

GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
Museion

WHEN CULTURE BECOMES HERITAGE

In search of the Samdok discourse of collecting
contemporary heritage

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to analyse how the concept of *heritage* is used and understood in the context of contemporary collecting within the Swedish museum network Samdok and the international Samdok conference Connecting Collecting. The analysis investigates what happens to the concept of heritage when it is used in a museum practice focusing on the present day, as well as in an international context. Examining the use and understanding of heritage is here seen as a manner of exposing the way culture is studied, perceived and defined within the practice of contemporary collecting.

The analysis is undertaken by examining a selected set of texts, produced by and about Samdok, an email survey directed to the participants of the conference Connecting Collecting together with a participant observation undertaken at the named conference. These primary sources are analysed by the methodology provided by Critical Discourse Analysis, commonly used within disciplines of Sociology and Cultural Studies.

The concept of a Western *authorized heritage discourse*, characterized by materiality, age, the aesthetically pleasing and/or the monumental, is used as a starting point when analysing Samdok as a sub-discourse. Opposing the *authorized heritage discourse*, heritage is instead proposed to be an intangible, social and cultural process.

The findings of the analysis indicate that Samdok, as heritage expert in the field of contemporary collecting, plays a double role as both expert and apprentice. Furthermore, the material shows that the participants of the conference perceive 'contemporary heritage' differently depending on how they define contemporary collections work.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The theme throughout this dissertation is the Swedish museum network¹, Samdok. Founded in 1977, museums of cultural history all over Sweden decided to join forces in order to cooperate and coordinate in the collecting of the present time. Samdok is an organization characterized by its curiosity and open structure. Many of those members engaged in the initiating stages are still active participants of the network. It is flattering for Samdok that so many have stayed loyal. This fact has also helped to build continuity and structure (Isacson & Silvéen 2006: 167).

Internationally Samdok has become known as a pioneer in the field of contemporary collecting, having developed new approaches for collecting evidence of Swedish life and culture over a period of 30 years (Silvéen 2004: 164; Lagerkvist 2002: 15). Today many museums all over the world address aspects of collecting the present in new and different ways according to their specific conditions and backgrounds. Since the foundation of Samdok, society has seen new ways of production and consumption, but more importantly the possibilities of communicating have radically changed. In a global perspective, museums now need new ways in which to share information and cooperate when collecting the 'glocal' community (Ross 2005: 12-13).

In the fall of 2007 the international conference, Connecting Collecting, initiated by Samdok was held at the Nordiska Museet.² The purpose of the conference was twofold: Firstly to launch the idea of establishing an international ICOM committee specializing in aspects of contemporary collecting, and secondly to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Samdok. During the spring of 2007 I did an internship at the Samdok Secretariat situated at Nordiska Museet. In the course of my internship I came to be involved in both the regular Samdok work³, and the initiating stages of the conference Connecting Collecting. These experiences created a deeper understanding of the historical and present challenges within the network. The very idea of the thesis started, during this period, as I realized that the people involved in Samdok perceived the organization in so many different ways. These experiences, as a

¹The words 'Network', 'organization', 'association' and 'forum' are all used as synonyms to describe Samdok.

² Nordiska Museet (translated 'the Nordic Museum') is the national museum of cultural history in Sweden. The museum has decided not to translate the name since the collection focus no longer is on Nordic cultural history as when the museum was founded. Today the museum focus is on Swedish cultural history.

³ Attending pool-meetings, working with the paper *Museums & the Present Time*, registering members etc.

form of participatory observation contribute and function as a primary background source within the thesis analysis.

At the conference, Samdok initiated an international dialogue about contemporary collecting, and in doing so, also activated broader questions about heritage work. As concepts utilized in a museum framework, both *collecting* and *heritage* are somewhat ambiguous. They represent concepts usually connected to the past, but within the contemporary collecting context of Samdok they are implemented in a practice linked to the present. The focal point of this dissertation is to investigate the Samdok-specific practice of collecting, as a way to reflect and react to *contemporary* society. Another purpose of this exploratory research is to highlight the likely challenges of contemporary collecting in the future practise of an international network, by examining how the heritage concept⁴ is used within the Samdok association.

For this thesis the concepts of *collecting* and *heritage* are essential. Both are concerned with the tangible and intangible aspects of life, or what is called material and immaterial culture. The notion of *culture* here represents the field in which collecting and heritage work is applied. In other words, the way collecting and heritage work is conducted directly reflects our definition of culture. Examining the use and understanding of heritage is therefore really a manner of exposing the way culture is studied, perceived and defined within the practice of contemporary collecting.

Aim

To analyse how the concept of *heritage* is used and understood in the context of contemporary collecting within the Swedish museum network Samdok and the international Samdok conference Connecting Collecting.

⁴ *Arv* is the Swedish word for *inheritance* but it can also mean *heritage*, although only if it is specified as *cultural* heritage (kultur-arv). The English word *heritage* on the other hand, encompass *cultural* heritage without any specifications needed. However, describing and referring to Swedish texts I will still follow the grammatical boundaries of the English language and subsequently let the English heritage concept include the Swedish meaning of cultural heritage, if not otherwise stated.

Objectives

1. To present former research and theories about contemporary collecting.
2. To introduce the concept of an *authorized heritage discourse* as a starting point when exploring the heritage concept within the Samdok association.
3. To identify and critically examine the uses and understandings of heritage as they appear in Samdok documents.
4. To collate and critically analyse the uses and understandings of heritage among the participants at the international conference Connecting Collecting.
5. To describe and compare heritage as used and understood within the Samdok association and the Connecting Collecting conference/network with the *authorized heritage discourse*.

The basic components and tools for the dissertation background and analysis are presented in chapters 2, 3, and 4. The thesis starts with an outline of previous research in the field of museum collecting. Then, the theoretical framework in which contemporary collecting and the concept of heritage belong is introduced. Finally, the methodology and material used is presented. In chapter 5–8 the thesis analysis is conducted. Chapter 5 provides a general description of the structure of Samdok together with the most prominent changes the organization has gone through. By analysing a set of texts describing the aims and hopes of Samdok, chapter 6 will investigate where Samdok stands today. In chapter 7 the understandings of contemporary collecting at the international conference Connecting Collecting are described and examined. In other words, chapter 5, 6, and 7 investigate the uses and understandings of heritage within Samdok by studying the network in three different contexts. In the concluding chapter 8 the findings on how the concept of *heritage* is used and understood in the context of contemporary collecting, is summed up and compared to each other and with the *authorized heritage discourse*.

In the following text a few Swedish Samdok publications will be repeatedly referred to. These titles have been translated into English and used as such in the text. However, all references within brackets are written in their original language. The quotes from the

publications: *The Present Day as Cultural Heritage*⁵ (Gudmundsson & Silvé, eds, 2006), *Societal Ideals and Images of the Future*⁶ (Hammarlund-Larsson, Nilsson & Silvé, eds, 2004), and *Museums & the Present Day*⁷ are all translated by Elin von Unge if not otherwise stated.

2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Research explicitly investigating the relationship between heritage and *contemporary* collecting within the museum sector is scarce. One reason for this could be that Museum Studies is a relatively new and small field constructed of interdisciplinary theoretical approaches. Furthermore, experiences of collecting the present, is a relatively recent phenomenon within the museum heritage division, where the early Samdok initiative represents an exception. However, key literature and themes exploring collecting within the contemporary museum heritage practice, together with a selection of influential texts produced by and/or written about Samdok, will here be accounted for. But first, a short description of the general development of collecting as a museum specific profession will be presented.

The collecting museum

The act of collecting wasn't invented by museums. In private, some people might collect antiquities and some mass-produced new products like Pokémon cards.⁸ All private collecting can therefore in a way be understood as contemporary. Hence, private collecting doesn't necessarily draw a line between old and new objects. Neither did the princely 'cabinets of curiosities' representing the eccentric and obscure, the rare and unusual. These privately owned collections that Western museums once originated from were, during the late 18th century, eventually opened up to the public, but now reorganized after typographies and origin (Hooper-Greenhill 1989: 71; Pearce 1989: 7-8). Art museums and museums of natural science were split up (Pearce 1989: 3). Now, one field of collecting, undertaken as part of the Enlightenment with the primary aim to explain development and origin, was developed (Ibid 1989: 3-4). In this field museum collectors searched for new

⁵ English title translated by Alan Crozier. Original title: *Samtiden som kulturarv*.

⁶ Original title: *Samhällsideal och framtidsbilder: Perspektiv på Nordiska museets dokumentation och forskning*.

⁷ Original title: *Samtid & Museer*

⁸ Trading cards for children depicting cartoon action figures from Japan <www.pokemon.com>.

material among the old things, believing the answers were hidden in the past. Subsequently the material traces of history were collected and preserved in museum stores.

In the Western parts of the world, the 19th Century was a period marked by social change and the idea of preservation grows strong during this period:

Almost inevitably it is the grand and great and 'good' that were chosen, to 'remind' the public about the values and sensibilities that should be saved or preserved as representative of patriotic American and European national identities. (Smith 2006: 23)

Ending the 19th century, disciplines like Archaeology, Anthropology and Ethnology, opened up for the study and collecting of old and/or isolated cultures where tradition had passed on knowledge from generation to generation (Pearce 1989: 4; Knell 2004: 30). In Sweden as in large parts of the West, the growing industrial society was replacing the former dominating agrarian culture; and so the Ethnographic museums working with cultural history were locally occupied with collecting and preserving the remains of a disappearing era, and abroad exploring foreign cultures (Knell 2004: 30; Hammarlund-Larsson 2004: 62-63).

During the first part of the 20th century, institutions preserving history in some ways became an antithesis to the growing mass production of the industrial society. To collect and preserve heritage here represented the opposite of ordinary industrially produced objects (Pearce 1989: 5). Collecting, as a way of gathering knowledge about the past, also came to play an important part in the creation of the nation state (Hammarlund-Larsson 2004: 62-63). However, museums did collect contemporary items as well. For instance art museums and galleries have always collected new material. Prominent modern design and inventions of the time were also included in museum collections. The Western museum collecting practise was hence signified by its focus on materiality, the old, the aesthetically pleasing and the monumental (Smith 2006: 4,1).

Unconsciously using time as a way to filter and limit what to collect, parts of the museum collecting practices, to a large extent, historically focused on collecting materials representing the past. The cultural reminiscences were kept and used to spread and preserve knowledge of bygone times. Museums were the keepers of selected material memories. Objects registered in a museum catalogue or database, were no longer active or 'alive', but rather functioning like symbolic memories (Silvén 2004: 181). One aspect of

heritage work within the historical museum context of the West can then be defined as material remains from the past, collected, handled and cared for by museums. These are the prevalent circumstances and conditions from where the notion of *contemporary* collecting developed.

Collections development

The traditional angle of exploring collections practise in a museum context is to see the objects as the starting point. The originality of museums then lies in how life is represented and interpreted through collected material culture. However, Simon Knell points out that most museum professionals today stress the importance of collecting contextual information as well (2004: 1-3) Susan Pearce has long been a leading voice in this field (1990). Since the 1980s she has conducted broad research on both material culture as such, as well as on the practice of collecting in and outside the museum sphere.⁹ Influenced by the critical structuralist and post-structuralist tradition Pearce, among others, initiated a renewal of the Western collection practice where the meanings of objects and the collecting process in itself could be reinterpreted and challenged¹⁰ (Pearce 1990: 2). However, the debate whether the objects represent the heart of the museum or function more like tools enabling knowledge production, today still stands (Knell 2004: 1-3).

In the anthology *Museums and the future of collecting* the editor, Simon J Knell (2004), sums up and accounts for the multitude of challenges collections practices today are faced with. In order for collections to meet a rational and sustainable future Knell encourages the museum sector to rethink what collecting means (Knell 2004: 46). According to Knell collecting in a museum context is:

... the intellectual components of an integrated 'acquisition-management-disposal' process, a process defined by a museum specific type of connoisseurship and focused on mixed media and collaborative recordings. (Ibid: 42)

Collections practice in museums is today a versatile occupation. It includes a wide range of activities, from the collecting of objects and contextual information, the preserving, revising and disposal of the existing collections, to programming, outreach and exhibition work. Knell's comprehensive definition, not only covers the referred process of *working* with the

⁹For most prominent publications see <www.le.ac.uk/ms/contactus/suepearce.html>.

¹⁰See chapter 3.

objects, but he also states that all collecting is contemporary. Irrespective of when an object was made the mere notion of its tangibility suggests it has a contemporary existence. ‘They are not pieces of the past as such, but pieces of the present which have a past’, Knell concludes (2004: 33–34). Consequently, where to draw the boundaries of collecting – its limits and focus – is much debated (Ibid: 1–56).

Together with the discussion about the object centred museum come questions exploring issues of inclusion, identity making and representativity, in short – the purpose of museums. The publication *Museums, Society, Inequality* explores these social responsibilities of the museum. The editor Richard Sandell claims that museum purposes traditionally have been viewed as cultural rather than social (2002: 3). What then are the implications of a collection practice addressing cultural authority and social inequality? Over the last couple of years a new interest in contemporary collecting has been spurred on in the UK, much thanks to reports such as *Collections for the future* instigated by the Museums Association.¹¹ The report launches the concept of a *dynamic collection* where the collection work is balanced between growth, engagement and disposals (Wilkinson 2005: 15). Subsequently, the report presents a method to make collections more relevant to the public as part of the collecting process. Zelda Baveystock, lecturer at the International Centre for Culture and Heritage Studies at Newcastle University, reflects on the implications of this new kind of collecting methodology.

Although it is understood that there are rich and varied ways in which visitors can personally respond to material culture in museum settings, one idea which has firmly taken hold is that a relevant collection is a representative collection; that to be interested in a museum display you must in some way be able to see yourself or your life reflected in it, or connected to it. (Baveystock 2008)

These ideas of representation and identity making are reflected in new research on museum community outreach projects, with the aim to reach excluded minority groups and non-visitors. Nevertheless, Baveystock claims that contemporary collecting in the UK still focuses much on collecting material for the future, rather than actually ‘finding innovative ways of working with the new collections formed,’ (Baveystock 2008). Furthermore,

¹¹ The Museums Association is an independent membership body, representing the interests of museum professionals and institutions. Read more and download the report at <www.museumsassociation.org/collectionsforthefuture> (12-05-2008).

Baveystock is hesitant about the direction the notion of relevance is taking; when focusing too much on individual responses the full picture is sometimes lost (Ibid 2008).

Much of the literature referred to above represents a museological tradition based in the UK, primarily from Museum Studies at Leicester University. However, it still displays approaches to contemporary collecting identified in a wider Western museum research context.¹²

In Sweden the early 1970s saw a need for new collecting methods and criteria; the museums needed to find ways to work and cooperate to share these responsibilities (Silvén 2004: 163). To actively work with these questions, a museum network was formed and 1977 the government granted the means necessary to form a Secretariat at the Nordiska Museet. Hence, Samdok was born. One of the early and most important texts produced by the young Samdok was *Distributing the museums' documentation responsibilities – a program for contemporary documentation at cultural history museums*,¹³ (Nyström & Cedrenius 1981). As implied by the title the text offers a plan of action, which the Samdok participants subsequently used during the establishing years (Silvén 2004: 164). Over the years Samdok has published a wide selection of reports, evaluations and even a book-series specializing in the methodological aspects of contemporary collecting (Samdok website). In this context Eva Silvén, former head of the Samdok Secretariat, is a reappearing and influential figure within the Samdok publications context. Altogether these Samdok texts give an in-depth description of the development of the Swedish discursive theories and practices of contemporary collecting.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The primary aim of this study is to examine the use and understanding of the heritage concept. As described in the introduction chapter, this is really a way of exposing how culture is studied, perceived and defined within the practice of contemporary collecting. The previous chapter explained how collecting developed as a museum profession. Starting by giving a brief background to more general conceptions of culture, this chapter will

¹² For further reading see Bennet 1995; Weil 2002.

¹³ Original title: *Fördela museernas dokumentationsansvar – ett program för samtidsdokumentation vid kulturhistoriska museer*.

subsequently account for the most common definitions within the museum sector. Finally, two approaches to the *heritage* concept used in the dissertation analysis, will be presented.

Over time cultural definitions have changed within the social and human sciences. One common interpretation is to define culture as the opposite of *nature*. When nature stands for something natural or original, culture becomes that which has been trained and learnt. But the concept can also be supplied with other connotations: as the opposite of the wild and uncontrolled sides of nature, culture instead becomes a sign of progress and evolution – a way to take control. Influenced by the Enlightenment the cultural definition of the 19th Century wanted to encompass the whole of Western civilization with its optimistic, progressive and evolutionary view on society (Johansson & Miegel 1996: 15-16).

This somewhat simplistic definition has since been both questioned and problematized. The previous focus on explaining long historical and general processes was subsequently replaced, as more attention was paid to the internal differences between groups of people in society.¹⁴ Societal changes, together with new technology, enabled people in the 1950s, '60s and '70s to communicate in different ways. This new homogenized society in turn gave birth to concepts such as *mass-culture* or a *culture of consumption* (Johansson & Miegel 1996: 18). These expressions of *popular culture* were as a start seen exclusively as a threat to the culture of the refined and educated. The formation of Cultural Studies together with theories within postmodernism later came to re-evaluate popular and youth culture as differentiated, including both positive and negative sides. Eventually the spotlight shifted once more, from defining the difference between cultures, to more focusing the study of *cultural change* within and between groups or fractions in society (Ibid: 19-21).

As part of the general growing interest in Cultural Studies, beginning in the UK during the 1960s and 70s,¹⁵ the interest in the material aspects of culture grew within the social and cultural sciences (Pearce 1989: 1). Greatly influenced by ideas of structuralist and semiological thinkers,¹⁶ the Material Culture Studies gained new land within the museum sector (Ibid: 1, 6-7). Encouraged by emancipatory ideals,¹⁷ a more critical view on collections work developed. As Pearce puts it: 'Societies are not neutral and objects are not innocent; on the contrary they weave a web of dominance and exploitation which it is the

¹⁴ For further reading see Elias 1939/1989.

¹⁵ For further reading see Turner 1990.

¹⁶ E.g. Ferdinand de Saussure, Nils Jacobsen, Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

¹⁷ E.g. the Frankfurt School of German social philosophy, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud.

student's business to expose.' In a poststructuralist view communication entails not only how we talk, write and act, but also material things like our clothes, furniture and where we live - communication as material culture (Pearce 1989: 47-59) Today theories within a range of social sciences¹⁸ acknowledge that everything, from the simplest objects like a chair or a pen to complex network objects such as shopping malls, computers or the subway system, also function as ways to communicate, understand and learn about human life (Woodward 2007: 3-4; Latour 1998). In order for museums to represent and reflect the world we live in, and the kinds of lives we live, they subsequently need to focus on both the tangible and intangible aspects of life (Knell 2004: 2).

Hence, the same goes for heritage work; seen as a way to produce knowledge about the past, heritage work can be used to suppress or liberate, in other words as a way to constitute power (Whinter Jørgensen & Phillips 2000: 8-9). Since the late 1990s a range of alternative standpoints has confronted the conception of heritage influenced by post-colonialism and a growing societal diversity (Smith 2006: 5-6). In agreement with the statement that heritage work is connected to power production, two theories on cultural heritage construction have been leading throughout the dissertation process.

Heritage theory

Heritage as a concept can mean many things and today professional heritage work is carried out in a number of ways and media. Since the 1960s and '70s the public interest in heritage work has increased and is commonly described as an *industry*. Together with the development of heritage *tourism* came new legislations and acts on heritage conservation and management (Smith 2006: 25). This growing interest in reproducing history has today been acknowledged in several fields of research. In this new, multifaceted heritage industry, museums only represent one field of expertise (Isacson & Silván 2006: 156). The question at hand is therefore how heritage experts, seen as a part of a larger Western museum practice, here represented by the Samdok association, use and understand the heritage concept.

By separating the notion of heritage from history, the historian David Lowenthal aims to highlight their different uses and characters.

¹⁸ See for example anthropology, ethnology, sociology, psychology, design and cultural studies (Woodward 2007: 4).

To vilify heritage as biased is thus futile: Bias is the main point of heritage. Prejudiced pride in the past is not a sorry consequence of heritage; it is its essential purpose. Heritage thereby attests our identity and affirms our worth ... Heritage diverges from history not in being biased but in its attitude toward bias. Neither enterprise is value-free. But while historians aim to reduce bias, heritage sanctions and strengthens it. (Lowenthal 1996: 123)

History, Lowenthal argues, is evolutionary, linear, and claims to represent the objective truth. Heritage, as demonstrated above, is admittedly biased to its very core (Ibid). He extends his metaphor by saying that ‘viewed as history, the past is a foreign country;¹⁹ viewed as heritage, it is highly familiar’ (Ibid: 139). Subsequently museums, as institutions intimately involved with collecting, presenting and preserving the past, have in their possession the means to let their audience visit the past as ‘a foreign country’ or as something ‘highly familiar.’ In constructing cultural heritage these two concepts are constantly at work. By using Lowenthal’s differentiation between heritage and history I hope to identify the heritage use within the material studied.

In the book *Uses Of Heritage* (2006) the scholar and cultural history consultant Laurajane Smith,²⁰ examines the idea of heritage. Smith introduces the notion of an acknowledged and established *Western Authorized Heritage Discourse* (hereafter AHD), with the central characteristics of materiality, age, the aesthetically pleasing and/or the monumental. Together these components construct and reflect identities concerning nationality, class, culture and ethnicity (Smith 2006: 4, 11, 28–29). Smith argues that the discourse is to a large extent upheld, regenerated and managed by heritage experts as they mark the past with an authenticity stamp (Ibid: 16–28). As caretakers of the past, with the specific aim to save and preserve for the future, the specialist controls the unauthorized interpretations. Hence the expert becomes a gatekeeper to the authentic heritage (Ibid: 29).

What then is heritage according to Smith? Quite controversially, Smith says that ‘the real sense of heritage is *intangible*.’ In doing so she highlights the opposite view of the AHD of which the most prominent characteristic is the idea of tangibility.

¹⁹ *The Past is a Foreign Country* is the title of one of Lowenthal’s books (1985).

²⁰ Laurajane Smith is a Senior Lecturer in Cultural Heritage Studies and Archaeology at the University of York. She previously taught Indigenous Studies at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, and worked as a cultural heritage consultant for many years (Smith 2006, dustcover).

The real sense of heritage, the real moment of heritage when our emotions and sense of self are truly engaged, is not so much in the possession [of the necklace], but in the act of passing on and receiving memories and knowledge. It also occurs in the way that we then use, recreate those memories and knowledge to help us make sense of and understand not only who we 'are', but also who we want to be.

In a material sense Smith argues, heritage doesn't exist but can rather be described as a cultural and social process, an experience or an act of 'passing on and receiving' (Smith 2006: 11, 2). If heritage is not a thing, it cannot be owned, but lives in the act.

Smith's definition of heritage is not entirely new (see e.g. Lowenthal 1996), but still an approach to heritage research that needs to be thoroughly investigated (Smith 2006: 45). For this thesis the concept of *intangible heritage* is essential, since it is used to contrast and reveal how culture is studied in contemporary collections work, here represented by Samdok. However, the thesis doesn't side with either the AHD or the notion of heritage as immaterial.

4 METHODOLOGY AND MATERIAL

In research, the material studied, the methods used, and the theories behind the study, go hand in hand (Kaijser & Öhlander 1999: 14-23). The previous chapter outlined the components of the theoretical framework behind this study. Here, the methodology is presented together with the primary sources. The empirical research base consists of:

- 1) An email survey directed to the 150 participants²¹ of the conference Connecting Collecting, which was sent out on April 7th, 2008.
- 2) Participant observation undertaken at the named conference.
- 3) Written sources consisting of the web-publication derived from the conference together with a selected number of texts published by and about Samdok of which the most prominent are: *The Present Day as Cultural Heritage* (Gudmundsson & Silvén eds, 2006), *Societal Ideals and Images of the Future* (Hammarlund-Larsson, Nilsson & Silvén eds, 2004), and *Museums & the Present Day*.

²¹ Approximately 140 persons attended the conference but the survey was sent out to a few more, who showed interest.

These primary sources will be analysed by the methodology provided by Critical Discourse Analysis. Here follows an introduction to the discourse concept together with the theoretical tools and concepts used in the analysis, and thereafter a brief presentation of the primary sources listed above together with the methods used (participant observation and the survey).

Discourse analysis

The research material will be approached by the use of discourse analysis. There are many different schools of theory using the discourse concept. On a general note, discourses can be described as a specific way to talk and understand the world. These different ways of 'seeing', sometimes contradict each other and sometimes align. When diverse discourses meet, antagonism appears. It is when this antagonism disappears that a discourse becomes dominant or hegemonic. In short, how we think, talk or act is regulated by the predominating discourse within a given society (Whinther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000: 7).

Discourse theory is much influenced by the French poststructuralist Michael Foucault. The aim of Foucault's genealogy is to investigate what enables discourses to work – how they shift, change and produce knowledge. Discourses as systems of knowledge, or systems of truth, are linked to power: To know the code of a predominating discourse is to have power over it. It is important to note that Foucault doesn't necessarily see the power of discourses as repressive or negative. Power can also enable creativity and change (Ahlbeck-Rehn 2001; Whinther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000: 7).

In the analysis the discourse concept established by Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA) will be used. It is an interdisciplinary methodology commonly used in for example Sociology and Cultural Studies, (Fairclough 2003: 1). In contrast to Foucault's genealogy, CDA provides a methodology that stresses the connections between *discourse* and *practice* (Smith: 15-16). Furthermore, CDA focuses on the relationship between *sender* and *receiver* within institutions involved in power-knowledge production. By studying a set of texts – how people talk or write, CDA aims to examine specific discourses, their inter-relationship, as well as how they are positioned within the social and political context at hand (Fairclough 2003:3).

Smith's analysis of the AHD is based on the belief that discourse is a form of social practise that shapes our way of thinking and acting (2006: 14-16). Accepting this reasoning, but now focusing on the context of Samdok, the association could be described as an AHD sub-discourse. Born in an age when the Swedish cultural history museum focus shifted from collecting the past to collecting and reflecting the present, Samdok was coloured by the wish for new collecting theories but was still greatly influenced by the prevalent AHD.

By studying the relationship between the members and their work field (sender-receiver) in a selected set of Samdok texts, this thesis will investigate the appearance of antagonism within the network. Hence, the power constituted by Samdok as *heritage expert* is examined. By further investigating how the network uses the heritage concept, the focus of the dissertation is to analyse how Samdok as a discourse relates to, on the one hand the AHD, and on the other hand, Smith's opposite definition of heritage. In other words, first the Samdok texts will be presented and critically examined. The analysis will present areas or themes where the understanding and uses of heritage, become most visible. These themes display the prime components constructing knowledge within the Samdok discourse. Secondly these themes will be compared to the AHD and Smith's contrasting heritage definition.

Grey sources

The participant observation, conducted at the conference Connecting Collecting, took place during the two days of the 15th and 16th November 2007 at Nordiska Museet, Stockholm. After working with the conference at an early stage due to my previous internship, I also helped out at the event. Therefore my focus was split: on the one hand I was handing out information and assisting the speakers, and at the same time I took notes and observed the general proceedings. Participant observation is a commonly used method in Ethnological studies where the thin line between participation and observation is acknowledged. The researcher sometimes needs to more actively participate and other times stand back and observe (Kaijser & Öhlander 1999: 74-75) This dual focus momentarily made it harder for me to concentrate and take notes, but it also helped me to get in touch with the partakers. All in all, the experiences from behind the scene as well as among the audience helped to shape an adequate basis of research material.

It was decided by the Samdok Secretariat to produce a web-publication presenting the conference speeches as articles. I assisted in the editing process, which enabled me to get to know many of the authors, as well as their texts, better. This internet-based dialogue communication has been taking place during a period of many months, from December 2007 to April 2008. The conference publication as a work in progress as well as the finished anthology are used as research material.

The conference, together with the web-publication, gives voice to a selected number of participants. Based on recommendations from the methodology handbook *Metodpraktikan* an investigative survey with the aim to learn more about the opinions of the general audience was therefore constructed (Esaiasson & Gilljam 2003: 251-278). My purpose was to find out if there was a common agreement about the aim of the proposed collecting network, or if the opinions differed much. The survey questions were hence written based on the different approaches to contemporary collections practice that were discussed during the conference proceedings, as well as in the contributions in the web-publication. The recipients were asked to choose three specific aims for the new network from a list of twelve. The possibility to write a motivation of choice was also included. The answers were anonymous and their choices personal (not representing a museum or institution). The survey was sent out by email to approximately 150 addressees of whom 22 answered,²² which makes the return rate 13 %. The survey was first sent out April 7th, 2008 with a follow up reminder on April 24th. The proceedings of the conference as well as the survey results will be more closely presented in chapter 7.

Printed sources

Since the aim of the thesis partly is to analyse Samdok as a discourse through a selected set of texts, the material used play a dual role. Some of the texts function both as contextual sources as well as primary research material. Therefore, throughout the analysis attention has been paid to this dual role of the Samdok sources. The rich text-based material touching Samdok-related aspects is too large to summarize but will be referred to throughout the thesis. It will thereby provide for a broad range of secondary sources placing the birth and development of Samdok in its contextual climate. A more general description of the

²² For the full survey, see appendix 1 and for a presentation of the survey results, see appendix 2.

network of importance for the contextual understanding of Samdok as part of the extended field of collecting has already been introduced in chapter 2.

Reading through the Samdok literature, two books stood out as more suitable primary sources for my aims and objectives. They were published fairly recently and represent a self-evaluating tradition detected within the Samdok literature, and as such they both reference and interpret these earlier contextually important texts.

The anthology *The Present Day as Cultural Heritage* is a logical choice (Silvén & Gudmundsson, eds, 2006). As the title implies, it centres on how Swedish museums, engaged in collecting and documenting the present day have, through Samdok, constructed heritage.

*... the overall aim of the project 'The present day as cultural heritage' has been to manifest the significance of the museums and their officials for the construction of cultural heritage and to bring this knowledge back to those concerned, in order to increase their professional self-insight, to improve their working methods, and to broaden the museums' interpretations of their public assignment.*²³ (Isacsson & Silvén 2006: 193).

Heritage is hence, throughout the fourteen contributions, a central theme. In a selected set of articles different museum professionals evaluate their own museums' contemporary investigations. In some cases this work is conducted in dialogue with researchers from a variety of disciplines. Others thematically challenge or describe the Samdok practise by using concepts of labour, cultural encounters or an international perspective (Silvén & Gudmundsson, eds, 2006: 183-184). In total the book describes the prime subject of the Samdok work as man and his/her living conditions. Written and produced by Samdok members, the anthology can be described as a way of self-evaluating and stimulating the Samdok network, including contemporary investigation work in Swedish museums.

Another useful source is the publication *Societal Ideals and Images of the Future* (Hammarlund-Larsson, Nilsson & Silvén, eds, 2004). Divided into three chapters written by three different authors, the book outlines the relationship between Nordiska Museet and the cultural landscape of Swedish society. The chapters mirror how changes in Swedish society are reflected within the research, collecting and documentation work of Nordiska Museet from its establishment in the 1870s up until today. For this thesis, the third chapter is essential,

²³ Translated by Alan Crozier.

focusing on the period of 1965–1989, in which the establishment of Samdok as situated at Nordiska Museet dominates the debate. Written by one of the editors, Eva Silvén, the third part, titled *In the Present or for the Future: About knowledge-building in late modernity*,²⁴ explains and analyses the relationship between Nordiska Museet, as an active voice within the Swedish museum sector, and the hopes and ideals of the present society. The text therefore offers both contextual information but more importantly constitutes a research material summing up the uses of heritage in relation to contemporary collecting.

The periodical *Samdokbulletinen*, later renamed *Museums & the Present Day* also provides a useful source. Over the 31 years of publication starting as a typed newsletter launching Samdok, the name, format and content has changed, but the original mission and structure basically remain: as a way to spread information between the members. Not only do the articles describe what the different sections within the organization are working with, but also throughout the years there is a lively discussion about, simply put, ‘the meaning of Samdok.’ Between the first bulletin from 1977 to no 2–2007, 33 issues have been studied.²⁵ As they specifically address themes useful for the purpose of this analysis two issues were then selected for a closer analysis: The English presentation of Samdok, *Connecting Collecting: 30 Years of Samdok*, which was published in connection with the named conference accounts for where Samdok stands today through the voices of its members (2007, no 2). The other issue, *25 years of Samdok*²⁶ is also selected since the articles address the direct future of Samdok (2002, no 3–4). These two issues will be given a closer description in chapter 7.

5 A NETWORK IN CHANGE

The overall aim of the analysis is to investigate how the concept of *heritage* is used and understood in the context of contemporary collecting, here represented by the Swedish museum network Samdok. By comparing the understandings and uses of *heritage* within the Samdok network, to on the one hand the AHD, and on the other, Smith’s contrasting immaterial heritage definition, the nature of Samdok as a discourse will be investigated.

²⁴ Original title: *I samtiden eller för framtiden: Om ett kuskapsbygge i senmoderniteten*.

²⁵ Samdokbulletinen: no 1, 12, 14–15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 28, 29, 33, 34, 37, 41, 43. Vol 15, 16, 18, 20 (no 1,3). Samtid & Museer: no 2 vol 21/ no 1, 2, 3 vol 22/ no 3 vol 23/no 4 vol 24/ no 1–2 vol 25/ no 1–2, 3–4 vol 26, no 3–4 vol 28/ no 2 vol 29/ no 2 vol 31.

²⁶ Original title: Samdok 25 år.

Over its 30 years of operation Samdok has gone through changes. However, to a large extent, the original formation still remains. By starting out with presenting and describing Samdok as an organization, this chapter not only aims to give the reader a view of the Samdok structure, but also to highlight the most prominent changes the organization has gone through. These changes in turn represent areas where the use and understanding of heritage become most visible.

This chapter is for the most part, based on texts from the two books: *Societal Ideals and Images of the Future* (Hammarlund-Larsson, Nilsson & Silvé, eds, 2004) and *The Present Day as Cultural Heritage* (Silvé & Gudmundsson, eds, 2006). Eva Silvé, former head of the Samdok Secretariat, is to a large extent involved in the production of these publications. Together with researchers and colleagues she manages to give a detailed picture of the life and functions of Samdok and its relation to Swedish society. Based on these deep analyses this chapter will sketch a summarized presentation of Samdok, which will point out and depict key characteristics and organizational changes that have occurred.

Structure

Today there are about 80 *members* registered in the network, though not all active. The members are representatives of museums all over Sweden, as well as institutions such as universities or archives associated with cultural history. All participation is on a *voluntary* basis and it is therefore up to the manager of each museum/institution to encourage and sponsor its staff to participate (Steen 2004: 200-201). Each participant needs to balance and adjust the work within Samdok to their museum's means and mission (Isacson & Silvé 2006: 167).

The Samdok *Secretariat* is the hub and administrative body of the Samdok network. It is financed by and situated at the Nordiska Museet and is presently consisting of only 1.5 positions. Apart from organizing conferences and member meetings the Secretariat is responsible for publishing the periodical *Museums & the Present Day* and managing the website²⁷ together with the public database, *Samdokregistret*, today consisting of around 1,000 entries covering a variety of collecting projects conducted by the members (Samdok's website).

²⁷ See <www.nordiskamuseet.se>.

The Nordiska Museet director, together with representatives for the Swedish national, county and municipal museums, governs the overall decision-making *Samdok Council*. As part of the Nordiska Museet's Research Council, the *Samdok Research Council* support and vouch for continued cooperation with, and connection to, the academic sphere (Fägerborg 2008; Samdok website).

The Samdok members are divided into working-groups called *pools*. At present there are seven. The pool-work can best be described as the core of the Samdok association (Samdok website; Steen 2004: 199). Each pool meet twice a year focusing their specific themes in various ways: i.e. field trips, seminars or a general exchange of experiences and information. Every year the different pool-presidents get together for a general meeting. Reports and articles on what is happening in museum Sweden are regularly published in the periodical *Museums & the Present Day*, which is distributed twice a year. Each pool decides within the group the nature of their work, provided it follows the constituted guidelines.²⁸ The present pools are titled: *Domestic life and leisure, Local and Regional Spheres, Management of Natural Resources, Politics and Society, Manufacture and Services, Sami Life* and finally *the Group for Cultural Encounters* (Samdok website).

From general to personal

Originally the eleven sector-specific working-groups, or pools, aimed to cover the work-field of production, services and the public sector. Only one pool represented life outside the 'work-field' – *the Home Pool*.²⁹ In Eva Silvén's chapter in *Societal Ideals and Images of the Future* she explains the close connection between the field of production and human life at that time.

That the present was thus so closely identified with labour and production mirrors the discursive importance enjoyed by trade and industry during this period ... Identity was linked to work and it was therefore natural that man, who in spite of the structural method was regarded as the essence of Samdok, could be studied starting from his or her professional occupation (Silvén 2004:172).

When *the Sami Pool* (1990) and later *the Group for Cultural Encounters* (1993) were established, a general need to include the consumer perspective within the pool-work was recognized

²⁸ Guidelines available at the Samdok website: <www.nordiskamuseet.se>.

²⁹ The original pools: the Agriculture and Forestry Pool, the Metals Pool, the Timber and Paper Pool, the Food Pool, the Textiles Pool, the Construction Pool, the Trade Pool, the Communication Pool, the Services Pool and the Home Pool.

(Silvén & Gudmundsson 2006: 181). Hence, in 1997 the working-groups were reorganized in order to encompass a differentiated, whole society and not as before, primarily the labour market (Ibid; Steen 2004: 199).

The changes within the pool-structure also reflect general tendencies in society during this period of time. Research in the 1970s was greatly influenced by the, to a large extent, male production-focused class perspective. Later, during the 1980s and '90s, this view was questioned and complemented by postmodern theories relating to ethnicity, gender and matters of inclusion (Silvén & Gudmundsson 2006: 181) Consequently, the growing post-war multicultural Swedish society was faced with new cultural political aims, focusing matters of democracy and inclusion. The *Group for Cultural Encounters* was therefore established to specifically encourage and support the other pools to integrate migration related questions in their work (Samdok's website). It is noteworthy that Samdok never initiated a pool or working group to specifically address gender related issues, a fact that might have something to do with the generally weak representation of gender questions at Swedish museums during this time (Isacson & Silvén 2006: 160-161).³⁰

Material or contextual?

When Samdok started in 1977, it was with the intent to make Swedish museums communicate and cooperate when collecting the present (Silvén 2004: 163-164). The 'Sam' part of Samdok therefore stands for *Samordning*, *Samarbete* and *Samtid*, translated into English *coordination*, *cooperation* and *the present time* (Rosander 1977; Steen 2004: 197-198). Since then, Samdok ideas and ideals have been much debated, but Samdok is today still one of few Swedish forums for museum professionals that actively address contemporary collecting. Early on, the attention on the objects shifted. Instead, guidelines, such as presented in the report, *Object, image, data*,³¹ (1973) launched the idea of restrictive accessioning complemented by fieldwork methods providing rich contextual data (Silvén 2004: 184). It is difficult to point to one specific reason or event that solely influenced this change. Some stressed the importance to *save* material culture before it disappeared in the rapid changes of industrial society. Some rather saw the objects as *symbols* that could be interpreted in different ways (Ibid: 166). Others stressed the importance of collecting a comprehensive material where the items represented different categories (Silvén 2004: 194). In *The Present*

³⁰ For further reading see *Genus på museer* 2003; Aronsson & Meurling 2005.

³¹ Original title: *Föremål, bild, data*.

Day as Cultural Heritage Silvén tries to explain Samdok's complex relationship to the material world.

... it is rather a question of a complicated relationship, where the positivistic inheritance from "material culture research" combined with collections demanding more financial resources, have subdued materiality as an analytical category. (Silvén 2006: 201)³²

Perhaps the prospect of managing a comprehensive, representative and all-inclusive collection felt insurmountable. Instead the network started to build new methods and theories concerning inclusion, oral history and intangible culture, all of them today burning concepts within the international museum field. Derived from primarily ethnology and anthropology, the latter part of the Samdok name, the 'dok', alludes to a range of methods developed and used in Samdok to document *and* collect the present time. In Scandinavia the commonly used phrase *dokumentation* or *samtidsdokumentation*³³ therefore sums up a variety of collecting methods including both ways of documenting as well as collecting material objects (Steen 2004: 197-198).

Systematize or inspire?

As mentioned above, the Samdok initiative was preceded by a debate on how to make the Swedish cultural history museums focus on contemporary collecting, but also on how to coordinate and cooperate in order to fill the 'gaps' in existing collections as well as on how to collect the neglected industrial 20th Century (Silvén & Gudmundsson 2006: 181; Silvén 2004: 163-173). In the first issue of *Samdokbulletinen* (1977) one of the initiators, Göran Rosander, explains the mission of the 'Samdok project'.

On a regular basis [Samdok] should work with the museums, with producers, importers and research institutes, it should procure ideas, create directories for special collections, and generally encourage an increased level of quality and ambitions in documentation work. (Rosander 1977:1)

The quote shows that, even though Samdok still centres on human life and experiences, the prime aim of the network has, since the beginning, shifted somewhat. At present the organization puts more emphasis on professional development and sharing of experiences than, as in the quote, practical systematization. Here, Eva Fägerborg, an active member of

³² Translated by Alan Crozier.

³³ Translated: To record and collect the present time.

the network since the very beginning, and presently in charge of the Samdok Secretariat, describes the association.

... Samdok is not a unit or a centralized body, it is its members. And the Samdok family is a heterogeneous crowd of museums with different aims and directions, different needs, competences and working conditions --- What is common is the mission to contribute to a deeper understanding of human beings, of people in society, through contemporary studies and collecting. In Samdok, the focus is on people's lives, activities, experiences, conditions and values related to time, space and social contexts. (Fägerborg 2008)

What Fägerborg stresses here are firstly, that Samdok is not a top-down organization: the responsibility as well as the freedom to influence and steer the aims of the network lies with the different members. The association is hence characterized by its *open structure* and *heterogeneous nature*. Secondly, what binds this diverse organism together is the constant focus on *contemporary human experiences*.

*Today for tomorrow*³⁴

In the debate on how to best capture the present time, the attitudes towards material culture activated and revealed different outtakes on the museum's role. Various sets of ideas around museum-specific research and documentation appeared (Silvén 2004: 193). When museum professionals started to notice how their predecessors had neglected to collect and document the greater part of contemporary every day life, they wanted to avoid making the same mistake. Here, Samdok represented a possible way to fill the gaps in the collections, as well as an initiative to actively collect and represent the present time. To evade making the same errors as their forerunners, different ways to insure that the material collected would be useful and adequate for the needs of the future, were discussed within the network. In the material presented by the periodical *Samdokbulletinen* the 'tenses of collecting', this relationship between the future and the present, is reappearing. This debate circled around both how far back the present time could be considered to stretch (Kolsrud 1980: 1-5), as well as how to make best use of the material culture collected (Ågren 1982: 11-12; Rosander 1983: 5-6). These two quotes clearly represent opposite takes on the role of 'the future' within contemporary collecting.

³⁴ Also the title of the English summary of the Swedish museum debate on collecting from the 1970s. (Rosander 1980)

We can be sure of the fact that the type of objects people will ask for in the future will be objects in general use today --- The risk of making mistakes [sic!] are of course smaller if we concentrate on objects which we know have been commonly used during that specific time and in that environment.
(Från knappnål till jumbojet, 1975: 94)

If the task of the museums is to be the memory bank of society ... our responsibility must not be limited to the work of registering and collecting today's reality to be worked at in the future.
(Conradson 1982: 5)

Due to Samdok's heterogeneous nature, the attitudes within the network towards this question have varied with place and time. On a general level however, this debate spurred on a tendency within the Samdok reports to prioritize the needs of the future in their collection work. As new selection criteria were written the collecting focus was put on gathering a broad and general material, representing the normal sides of everyday life (Silvén 2004: 190, 196-197). Since many of the Samdok reports were meant to be interpreted by future museum workers, the data has since been criticized of being left somewhat unproblematized. Silvéen believes that, partly due to this fact, the nature of the museum investigations developed in a different direction than more established research as well as professions such as journalism, professional writing, photography and film-making,³⁵ (2004: 204-205).

The dispute about whether the products of Samdok work should be considered as research about the present time, or as primarily material for *future research*, has subsequently been actively debated throughout the Samdok history. Today the work of the members has become more problem-oriented and more about using the investigations as a way to reflect the *present*, to be utilized both in the present *and* the future. However, the Samdok reports are still not fully considered as established research.

Summarizing, Samdok's original focus on heritage as material culture quite soon gave way to the development of new and alternative methods of documenting and gathering contextual data; As *contextual information* the concept of heritage came to be understood and used as intangible. Starting with a dominating *class-perspective* and focus on primarily the *production-centred Swedish labour market*, the pool-structure and pool-work slowly developed to more and more include issues of *consumption* and *identity*. The original spotlight directed

³⁵ These professions represent fields that during this time were also occupied with documenting contemporary society through different media.

towards the practical uses of Samdok, the need to *systematize* and *coordinate* collecting among Swedish museums, also changed. Today the network is seen as a *forum* with the prime aim to *share discussions* and *experiences* and to sponsor further *professional education*. As a forum, Samdok today understands and uses heritage work in a relationship with society and the individual as opposed to before, when the heritage work was more about finding a system to capture aspects of work-related life.

For the nature of the investigations conducted by Samdok members the supposed needs of the *future* came to play a decisive role when the members documented the present day, as they more often left the collected material ‘unresearched.’ They wanted to collect and document the truth about the present. ‘Heritage’ was hence seen more in the lines of ‘history’ – as evidence of the past, for the future. Even though other perspectives eventually took over, these museum-based reports were, and still are, not considered as research but rather as a basis for, or sometimes as a special kind of, research (Silvén 2004: 202).

6 SEARCHING SAMDOK TODAY

The periodical *Museums & the Present Day* represents a forum where the different pool-members have shared their opinions. Dedicated to celebrate Samdok’s 25th year of operation (2002, no 3–4) and, five years later its 30th birthday (2007, no 2) these papers give an overview of the most current Samdok work; together the articles sum up where Samdok stands today. In the descriptions of the pool-work and pool-aims the relationship of contemporary collecting and the understanding of the heritage concept become visible.

In the introduction and concluding chapters of *The Present Day as Cultural Heritage* the authors give voice to future hopes and aims for Samdok (Silvén & Gudmundsson, eds, 2006). In *Societal Ideals and Images of the Future* Eva Silvén also concludes by expressing her wishes for the future Samdok work (Hammarlund-Larsson, Nilsson & Silvén, eds, 2004). Together with the two issues of *Museums & the Present Day* (*Samtid & Museer*, 2002, no 3–4; 2007, no 2), these texts provide a basis for the following analysis of the relationship between contemporary collecting and the conception of heritage, as used and understood within Samdok. In short – where Samdok stands today.

Pool practice

Samdok is known to be described as ‘its members’ (Fägerborg 2008). Through the different articles in *Connecting Collecting: 30 years of Samdok*,³⁶ the members of the pools³⁷ describe and account for their aims, perspectives and pool-projects (2007, no 2). Together these pool-descriptions articulate Samdok through the words of the partakers. Over the years the pool-work has changed within and between the different groups. Based on these articles, but without going into detail as to the specific identities of the pools, a general description of the *aims, methods* and *outcomes* of the pool-work will here be presented. However the primary purpose is not to scrutinize the pool-structure, or their strengths and weaknesses. Interest is instead paid to parts of the texts addressing how the pools face the task of collecting contemporary heritage.

The various pool-themes aim to cover the Swedish society. The themes are seen as fields where aspects of present cultural and social human expressions and experiences are studied, documented and collected. The original production focused pool-division has changed, and today the pools represent a variety of outlooks on society. For example, the field of study of the *Pool for Sami life* differs a lot from pools such as *Local and Regional Spheres* or the *Group for Cultural Encounters*. What they all have in common is a stated *aim* to study a specific field or theme in relation to the human life and experiences of today. This is expressed in all the articles, but in this context the *Pool for Leisure* and the *Pool for Manufacture and Services* will provide illustrative examples:

By questioning and deconstructing leisure as a concept and a phenomenon we can investigate changes that take place in society and affect the individual. (Nyberg & Fredriksen 2007: 10)

The pool for Manufacture and Services focuses on matters concerning people involved in the production of physical objects and energy, services, media, and communication. (Andersson, Carlström & Åkerman 2007: 16)

Apart from some minor differences, the general *methods* of investigation for the pool-work seem to be quite similar. The articles describe several projects of different size and nature, mentioning techniques such as participant observation, different interview techniques,

³⁶ In order to reach an international audience this issue was printed in English. All translations by Alan Crozier.

³⁷ At this time the pools were eight. In 2008 the Pool for Domestic Life and the Pool for Leisure merged into the Pool for Domestic life and Leisure. Therefore the text refers to the previous eight Pools.

photography, questionnaires, study trips, seminars, the use of earlier Samdok material, and in some cases the acquisition of objects (*Samtid & Museer* 2007, no 2: 7, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 21). Though none of the articles specifically address the difficulties and complexity of fieldwork, the mentioned methods together display adequate techniques for documenting and collecting the present time. It is noteworthy that even though the collecting of objects is mentioned, it seems to occur rather as an exception. Emphasis is instead put on the *dialogue* with colleagues, researchers and the public (Nyberg & Fredriksen 2007: 11; Magnusson 2007: 6-7).

The expected *outcomes* of the pool-work can be divided into two groups where the first one consists of outcomes for the public such as exhibitions, publications, grounds for decision-making, or a clearly expressed aim for the investigation to involve and be of use to the people studied (Murray & Silvén 2007: 21). Sometimes the pool-work becomes part of larger museum projects and then result in e.g an exhibition or a publication. But otherwise, after being transcribed and outlined with sufficient contextual information, the work is likely to be archived at the host museum (Andersson, Carlström & Åkerman 2007: 17). In this latter case, the outcome of the pool-study partly lies in the future use of material such as interviews, field notes, artefacts, photographs, sound and video recordings, and documents, but also in the experiences gained by the museum professionals that participated. This development of an internal knowledge base for museum professionals is throughout the texts, highlighted as one of the major outcomes of the Samdok participation:

In their day-to-day work the members of the pool are occupied with many different tasks and are not infrequently alone in doing Samdok studies within the framework of their respective museums. The pool meetings are thus an opportunity for the members to learn from each other's experience. (Andersson, Carlström & Åkerman 2007: 17)

In these contexts [exhibition work with external financing] the Samdok organization plays a crucial part, as support and as a sounding board. (Eivergård & Knutsson 2007: 9)

We arrange lectures, study visits, and seminars, and the pool serves as a resource for supplementary education and networking for the participating museums. (Wahss & Gradin 2007: 15)

Concluding, what characterizes *Samdok heritage work* in these texts is firstly the focus on human activities in the present day, and secondly the form of tradition developed in the

network, where a structure for the exchange of knowledge and further education between museum professionals has been established. Though using a variety of methods, there is no specific or established way of conducting a 'Samdok investigation'. Furthermore, the texts put little emphasis on the practical aspects of developing new methods of documenting and collecting the present day. Instead they emphasize the use of theoretical perspectives to critically examine power factors in their studies. The *Group for Cultural Encounters*, as established to specifically address issues around cultural diversity, can perhaps help to highlight these topics:

Each member of the Cultural Encounters Group acts as contact person for a pool. Originally this mostly involved highlighting cultural encounter issues and getting these into the action programmes of the pools. This task has been accomplished, but the step of finding fields of study, formulating important questions and seeking relevance in the work of the pools is a constant item on the agenda. (Magnusson 2007: 7)

Finally, the general focus on *change* in the articles, is striking. The study of change seems to be an underlying idea behind both the aims and fields of study. Above, the *Pool for Leisure* defined their aim as a way to investigate societal *changes* through deconstructing the concept of leisure. The *Pool for Domestic life* also motivates its studies of the home by declaring it a place 'characterized by constant change' (Eivergård & Knutsson 2007: 9). The studies presented by *The Pool for Local and Regional Spheres* almost exclusively centres on societal change (Mellander & Ulfstrand 2007: 12-13) whereas others stress the joint focus on 'development and change' (*Samtid & Museer* 2007, no 2: 14, 20). Concluding the description of their work two of the pools finish off by stating:

The aim of the pool for Society and Politics must always be to explore processes of change in society, to see their effects and patterns. (Ohlsson & Stolt 2007: 19)

The Pool for Management of Natural Resources documents a cultural heritage that is changing radically, and this work is very important for the future. (Wahss & Gradin 2007: 15)

It is not an understatement to say that the search for *processes of change* in society to a large extent defines the uses and understandings of what heritage is in the Samdok pool-work.

Future prospects

To celebrate Samdok's 25th year of operation, the conference *Seen and unseen: On the possibilities and limits of collecting the present day*³⁸ was held at the Nordiska Museet in October 2002. The conference proceedings were later that year published in the periodical (*Samtid & Museer* 2002, no 3–4). The contributions addressed how Samdok best could be of use in future museum work. The four themes outlined in the previous chapter, summing up the development of the network, are recognized in the various inputs from the conference. Through these texts the focus of the Samdok practice appears to be in constant negotiation between the *general* or the *personal*, the *material* or the *contextual*, the *systematization* or *inspirational* and the *documentation for the future* or *research for today*.

The different articles in the conference issue of *Museums & the Present Day* can thus, be placed in two loose groups, which emphasize different needs for the future work of Samdok, and in extension the aims of the museums (*Samtid & Museer* 2002, no 3–4). By applying long perspectives, stretching both back and forth in time, one group stresses that the prime aim of museums must be to seek those phenomena and examples that catch the general tendencies of the present time:

If we problematize, disregarding the present and applying a long-term perspective, we will be able to contribute in a substantial way to social discussion. The purpose of the collecting and documentation process of the museums is long-term – the collected items should be used for future exhibitions, teaching, and research. (Rentzhog 2002: 7)

Here is an important part [for the museums] to play in helping people in the future to form a better general picture of things that occurred during our time, and maybe even why they happened. (Hadders 2002: 11)

It is apparent that these quotes testify to the belief that museums fulfil a specific role in society by making sure that the memories of today are kept for the use of tomorrow. For this, Samdok need continuity, coordination and methodological development (Rentzhog 2002: 6–7; Eriksson 2002: 17).

³⁸ Original title: *Sett och osett. Om samtidsdokumentationens möjligheter och gränser.*

Then there are those who are driven by the prime aim to make the museum an inclusive forum, where people with different backgrounds and views on life interact in a dialogue reflecting their present conditions:

Today there is an ongoing discussion on heritage, where everyone's right to his or her history is usually pointed out. Demands are raised that institutions working with heritage must not exclude or marginalize certain groups. An important question is whether museums should be an arena for the culture of the majority, a mediatory place where "normality" is confirmed, or if it should belong to everyone, regardless of way of life, class, gender, or ethnicity. (Eivergård 2002: 8)

Contemporary collecting and recording can be an interactive process for the purpose of creating dialogue and networks – focusing on material things, heritage, human life stories, the unspoken, and the experienced --- Contemporary collecting and recording should also have a role in the outreach work of the museums, both as a way of working and as an explanatory model. (Johansson 2002: 12-13)

As seen the use of heritage work is addressed in both these quotes. To begin with, the first quote emphasizes that how reality is perceived varies greatly from person to person, and that museums therefore risk excluding people when focusing solely on general descriptions of society. Furthermore, the second quote suggests that the practise of documenting and collecting the present day, should be seen as part of the general outreach work at museums. These more inclusive aspects of museum work are today recognized in contemporary museum practices in many parts of the world (e g *Collections for the future* by Wilkinson 2005). Inspired by museum work in the UK, the former employee of the Samdok Secretariat Cajsa Lagerkvist, joins the second group when she explains how Samdok is perceived in an international context:

When I had stopped working for the Secretariat I became aware of how limited the knowledge of Samdok's work and purpose is, and of the fact that a very small part of its internal discussion goes beyond the people immediately concerned. Evidence suggests that Samdok has become a matter only for the active --- Samdok is the internationally best known Swedish museum work, which has also had an impact on museums in other parts of the world --- However, a certain measure of surprise has been expressed over the fact that Samdok has not been motivated by any kind of emancipatory interests. (Lagerkvist 2002: 14)

The analysed texts show that two parallel ideas exist about how heritage work within Samdok should proceed. The most significant difference between the two groups lies in how they use the time dimension to define and limit their primary mission. The first group motivates the museum work through the ability, by using long-term perspectives, to collect, preserve, and present history for the future. Heritage is here perceived as history. The second group is more concerned with making heritage inclusive and accessible for the present as well as for the future. Samdok is also criticized for being too introvert and without emancipatory interests. It is interesting to note how the Samdok texts repeatedly tell the same 'stories of Samdok.' These reoccurring descriptions of the organization can be described as breaking points, where the discourse of (or truth about) Samdok is being negotiated and eventually established.

Verbalizing heritage

The publications *The Present Day as Cultural Heritage* (Silvén & Gudmundsson, eds, 2006) and *Societal Ideals and Images of the Future* (Hammarlund-Larsson, Nilsson & Silvén, eds, 2004) also gaze towards the meanings and possibilities of the Samdok network, by reflecting on different aspects of heritage management. Together, these two self-reflexive publications provide a material where the hopes and aims for a future Samdok can be detected. These discussions around Samdok and museum's collections work in general tell us how the authors view heritage and its uses. As the concluding chapters of these two books summarize and feature the future prospects for museums as heritage experts, they also provide a basis for the coming analysis.

The texts acknowledge that museums today are not alone as actors in the heritage arena; they no longer have sole custody of the position as heritage experts (Isacsson & Silvén 2006: 193). In recent years the boundaries of what is considered as heritage and what is not, as well as who has the right to determine this, have widened (Silvén 2004: 210-211).

This view of heritage as a function of today's society, as part of a democratic society, is a fact that has become more prominent lately --- today 'cultural heritage' is created in other areas of society than through the professional work of museums. The creating of heritage as a process has begun to challenge the creating of heritage as a result. (Silvén 2004: 209)

The competition from this new and widened heritage industry has forced the museum sector to rethink and evaluate their role as experts. Judging by a number of self-reflexive questions posed in the texts, the proceedings of heritage work within Samdok are scrutinized thoroughly (e.g. Silvéen 2004: 208, 217). The over-all question however, seems to be what today's role for museums as heritage experts really is? Here, new perspectives within the research around the heritage sector are called for, to help museums with 'what could be said to be at the same time a problem and a possibility for the museums: to work with cultural history and cultural analysis both in today's society and for future awareness of times gone by.' (Silvéen 2004: 219). Subsequently, the specific museum challenge lies in the task of focusing both on the present *and* the future, by using instruments such as cultural history and cultural analysis.

*With a focus on the new and not yet defined forms of what is emerging, instead of established, museums could contribute material for an understanding of how future society develops out of today's conditions, how something comes into existence instead of confirming what exists already.*³⁹ (Isacsson & Silvéen 2006: 192).

It is here suggested that by centring the attention on the *emerging* and *not yet established*, heritage work can help people today to reflect on their living conditions as well as give those in the future an understanding of passed times.

Due to a sometimes unproblematized way of choosing perspectives and fields of study, the investigating Samdok work has been criticized of being too 'nice' (Rosengren 2006: 111-113). Uncomfortable and difficult matters⁴⁰ are not easy to handle, and perhaps museums have been afraid of legitimizing and transforming the darker sides of culture into heritage by acknowledging them. Perhaps the contemporary documentations have been 'based on consensus that life must be ordered and kept within certain social frameworks if it is to function at all?'⁴¹ (Isacson & Silvéen 2006: 200). The present heritage climate, dominated by new and various forms of heritage management, has encouraged changes in the relationship between the expert and studied field:

³⁹ Translated by Alan Crozier.

⁴⁰ *Difficult Matters (Svåra saker)* is also the name of a Samdok project, which specifically addressed the uncomfortable material culture of the past, <www.svarasaker.riksutstallningar.se>.

⁴¹ Translated by Alan Crozier.

*Contemporary documentation is about establishing a dialogue, one which is characterized today by a changed power relationship between the researchers and the researched.*⁴² (Isacson & Silvén 2006: 194).

When describing this heritage work, a range of verbs are used. By studying the present day, museum professionals for example, *create, care for, legitimize, mirror, build, interpret, use, preserve* and *transform* heritage. The multitude of verbs describing heritage work can be read as a result of the dual role museums have as heritage experts. The publications used for this analysis are for instance described as ‘meta narratives’ or ‘double time documents’ as they both analyse previous Samdok work, but at the same time display the values and norms of its own time (Isacson & Silvén 2006: 205). Museums are thus both *creators* and *managers* of heritage.

Evidently, the quotes above show that the role as heritage experts and the methods used in the profession are examined via a self-reflexive tradition. This has led to a re-evaluation of the museums’ role as heritage experts, where heritage is understood as a process rather than a result, of use for both the present and the future. In dialogue and collaboration with the public, attention is paid to the emerging rather than the established. However, the texts display some uncertainty of what heritage experts really are doing. For example, when Isacson and Silvén write that ‘today “cultural heritage” is created in other areas of society than through the professional work of museums,’ do they suggest that heritage was previously created only by museums? (Isacson & Silvén 2004: 193). Museums are both creators and managers of heritage, but what is the difference between museum created heritage and heritage created by people in everyday life? In short, when does culture become heritage?

7 CONNECTING COLLECTING

Previously, the most prominent changes that Samdok has gone through, as well as where the organization stands today, has been described. At the conference Connecting Collecting, held at the Nordiska Museet on November 15–16 2007 in Stockholm, Samdok took a step towards a widened field of operation. At the international conference contributors from

⁴² Translated by Alan Crozier.

different parts of the world presented their specific museum experiences and attitudes towards contemporary collections work. Furthermore, the idea of an international network focusing on contemporary collecting issues was launched. The following analysis is based partly on the participant observation conducted during the conference but also on the web-based anthology encompassing the conference proceedings. An investigative survey was also sent out to complete the research base. This chapter thus aims to search for the uses and understandings of heritage during the process of instigating an international network, focusing contemporary collections work.

A conference for contemporary heritage

Information about the conference was sent out in advance during the autumn of 2006, and in March 2007 a call for papers followed (see Samdok website). The invitation asked for professionals and scholars who wanted to:

... discuss and share experiences on collecting in contemporary society ... contemporary use of collections acquired in earlier scientific, ideological and political contexts ... discuss and hopefully agree on establishing an international museum Collecting Network which might develop into a new international ICOM committee' (Conference invitation 2007).

The conference took place over two days and was presented under the slogan 'Connecting Collecting – An international conference on collecting as a key to the future of museums in a global community.' Each day started with an especially invited keynote speaker, giving a longer in-depth lecture. Then followed short presentations addressing various topics. Including the keynote speakers there were eighteen different contributions. Nearly 140 delegates attended the conference and altogether, nineteen countries were represented. However, apart from the keynote speakers from Africa and the US, the delegates and the audience were mainly from different parts of Europe. Partakers from Scandinavia, mostly from Sweden, dominated. The conference was held in English.

The conference lectures, which eventually were rewritten as articles and soon to be published on the web,⁴³ can be divided into three loose groups. The first group includes presentations of different museum projects conducted through various methods touching on issues such as social inclusion, public archaeology, national celebrations, immigration

⁴³ See Samdok website <www.nordiskamuseet.se>. Three contributions were later added to the publication, and one failed to appear.

and border-related issues. The second group includes different approaches to working with the, often specialized, existing collections.⁴⁴ The third group describes how different museum contexts⁴⁵ affect, influence and sometimes control both how museums are perceived as well as their work. This last group address questions such as repatriation and heritage management (Fägerborg & von Unge, eds, 2008).

The two keynote speakers also approached the conference theme from very different angles. Elisabeth Merrit, from The American Association of Museums, focused on more practical aspects of collections management (collection strategies), whereas the historian, Ciraj Rassool, from the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, paid attention to how heritage is regenerated and used as a tool in the construction of national identities (see Fägerborg & von Unge, eds, 2008).

After two days, the final session ended with a concluding discussion involving both the audience and the various speakers. It then became clear that the partakers had somewhat different views on what contemporary collecting was about, a fact that perhaps is not surprising. In an international context the various backgrounds, contexts and fields of expertise of the museum workers are sure to bring at least some elements of conflict into the picture.

The discussion focused to a large extent on issues concerning de-accessioning of existing collections, ranging from collections care to working with repatriation or, e g, 'auctioning out objects on e-bay.' This topic revealed the fact that, although most museums have collections, they are approached in a multitude of ways. For instance the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm does neither collect nor dispose of things. Instead they work with loans and repatriation. Others stressed the importance of actively addressing de-accessioning as part of the whole collecting process, so that the collections could be renewed. The difficulties around methods of 'disposal' aroused a number of ethical and practical concerns, which in turn lead to the question of *value*; a need to develop criteria for how to value objects in the collecting process was expressed, while others meant that this quality could only be reached through professional experience and instinct. By the end of the session parts of the audience expressed a want for a focus on 'contemporary collecting'

⁴⁴ Such as photographic collections, military collections, telecommunication collections.

⁴⁵ Context in this case means the prevailing political or academic climate.

as such, whereas others argued for an all-embracing definition of ‘collection work.’ All in all the concluding discussion mostly centred aspects of material cultural heritage management.

Summarizing, the contributions from the conference put light on a range of collections issues. There appeared to be many ways of seeing ‘collecting as a key to the future of museums in a global community’: to work with strategic de-accessioning, to put light on existing collections, to increase museums’ relevance in society, to address issues of repatriation, to improve accessibility, to work with global cooperation, to preserve history for the future, to produce exhibitions with material collected from and reflecting the present (Fägerborg & von Unge, eds, 2008). As stated in chapter 2, working with collections in museums is today a versatile occupation including a range of activities. Simon Knell’s comprehensive definition of collecting as a process where the ‘acquisition-management-disposal’ is integrated seems to coincide with the versatile approaches displayed at the conference (Knell 2004: 46). However, fully recognizing that the collecting process is intimately connected to working with the collections in research, exhibits and conservation etc, the focal point of this dissertation is to investigate the specific practice of collecting within the museum heritage sector, as a way to reflect and react to *contemporary* society. The conference invitation asked for contributions describing ‘experiences on collecting in contemporary society’ together with the ‘contemporary use of collections acquired in earlier scientific, ideological and political contexts.’ The question is, does the word ‘contemporary’ in the invitation allude to the collecting process of acquisition, management and disposal that museums perform on a regular basis every day (in the present), or to the collecting process that specifically aims to *reflect* the present day? In other words: Is the understanding and use of heritage different when it is collected in a contemporary context?

A collecting net

When the concept of cultural heritage no longer has a taken-for-granted local, regional, or national connection, collecting must be problematized in new ways, in relation to the world and the circumstances in which the museums act. (Fägerborg 2007: 3)

Through this quote Eva Fägerborg, as prime initiator of the conference and subsequently the network, manages to capture the main reason to why the practices of collecting could benefit from being examined in an international context. The incentive to establish an

international network was hence born out of the experience that the conception of heritage changes within a global community. A network is not meant to be a tool for creating one common opinion, but rather to open up for debate. However, before joining, it might help to have some idea about what purposes the network aims to fulfil.

At the conference, those interested in participating, or in setting up and organizing the network, could sign up. A short draft was presented where the aim of the network was outlined as:

... to become a forum for extended dialogue and collaboration on the meanings and implications of the museums' mission to collect, on collecting policies and practices, and on the role of collecting in museum work in general.' (Draft 2007)

Approximately 150⁴⁶ people registered their interest in participating, and a smaller working group was formed to start the communication through a web-based newsletter, later named *Collectingnet*, and to also initiate dialogue with ICOM about the possibilities of establishing a new ICOM committee. With the Samdok Secretariat as the base of operation, the newsletter is to be sent out to those who listed their interest. The network is presently involved in the process of establishing its aims and objectives.

By asking questions of the conference audience about *personal aims* for participating in the international collecting network I wanted to collect a material, which could shed light on both how the international participants comprehend *heritage*, as well as *contemporary collecting*. The aim was also to reach others than the conference speakers. A survey was sent out by email to approximately 150 addressees of whom 22 answered.⁴⁷ The low return rate of only 13 % can partly be explained by the fact that the network is new and the participants situated in different parts of the world, and so the number of survey-answers might indicate how many that are actually interested in actively participating. Even so the number of answers is unfortunately not high enough to draw any major conclusions from. Here follows a short summary of the results.⁴⁸

Alternative number two was chosen by the majority (12 votes) followed by number twelve (8 votes) and number one (7 votes). The participants had the possibility of grading their

⁴⁶ This number includes members who listed their interest at a later stage.

⁴⁷ The full survey is presented in appendix 1.

⁴⁸ See appendix 1 and 2 for detailed information.

three choices on a scale where 1 was the most important. These ‘winning’ top-three alternatives above also represented the first-hand choices for the majority. However, since 9 out of the 11 votes on number two were Swedish, the general picture becomes somewhat different.⁴⁹ According to the overall survey-answers the three primary aims for participating in the network would be to:

1. ...increase the relevance of museums in society: By discussing and initiating contemporary collecting projects within the network, my aim is to make museums an active part of society.

2. ... establish a global framework for general issues concerning contemporary collecting: My aim is to be involved in the shaping of an international framework, providing guidelines useful in global contemporary collecting work.

3. ... revisit and renew old collections: I want to discuss different ways of connecting old collections to new museum projects as a way to renew and evaluate the older collections.

However, all in all, the survey can only be read as an indication that most of the Swedish answers (60 %) find the aim to ‘increase the relevance of museums in society’ of great importance to the network.

The low rate of answers also tells us something of the nature of connecting on an international level. Even though (or perhaps partly because) new technology today enables us to communicate in new and easier ways, it still requires a lot of time and effort. The English language might also present an obstacle to some. Perhaps the survey could have been structured in a more comprehensible way? These results therefore need to be complemented with follow-up studies.

Half the survey-answers had short comments or motivations attached, and one person even wrote a letter explaining personal hopes and aims for the network. These more personal texts provide a source of voices from within, and they address many important aspects of both international cooperation and contemporary collections work. Some simply point out that they find most of the alternatives important for the network and that it was hard to

⁴⁹ See the Swedish results in appendix 2.

choose. However, this was partly my aim: I wanted to present the participants with a list of ‘good’ choices so that they would be forced to prioritize.

The comments also show that the reasons for participating vary greatly, depending on where and in which museum or institution the recipient works. One text focuses on the network as a way to develop aspects of ‘virtual collecting.’ Many of those working in specialized museums emphasize that they would like to connect with museums in other parts of the world that are specialized in the same field. For the same reason, others emphasize that there already are existing networks addressing many of the alternatives on the list and that the network therefore should focus on the international and global aspects of museum work:

I simply asked myself: what is the point of an international network compared to a national. I think that all the other alternatives [except 4, 8, 11] can be discussed with a good outcome within the different sections of the national network. The aim behind an extended international network then has to be the possibility to address boundless problems dealing with for instance globalization and repatriation.⁵⁰

Many of the other answers also align with Knell’s comprehensive definition of collecting where questions of both collecting and collections are centred:

We cannot just concentrate on collecting from the present, and we cannot just forget the past and the old collections because it is too much work.

My main interest in an international network would be the possibility to discuss general issues related to collections and collecting. Issues like Value, Significance, Authenticity, Ethics, Collection development and deaccessioning. Contemporary collecting is one of them and especially interesting because it demonstrates the limitations of the museum.

In this last quote, contemporary collecting is described as one of many general issues involved in the work with collections and collecting. Collection work as a way to react and reflect the present day would, in this case, be one of many aspects of the general collections work. The following quote, on the other hand, shows an opposite focus:

My personal hopes for a contemporary collecting network would be to inform best practice in the discipline ... with an emphasis on making people more aware of the potential of collecting projects

⁵⁰ Translated by Elin von Unge.

as a means of engaging current audiences ... I would like to see a move away from sterile curatorial discussions about the need to collect for collecting's sake, towards a more active discussion on WHY we collect, and WHO FOR. One of the simplest ways of achieving this would be to share local experiences – but also to critically interrogate them.

Specifically spotlighting *contemporary* collecting, this latter quote emphasizes the act of collecting as a tool to engage audiences and to activate a critical analysis to why and for whom we actually collect. The aim of the network would in this case be to develop the practice of collecting in relation to a contemporary global and local community.

Concluding, a network was instigated at the conference out of the notion that the conception of heritage changes within a global community. The over-all aim of the proposed network was to build dialogue and collaboration around meanings and implications in the general role of collecting (including policies and practices). To find out more about the personal aims for participating in the international network a survey was sent out. Due to the low number of replies, no major conclusions could be drawn from the results other than those implying the difficult nature of keeping an international organization active. However the comments attached to the survey conveyed personal views on the meaning of networking in an international context. Firstly, the aims for participating varied. It was hence suggested that a focus on the international and global aspects would be beneficial. Secondly, two separate approaches were detected in the answers. Some pointed out the need to focus on both collections, *and* collecting where *contemporary* collecting would represent one of many ways to approach general collections work, while others instead saw the primary aim of the network as a way to specifically focus *collecting in relation to the contemporary global and local* community. Drawing on the findings from the conference material, the more personal aims for participating in the network also displayed two different approaches to contemporary heritage work.

8 WHEN CULTURE BECOMES HERITAGE

The changes that Samdok has gone through cannot be explained without taking into consideration influences from the wider society. For instance, at the time of establishment, the network's original structure clearly reflects the industrial base of the Swedish society, as

well as general tendencies and patterns (Silvén 2004: 194). However, these changes also represent areas where the *uses* and *understandings* of heritage have become most visible. What then can these changes tell us about the discursive uses and understandings of heritage within the organization?

Based on the above displayed findings in the research material, this concluding chapter will more closely examine in which ways the conception of heritage align with, or differ from, the AHD. The components, which constitute Samdok as a discourse, will emerge through this process. To begin with a summary of the major changes will be presented. Next, the role of Samdok as heritage expert will be outlined. Finally, the inter-relationship of collection work as opposed to contemporary collecting will be presented through the findings from the international context of the conference Connecting Collecting. A few concluding remarks will bring these different aspects together in the very last section.

A discourse in change

The Samdok organization is characterized by changes summarized as a move from the *general* to the *personal*, the *material* to the *contextual*, *systematization* to *inspiration* and from documenting *the present for the future* to documenting *the present for today and tomorrow*. As seen from the material represented in the periodical *Museums & the Present Day*, the opinions of the members and the pools still vary and differ from each other. Even though there isn't consensus around the concept of heritage within the present network, these themes still display how the understanding of heritage has generally changed with time.

The central characteristics of the AHD as described by Smith are *materiality*, *age*, the *aesthetically pleasing* and/or the *monumental* (2006: 4, 11, 28-29). When Samdok started the organization represented a different approach to collecting than what cultural history museums in Sweden were used to. With a specific interest in the general and common aspects of the *contemporary* society, as opposed to the grand, historical and disappearing culture, as defining components within the AHD, the network distanced itself from more traditional museum work. On the other hand, the original focus was on how to systemize and share responsibility around the *material objects* collected. The materiality was very much a part of what constituted Samdok in the beginning and thus puts the network closer to the AHD. Also, influenced by primarily folkloristic Ethnology, the collecting within the Swedish cultural history museums was by tradition focused on the material culture representing

Swedish everyday life of the peasantry (Hammarlund-Larsson 2004: 33). The idea to collect and document the ordinary aspects of life wasn't entirely new for Samdok.

Smith means that the characteristics of heritage within a chosen discourse together construct and reflect identities concerning nationality, class, culture and ethnicity (Smith 2006: 4, 11, 28-29). Looking at the original pool-structure it clearly reflects the industrial base of the Swedish society, and most of the Samdok projects were highly influenced by a class perspective (Fägerborg 2006: 118-119). Man's identity was linked to work and production and hence heritage was understood as the culture generated in those fields. Heritage was also used to construct a Swedish national identity, which described the most common structures in society such as the nuclear family, male labour, and the industrial sector (Isacson & Silvéen 2006: 197-199).

It seems as if both the uses and understandings of heritage within Samdok have moved further away from the AHD with time. It shows primarily in how Samdok has changed focus from the material objects, to instead developing methods for contextual documentation and collecting. It can also be seen within the changed pool-structure and work: Heritage is today used to challenge established identities around areas such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality and generation. Furthermore, it is understood as a means for museums to collate both general descriptions of society, as well as individual experiences.

Smith suggests that heritage can be constructed in a number of ways, within or in opposition to the AHD (2006: 53). These reoccurring descriptions of the changes and meanings of the organization were earlier described as 'breaking points' where antagonism appears. It is here that the discourse of (or truth about) Samdok is negotiated and established. Judging from the summarizing descriptions above it easily looks like Samdok has moved quite far away from the AHD during its 30 years of operation. On the other hand, the discursive practices of Samdok do not completely differ from the AHD either. Thus, the question arises how these breaking points within Samdok specifically relate to each other?

Those Samdok texts where the meaning of the network is scrutinized through a self-reflexive tradition have shown an ambiguity towards the organization's role as a *heritage expert*. The battle over 'the meaning of Samdok' takes place here. The following chapter will more closely outline the practice of heritage expertise as constituted by Samdok.

Between expert and apprentice

The research material presented in *Museums & the Present Day* no 3-4 shows that there are two parallel ideas about how the Samdok work should proceed (2002). One group stresses the importance of preserving and presenting long historical perspectives for the future. The second group focuses on Samdok work as a means to document and collect the present for today as well as for tomorrow. The various approaches within these groups can be interpreted as different ways of relating to heritage management. This focus on longer, overarching, historical lines correspond with Lowenthal's definitions of history as evolutionary, linear, claiming to provide the future with the 'truth' about the past (1996: 123). Also, as historical experts the aim of the first group coincides with the AHD. The focus of the second group can, on the other hand, be likened with Lowenthal's description of the nature of heritage as biased and of use for and in the present (Ibid).

According to Smith the AHD is to a large extent upheld, regenerated and managed by heritage experts marking the past with an authenticity stamp. The experts have an interest in maintaining the privileged positions of their knowledge about the past and therefore want to control the 'meaning and value' of heritage. Heritage management then becomes 'a form of social control' (Smith 2006: 16-29). It is interesting to see that the second group, which stresses the use of the more biased and identity-shaping aspects of heritage work, states that their aim is to *both* be of use in the present *and* for the future. According to these views, the role as museum experts becomes double: As experts of history, the past becomes a foreign country and as heritage managers it becomes highly familiar (Lowenthal 1996: 139).

Perhaps the self-reflexive tradition detected within the Samdok material is also a sign of this dual focus? Many of these reoccurring 'breaking points,' earlier described as an ongoing negotiation of the nature (or discourse) of Samdok, also centre Samdok's role as creator and/or manager of heritage. Through this re-evaluation of the museums' role as heritage experts Silvén explains that heritage today is understood rather as a process than a result. In dialogue and collaboration attention is paid to the emerging rather than the established (Silvén 2004: 192, 209). These descriptions also coincide with Smith's heritage as purely intangible and 'a social and cultural process that mediates a sense of cultural, social and political change' (Smith 2006: 84).

As was shown in the descriptions of the pool-work it was to a large extent characterized by a focus on processes of *change* in society. However, this focus was motivated in very different ways. For instance, the aim of the *Pool for Society and Politics* is to ‘explore processes of change in society, to see their effects and patterns’ (Ohlsson & Stolt 2007: 19). The *Pool for Management of Natural Resources*, on the other hand, states that it ‘documents a cultural heritage that is changing radically, and this work is very important for the future’ (Wahss & Gradin 2007: 15). Though both pools focus on processes of change, the first pool motivates its choice by the ‘effects and patterns’ of change, while the second stresses that the work is important for the future because it is changing. In other words, the second pool is driven by the aim to preserve for the future, those factors that are disappearing in the present day. Evidently, using ‘processes of change’ as a searchlight within heritage work doesn’t necessarily imply the mediation of ‘a sense of cultural, social and political change’ (Smith 2006: 84). Here, a dual focus is again detected within the network as the *Pool for Society and Politics*, like Smith, focus their documentation on consequences of change where the *Pool for Management of Natural Resources* is more likely to record that which, like the AHD, stands for the old and monumental.⁵¹

The description of today’s Samdok as a forum for discussion and further education is detected both in the texts produced by the pool members (*Samtid & Museer*, 2007, no 2) as well as in publications such as *The Present Day as Cultural Heritage* (Silvén & Gudmundsson, eds, 2006) and *Societal Ideals and Images of the Future* (Hammarlund-Larsson, Nillson & Silvén, eds, 2004). This move, from a starting point where professional coordination and systematization dominated, into a *forum* aiming to stimulate and educate its members, also reflects the duality of Samdok’s role as heritage expert. Rather than collecting material culture, the network came to centre a variety of ways to document and record the present. Even though it is questionable if this change was deliberate, the focus was no longer on the material objects themselves. Instead heritage was documented as an intangible process much like Smith’s definition, where the material culture is seen as a tool that can facilitate, but is not necessarily vital for the process of heritage (2006: 44). The question is whether Samdok, when distancing from the tangible sides of heritage also, as Lagerkvist earlier suggested, turned their focus inwards instead of out towards the public, and became an organization with less emancipatory interests (Lagerkvist 2002: 14)? As a consequence of

⁵¹ E.g. the project to document Silos instigated by the *Pool for Management of Natural Resources* (Wahss & Gradin 2007: 14–15).

the dual role of Samdok the network today operates both as an expert and as an apprentice in field of heritage management.

What is contemporary heritage?

The examples displaying the complexity and duality that Samdok as heritage expert is facing today are many. Also, competition provided by a growing heritage industry, encourages museums to evaluate and question their mission. In the field of contemporary collecting Samdok is today both creator and manager of heritage. As mentioned in the introduction, a focal point of this dissertation is to investigate the specific practice of collecting within the museum heritage sector, as a way to reflect and react to *contemporary* society. However, as was shown in an international context provided by the material describing the conference Connecting Collecting, the definitions of collecting and documenting the present day differ. How then, do these different definitions of collections work compare to the AHD?

The variety of approaches to collecting displayed at the conference and in the anthology *Connecting Collecting*, showed that the aims for participating varied. The participants seemed to understand the word ‘contemporary’ in the invitation folder in different ways. For some it meant the whole collecting process of acquisition, management and disposal that museums perform on a regular basis every day. For others it meant the collecting process that specifically aims to *reflect* and *react* to the present day.

The survey comments displayed the same ambiguities: Some stressed the need to focus on aspects of working with both collections *and* collecting. Contemporary collecting would here represent one out of many ways to approach general collections work of the network. Others instead saw the primary aim of the network as a way to specifically focus collecting in relation to the contemporary global and local community. Work related to the existing collections would in this case be a consequence, but not the prime focus.

Since the everyday management process of acquisition, care, and de-accessioning is centred on the tangible objects it is clear that for those who read ‘contemporary collecting’ as a way to focus this process, material culture is a vital part of their heritage concept. As such those representing this view come closer to the AHD. The representatives of the other view, where ‘contemporary collecting’ is read as a means to reflect aspects of the present day society, are not as bound to the tangible sides of heritage, since the prime aim is to, through different

media, reflect and react to contemporary phenomena. This view also sides with Smith's belief that when heritage is conceived as a social and cultural process, the material culture is an important tool to mediate this process, but not essential (2006: 44). Smith means that when memories belong to a group of people they are abstract and hence more difficult to handle and then often neglected. They are therefore often materialized by heritage experts in order to be more manageable. Then they can be 'collected, preserved, lost, destroyed or restored' (2006: 61). It is however important to remember that the consequences of heritage, whether it is seen as material or not, are always real (Smith 2006: 53-57). Perhaps museums today are dependent on heritage to be tangible for it to be managed?

In between these two outlooks lies the question of what contemporary heritage really is? Can it per definition be called heritage if it is contemporary, or is the phrase 'contemporary heritage' an oxymoron in itself? Again: when does culture become heritage?

Concluding remarks

The primary aim of this dissertation has been to analyse how the concept of heritage is used and understood in the context of contemporary collecting within the Swedish museum network Samdok and the international Samdok conference Connecting Collecting. As explained, this is really a way of exposing how culture is studied, perceived and defined within the practice of contemporary collecting, here represented by Samdok.

Through the material analysed the nature of Samdok as a discourse has emerged. A set of themes have been detected and explained as 'breaking points' where different uses and understandings of heritage become visible, negotiated and established. The findings show that, over time, Samdok has come to more and more distance itself from the AHD, though not completely abandoning it. As part of the AHD, but at the same time opposing it Samdok has over the years acquired a double focus.

Subsequently the organization's role as heritage expert has been questioned both from the outside and from within. The network is characterized by two different ways of perceiving culture: As *heritage expert* Samdok provides historical facts, creates and establishes what heritage is, and manages the material culture of which heritage partly consists. As *heritage apprentice* the organization investigates social and cultural processes of societal change, which are intangible.

Furthermore, the empirical findings from the conference show that these two approaches are detected within a wider international context as well. There are those who embrace a more comprehensive definition of 'collections work', which firstly stresses the fact that all work with collections is contemporary and secondly, the tangible nature of heritage. Then there are those who see 'contemporary collecting' as a specific way to approach the present day. Does then, the understanding and uses of heritage become different when it is collected in a contemporary context or, in other words, when does culture become heritage?

There are two ways of answering this question and the answers follow the two different heritage definitions. For a heritage *expert* culture becomes heritage when it is approved and marked with an authenticity stamp. Culture then becomes heritage when it is 'created' by, for instance, museum professionals. In this case it is signified by the characteristics defining the AHD. For a heritage *apprentice* culture becomes heritage when it is acted out, when it is performed, remembered and negotiated in everyday life. This kind of heritage can be studied, collected, and *managed* by museum professionals, but not *created*.

The model sketched above depicts two extremes. In real life the understandings and uses of heritage are often more complex and differentiated. However, the Samdok material analysed does tell us something about the nature and implications of collecting contemporary heritage. For instance what are the consequences of applying a dual focus within heritage work? Do museums undermine their identities in doing so? What awareness is there in the museum field about these questions? Can the two approaches to heritage work detected through the analysis be read as a coming shift between paradigms of knowledge?

Also, the Connecting Collecting conference puts light on a range of collections issues. If such different comprehensions and appreciations about heritage exist, how can we make international collaboration fruitful? When does culture become heritage in the global community?

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APPENDIX 1.

Survey

This survey contains a list of alternative aims for your participation in the suggested international network. The alternatives are not presented in any specific order – there are no ‘right choices’. You can proceed in three ways:

1. Choose the **3** alternatives that coincide best with your aims and hopes for the network. Mark them with an **X** if you think they are equally important.
2. You can grade your **3** alternatives on a scale from 1-3, where 1 is what you find most important.
3. You find no alternative sufficient. Please write what you think should be the primary aim(s) of the network on the last page.

If you want, you can write a short motivation for your choices at the end of the document. It is important to note that choosing 3 primary aims *does not* mean that you exclude the other alternatives altogether. Your choices simply represent *your personal* interests within the frames of an international collaboration, when forced to make a selection. Read them all before choosing.

Mark your choices with an **X** followed by your grade, directly in this word-document, and write your comments at the end. Write your answer in English or Swedish. When you are finished, save your changes and send the file back to me, attached in an email (elinvonunge@yahoo.se).

Country:

My primary aims for participating in an international collecting network is:

Indicate which statements most closely reflect your views with an **X** (up to a maximum of 3) followed by your grade.

1. to revisit and renew old collections:

I want to discuss different ways of connecting old collections to new museum projects as a way to renew and evaluate the older collections.

2. to increase the relevance of museums in society:

By discussing and initiating contemporary collecting projects within the network, my aim is to make museums an active part of society.

3. to improve accessibility:

By participating in the network I want to discuss and share experiences of collection practice, as a way to make existing collections more available to the public.

4. to accomplish global collecting projects:

My aim for participating is to initiate international collecting projects about global issues.

5. to preserve history for the future:

By participating in the network I want to discuss and share new ways of collecting as a way to save the present for the future.

6. to produce exhibitions with material collected from the present:

For me the network is a way to discuss and share experiences of using collecting projects as a means to gather topical material to produce exhibitions about the present.

7. to work with strategic de-accessioning:

Many museums today face increasing management costs due to the care of over-sized collections. One of the consequences is that the contemporary collecting is cut down. By participating in an international collecting network I want to find new and better ways of approaching this concern.

8. to share global collecting experiences:

I want to use the network as a way to share and discuss experiences of global collecting.

9. to collect research material:

In the network I want to discuss and share collecting experiences as ways to record contemporary events with the primary aim to gather material for research.

10. to share collecting experiences:

I want to use the network as a way to share and discuss local collecting experiences.

11. to actively work with repatriation issues:

Through the specific question of repatriation I want to establish international collaborations and discussions around issues of equality and representativity.

12. to establish a global framework for general issues concerning contemporary collecting:

My aim is to be involved in the shaping of an international framework, providing guidelines useful in global contemporary collecting work.

Comments or motivation of choices:

APPENDIX 2: Survey results

The survey was sent out to approximately 150 e-mail addresses.

22 persons replied

15 were from Sweden

6 were from other countries (UK, Belgium, Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Poland)

1 did not mention which country

1 person didn't answer the survey but wrote a personal answer instead (included in the 22 total though)

10 persons added comments to their choices.

12 persons graded their choice on a scale from 1-3 where 1 represented their first choice.

9 persons chose 3 (or less) alternatives as equally important.

The full list of votes (including Swedes):

Alternative choices	Graded choices	Un-graded votes	Total votes
1)	1, 1	5	7
2)	1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 3	4	12
3)	2, 3	3	5
4)	2, 3	2	4
5)	3, 3	3	5
6)	2, 3	1	3
7)	3	1	2
8)	3	3	4
9)	3, 1	1	3
10)	2, 2, 2	1	4
11)	2	2	3
12)	1,1,1, 2, 2	3	8

The 15 Swedish answers

Alternative choices	Graded choices	Un-graded votes	Total votes
1)	1	4	5
2)	1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 3	3	9
3)	2	1	2
4)	2, 3	2	4
5)	3	1	2
6)	2, 3	1	3
7)	3	1	2
8)	3	3	4
9)	3, 1	1	3
10)	2, 2		2
11)		1	1
12)	2, 2	2	4