratic development of society is based on the function of history and cultural heritage in terms of understanding. Everyone uses and creates history and cultural heritage. History and cultural heritage are not something laid down once and for all and set in stone for ever more. The democratic development of society is about different groups in society having the opportunity to play a part in and influence society and the direction in which society is to develop. “People without a recognised history are less well equipped to participate in social debate,” the Government writes in its 1996 cultural policy bill (Prop. 1996/97:3). A central task for the cultural heritage agencies is therefore to draw attention to the cultural heritage of different groups and to increase understanding of the way in which history and cultural heritage are used for differing purposes. In this context, the term “democracy” should be seen as a direction of movement rather than a political goal or a form of government, i.e. taking its basis in the fundamental freedoms and rights and the personal, economic and cultural welfare which each individual enjoys under the constitution. It follows from this that the agency places people in the centre of the story. Our task is to meet today’s needs and those of the future for historical perspectives, with their importance for democratic development. SHMM is thus at the same time a resource and a tool which is able to be used in social development.

Being responsible for the effective *administration* of cultural heritage is essential to SHMM being able to fulfil its mandate of strengthening everyone’s opportunities to participate in democratic social development. The term “administer” has been chosen with care. It makes it clear that SHMM is performing a task on behalf of society, administration as commissioned by a client, namely society and its citizens. Good administration on behalf of a third party also goes hand in hand with a demand for rationality and efficiency; one must be able to set high demands to ensure that our cultural heritage is administered efficiently and well. However, the term “administer” also encompasses a development perspective. The view of what the best standard for good administration is shifts depending on the time and the context. With good administration, the object administered can provide an increased return over time, which in this case does not primarily mean a financial gain but benefit to society in a wider sense. Good administration also incorporates the sense of enriching cultural heritage.

Another central task for SHMM is to provide perspectives on our existence. These perspectives can – and must – be very different. There is not *one* history, *one* story. Our interpretation of history influences our view of our own time and our view of our own time influences how we interpret history. However, it also influences our expectations of the future, and our chances of influencing the future in line with these expectations. The term “consciousness of history” is usually defined as the experience of links between the interpretation of the past, understanding of the present and perspectives on the future. Consciousness of history can be seen as a way of thinking and a willingness to understand processes which have been realised through human action and can thus be applied at individual level as well as at the level of society. The term “cultural heritage perspective” can also be used in the same sense. It can refer to a perspective which can be constructed in order to better explain and understand existence.

It is fundamental to SHMM that the perspectives which are conveyed address the question of what it means to be human – and what it has meant throughout history. The actual process of selecting perspectives on existence and the way in which these perspectives are presented are crucial in many ways. As a central museum with national responsibility, SHMM has a public service role which goes hand in hand with an independent, critical and analytical approach. In this critical and responsible role, SHMM must at the same time meet the needs for historical perspectives required by the citizens.

Vision

National Historical Museums are to be the best museums of cultural history in the Nordic region

National Historical Museums have set their sights high: National Historical Museums are to be the best museums of cultural history in the Nordic region. Of course there is no single definition or measurement of what the term “best” stands for in this context, but the vision expresses, among other things, the aim that the work of the museums is to meet the highest current standards of excellence. The vision’s use of the word “best” must thus be used in the sense of “compliance with the highest demands imaginable when it comes to appearance, characteristics and requirements”.

The vision is designed such that every part of the agency can relate to it, whether its work involves caring for the collections, the content of exhibitions and the way they are conveyed to the public, meeting visitors, IT or security issues. SHMM’s vision is both concrete in a physical sense and “psychological”. Physically the vision means having the highest quality premises and exhibitions, for example. Psychologically the vision means that ways of working and content are to be modern, appropriate and of high quality. When compared with other relevant museums, SHMM is to head the field.

There is a great challenge in the fact that the vision focuses on the concept of being “the best”. When the large, national museums of cultural history were created, they formed part of a modern, national project. They met the needs, which society at the time saw as important, for national consolidation and for a national identity. Much of this role has since vanished. For museums of cultural history, striving to be “the best” therefore also means gradually adapting to, and helping to formulate, tasks, mandates and working methods for our own time. This means listening to the needs for knowledge and identity of the surrounding society, while at the same time basing this on a clear ability to be completely up-to-date, e.g. in relation to current knowledge and the latest research. This naturally means treating our public, and our users in a wider sense, with a great deal of humility and respect to ensure that we live up to their wishes and requirements.

Where the vision states that SHMM is to be compared with the museums of cultural history in the Nordic region, it is setting out both a sense of relatedness and a spectrum of potential alternatives. The Nordic museums of cultural history display many similarities, but have also developed differently in the different countries, especially in recent decades. Among the Nordic museums of cultural history there are several institutions which can be seen as role models in various areas, but nevertheless SHMM is holding its own very well in several sectors. The vision thus expresses a high ambition to aim towards.

This vision does not come with a time limit. There is no fixed deadline by which it must be achieved. It must be seen as a future desirable ideal state – a goal – which must not be confused with a concrete target. At the same time it must be possible to monitor the work carried out in order to achieve this vision. It must be possible to assess whether trends within the agency are in line with the vision. SHMM must constantly compare itself with other leading museums of cultural history in the Nordic region in order to draw conclusions on the direction and rate of development. Each part of the agency should form a view of what is “best” within its different areas. The objectives for the work of the agency formulated within SHMM are to clearly seek to realise the vision.