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The development of Finnish museums over the last forty years

JANNE VILKUNA

Abstract: *The focus of this article is the development of Finnish museums since the 1970s, when the Ministry of Education started to understand the social benefits of museums as social memory organizations with activities of research and education. At this point in time the Ministry began actively developing the preconditions for museum work, the main "tools" being several political museum committees which created a museum hierarchy and network, ensured state subsidy through museum acts, established university studies of museology, and gave support to the Finnish Museums Association.*

Keywords: Museum act, museum hierarchy, museology, Finland, museum policy.

This article describes the growth in both numbers and staff of Finnish museums after the Second World War, and how the museums after the 1980s were organized into a state-funded unity, a museum hierarchy, by the Ministry of Education. The development also included the formalizing of museology as an academic discipline for museum staff.

With the exception of the state-owned museums, only 12 Finnish museums had permanent staff, altogether 21 persons in 1945. By present-day standards, only three of them had special training in museum work. According to the museum statistics, museums had 1,861 permanent staff in 2016.

The Finnish Museums Association (FMA) was founded in 1923, and it became an auxiliary organization in museum matters for the National Board of Antiquities (NBA, in

Swedish: Museiverket, founded in 1884; in 2018 renamed (in English) the Finnish Heritage Agency, FHA). The FMA is an association of professionally run museums. It has 203 society members who run 383 museum sites. The Finnish Local Heritage Federation was founded in 1949 and is today a federation of about 800 local heritage associations, which voluntarily run about 700 local museums. Both organizations receive annually both discretionary state grants and commissions from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC, until 2009 Ministry of Education, ME).

MUSEUM HIERARCHY

The ME began to develop museums in the 1960s by nominating committees to write museum policies and to discuss current and future

questions. The overall goal for the committees and new laws was to rise the quality of museum work. Before 2000, 21 museum committees had submitted their reports. The museum policy for cultural historical museums was published in 1981 and the policies for natural history museums and art museums in 1984.

The Museum Committee on Regional Governance came out with a report in 1973 where it proposed, among other things, an Act on State Subsidy. After some delay in state funding and a regional art museum experiment, a governmental decision in 1979 created a network of 20 cultural history “county museums” and 16 “regional art museums” during the 1980–90s. Their former owners, cities or foundations, now received state subsidies for regional activities. The decision also included the establishment of special national museums, but their establishment had to wait.

According to the proposition of the natural science section of the Museum Advisory Board (an organ nominated by the ME, active 1973–1993), the Senate of Helsinki University amalgamated in 1988 its zoological, botanical, geological and palaeontological museums into one Finnish Museum of Natural History and the first National Central Museum was born. The art museum section of Museum Advisory Board, which prepared the art museum policy, proposed rapid nationalization of the Ateneum Art Museum of the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts and naming it the National Central Museum of Art. It was organized in 1990 and the museum was named the State Art Museum and in 2014 it was privatized to a public corporation named the Finnish National Gallery with three art museums: Ateneum (old Finnish art), Sinebrychoff (old European art) and Kiasma (contemporary art).¹

When Parliament in 1992 issued a Decree on

the NBA, it stated that the National Museum of Finland (a department of NBA) is the National Central Museum of Cultural History. A special working group, nominated by the ME, had submitted its report in 1985 and proposed the establishment of the category of national special museums in the near future. With the nomination of the first five national special museums in 1993 the museum hierarchy was established. Overall 16 (+1) museums gained this status from the ME. The “+1” is the Military Museum under the Ministry of Defence.²

All in all, there are today three national museums in Finland: the Finnish National Gallery, the Finnish Museum of Natural History and (for cultural history) the National Museum of Finland, all located in Helsinki, 16 (+1) National Special Museums, 22 regional Cultural History Museums and 16 Regional Art Museums. All other museums than these 57 (+1), despite being professionally or non-professionally run and irrespective of the size of their collections or staff or budget etc., are considered local museums in the hierarchy.

MUSEUMS ACT AND DECREE

After many delays, the Museum Act and Decree on both statutory subsidy and discretionary state grants for museums were enacted at the same time, December 1 1989, defining the roles of the regional museums, at the time 35 in all. The timing was excellent, because Finland had just plunged into a deep depression as a result of a bank crisis. The Museum Act saved the most important resource of the museums: the employees.

In 1992 the entire Finnish state subsidy system was reformed and a new Museum Act and Decree was enacted: statutory state subsidies were granted to all non-state

museums with at least one permanent officer. State subsidies were allotted to over a hundred museums.

Since 1996 the calculation formula of the statutory subsidy has been the “norm × percent × performance”. The norm is the unit price of a person-year (63,000 euros in 2017), percentage is 37 for local museums and 47 for the ones with a regional or nationwide role. Performance is defined as person-years. In 2016 154 museums (of which 124 received statutory state subsidies) had 1861 permanent staff and 2,630 person-years. The state budget limited the number of person-years to 1,026 in 1993, and 1,183 in 2010. However, according to figures from the museum statistics, museums receiving statutory subsidies have over 1,000 non-funded person-years.

The amount of the discretionary state grant increased significantly in the early 2000s, for both professionally and non-professionally run museums. The total amount of state grants in 2017 was 33 million euros, of which some 20 million was covered by lottery funds. Total funding of all professionally run Finnish museums was 249.8 million euros, of which public funding (state and cities) covered 75.4 percent.

The Museum Act and Decree were updated in 2005 and in 2015 with regulations for the national special museums. In 2005 the Decree associated with the Act defined the tasks of the national and regional museums, and the updating in 2015 contained regulations for the status of national special museums and a minimum of professional museum workers.

REPORT ON VOLUNTARILY RUN LOCAL MUSEUMS

The MEC nominated a working group for the task of working out the so far unknown

situation of the mainly voluntarily run local museums in 2010. The report of 2011 stated that there were over 1,000 local museums, of which 725 (with 860 museum sites) were owned by municipalities, societies and foundations. Seventy-two percent of them defined themselves as local heritage museums (in Finnish *kotiseutumuseo*, in Swedish *hembygdsmuseum*). It was estimated that altogether 10,000 volunteers maintained the museums. Public funding was six million euros. Local museums administrated over 3,000 transferred or in situ buildings. The oldest date from the sixteenth century. Their collections contains over 700,000 objects. Despite there are mainly open only in the summer, they receive 600,000 visitors annually.

A report published already in 1999 had noticed that the discretionary grants for local museums was inadequate and proposed to increase them. ME recognized the importance of local museums and increased the subsidy in 2004 to 300,000, in 2009 to 510,000 and in 2017 to 580,000 euros (on average 4746 euros per museum).

From 2018 onwards the Finnish Local History Federation will organize a nationwide training programme for voluntary museum keepers.

MUSEOLOGY AND MUSEUMS

The Advisory Board of Museums contacted the Ministry in November 1980 to draw attention to the fact that the growing field of museums had no clear and united plans for training their staff and therefore proposed an inquiry. In January 1981 the ME asked the University Council to make a proposition for training. At the same time, the FMA had nominated a working group on museology. Through the cooperation between the University Council

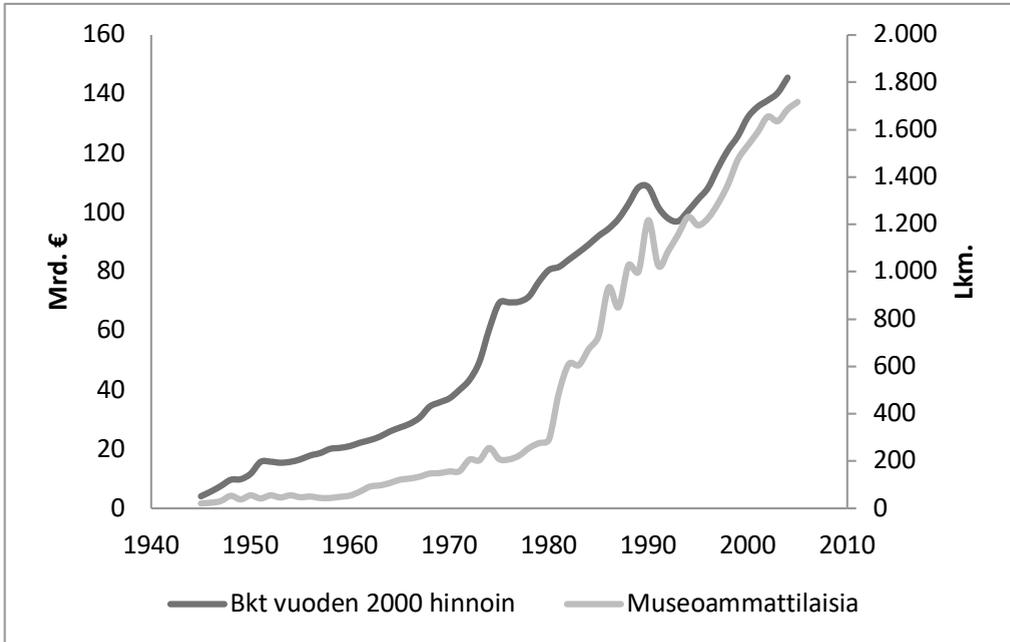


Fig.1: The grey line shows the increase in museum professionals and the black line the increase in GDP (gross domestic product).

I once asked the professor of economic history Ilkka Nummela to compare the increase in museums professionals from 1945–2005 to national economic capacity. Although the numbers are not directly commensurable, Nummela chose GDP and produced this figure, which shows the convergent trends. To put it simply, when the economic capacity of the nation rose, more museum officers could be employed. The general secretary of the Finnish Museums Association, Kimmo Levä, commented on the figure in a different way: “It is very profitable to the nation to employ museum professionals because it positively affects the GDP!” The deep economic recession of 1990–1993 led to big cuts in public spending, but it did not affect museums. The recession of 2007–2008, on the other hand, was one reason why the staff of the National Bureau of Antiquities was heavily reduced from 421 posts in 2008 to 236 in 2016.

and the FMA a proposition on basic studies of museology was sent to the ME in May 1983.

Museology became a minor subject at undergraduate level in the Universities of Jyväskylä and Turku (Åbo) in the 1980s, and in the 1990s at Helsinki and Oulu Universities and in 2002 at Tampere University. The right to teach intermediate/subject studies was given to Jyväskylä in 1993 (in the same year the subject was associated with the editorial board of The

Journal of Nordic Museology) and in Turku 1997 and Helsinki in 2006. The status as major subject with advanced studies for MA and PhD degrees was given to Jyväskylä in 2002. The first permanent office was established at Jyväskylä in 1989 (which became a professorship in 1998), in Turku in 1998 and in Helsinki in 2003. At Helsinki University BA, MA and PhD programmes start in 2018.

The first MA student graduated in Jyväskylä

in 2005 and the first doctoral dissertation in museology was defended in 2008, and six have followed.³ All these respondents (doctoral candidates), except one, had a long career in museums or other heritage management organizations before the defence of their dissertation. The first one had even retired twice, first from the Finnish Air Force and then from the Finnish Air Force Museum!

Students of the minor subject, museology, founded the student organization of museology, Diaario, at Jyväskylä back in 1994 and two years later they arranged Museological Days, a thematic national two-day event open to all, which became an annual event. Students at Turku University and Åbo Academy University founded their joint association Museion in 2002.

Museology at Jyväskylä University has broadened the “traditional” view of museology to heritology, a concept referring to heritage, introduced by Tomislav Šola. This is natural as firstly, museums began in the 1980s to work with building protection and other social environmental issues, and secondly, Finland has joined many international UNESCO and European Council conventions (administered by “FHA”).⁴

The Museum Decree of 2005 defined the minimum of staff and their training in statutorily subsidized museums. Museums had to have a Director and at least one other full-time employee, and either of them had to have a higher university degree (MA) and the other a BA or a vocational higher education or a corresponding degree. In addition, both were required to be acquainted with the working field of their museum and to have completed basic studies in museology or alternatively to have work experience in museums. A minor problem was that the degree did not specify the amount of basic studies was required. However,

in 2013 a new decree mended the situation as it specified that the requirement was to have completed basic studies in museology or have at least one year of professional expert work in a museum.

One of the major professional problems of museums in the future is that the university degrees have become more “universal” without specified subjects but with degree programmes. The students do not gain substantial knowledge of their subjects as before. In other words, it is harder for museums to recruit specialists from the graduated students. Museology teaches an understanding of the relations of society, heritage and museums, about museum history, hierarchy, processes and ethics, but who today teaches the substance subjects, specially related to the most basic museum work in a great variety of museums: collecting and documentation?

COLLECTIONS

According to Museum Statistics for 2016, the collections of professionally run museums consisted of 5.5 million objects in cultural history collections, 405,000 works of art, 21.7 million objects/samples in natural history collections and 22.8 million photographs and 38,000 audio-visual objects. Computerization began in the 1980s. Today Finnish museums do not have common collection management software, but art museums and natural history museums have their own widely used software. Eighty-five percent of the museums have made a collection management programme and 1.1 million objects are published on the Internet.

Inspired by the Swedish museums’ Samdok project on contemporary collecting and documentation from 1977, coupled with an awareness of collection object bulimia or unsustainable development in Finnish

museum collections, led in 2009 to a similar project in Finland (TAKO). In 2016 museums deaccessioned about 10,000 objects.

STAFF

The division of labour between universities and the FMA specifies that universities give basic and further education and the FMA is responsible for supplementary training. Conservators are trained in polytechnics and they have continued their studies in museology for MA and PhD in Jyväskylä University.

The FMA has completed three surveys of museum workers (in 2003, in 2008 and in 2013, in which the last is comparable with the two earlier ones) both regarding personnel statistics and the pros and cons of the working spirit. The majority of officials are female (81 percent in 2013) and their proportion has been slowly rising. The percentage of vocational higher education degrees (9 percent) and PhDs (3 percent) has been the same, but BAs (11 percent) are slowly decreasing and MAs (47 percent) are increasing. In 2003 the percentage of those who had not studied museology was 47 but in 2013 it was 36. Thus, the academic level of museum professionals is high. Although the BA degree should be enough, most have made the MA degree, but the requirement for a PhD is rare even in the highest offices. The only exception is the Finnish Museum of Natural History, a separate research institute of Helsinki University, where all directors have the degree of PhD.

The growth and diverse development of professionalization can clearly be seen in the newly founded labour associations. The Finnish ICOM committee was established in 1946 (registered in 1976), the Finnish branch of the Nordic Conservator Federation in 1963 and the Museum Labour Union in 1969.

During and after the 1970s museums began to be more and more professionally run, and when the number of staff grew, they organized for lobbying and professional information exchange. An association for directors was founded in 1985, for curators in 1985, for educators in 2005 and for technicians in 2012. The last trend was to increase the posts for conservators and museums educators with the ability to use social media.

THE FUTURE?

Two working groups prepared both a new museum policy programme and an updated Museum Act in 2016–2017. According to these plans, the regional and national museums will be named as “responsibility museums” and the statutory state subsidy percentage shall be 37 for professionally run local museums and 85 for regional museums. The national museums will obtain their funding with an increase in their subsidy in euros.

Financing of University Museums was not a problem before the 1990s when ME implemented earning logistics for universities based on the number of both MA and PhD degrees, ranked publications and external research funding. However, museums as the so-called “support services” had no right to “produce” degrees, and consequently they lacked the earning logistic and were in a difficult position. Finnish state-owned universities were privatized in 2010, but their main funding still comes as discretionary state grants according to negotiated result agreements. This was the reason why university museums were still after 2010 considered state museums and could therefore not get any kind of state subsidy.⁵ The museum policy programme of 2017 proposed that university museums could also apply for discretionary state grants for museums.

MUSEUM CARD

The total number of museum visitors was less than 5 million for years and grew slowly. The population of Finland is 5.5 million. Having analysed the Museum Pass and Card systems of both Switzerland and the Netherlands, the FMA released the Museum Card (MC) in May 2015. The price was 59 euros and the card gave the owner unlimited access to the museums during one year after the first visit with the card. The FMA prepared the card with its own resources and with agreements with almost every Finnish professionally run museum. It has been a success. At the end of 2017, 263 museums participated and about 110,000 cards are valid. Comparison with the year 2014 (with no MC) and 2016 (with MC) shows a 23 percent growth in visitors to 6.6 million. The growth in entrance fees was 41 percent. Preliminary data from 2017 counts 7.1 million museum visitors. The MC of course is not the sole reason for the growth. At the same time, many museums strengthened their profile and produced interesting exhibitions.

CONCLUSION

All in all, museum work has developed from object-centred to phenomenon-centred and further to society-centred work, which has greatly increased the participatory role of audience.

The goodwill towards museums and their role in the society can be seen both in the continual increase in resources from the state and in the growing number of visitors who vote with their feet. Despite the many attempts of the MEC, good quality criteria for evaluation of museums and their overall work has not been defined and implemented.

NOTES

1. The dividing line between old and contemporary art is the year 1960.
2. 16: Craft Museum of Finland (Jyväskylä) 1993
 Museum of Finnish Architecture (Helsinki) 1993
 Sports Museum of Finland (Helsinki) 1993
 Design Museum (Helsinki) 1993
 Museum of Technology (Helsinki) 1993
 Finnish Glass Museum (Riihimäki) 1994
 Finnish Museum of Photography (Helsinki) 1994
 Theatre Museum (Helsinki) 1994
 Werstas – Finnish Labour Museum (Tampere) 1996
 Finnish Railway Museum (Hyvinkää) 1997
 Finnish Aviation Museum (Vantaa) 1997
 Mobilia – National Automobile and Road Museum (Kangasala) 1997
 Siida – National Museum of the Finnish Sámi (Inari) 1999
 Forum Marinum – National Maritime Museum (Turku) 2004
 Lusto – Forest Museum (Punkaharju) 2010
 Sarka – Finnish Museum of Agriculture (Loimaa) 2010
 +1: In addition is the Military Museum (Helsinki, est. 1929) under the Ministry of Defence. It has eight “co-operative museums”, e.g. the Finnish Air Force Museum (Jyväskylä) and the Armour Museum (Hämeenlinna).
3. The dissertation titles (other than Laine-Zamojska in Finnish, here the titles are translated into English) are as follows:
 2006 Hannu Valtonen: From Commonplace to Curiosity – The Museum Value of Two Messerschmitt Bf 109 -Aircraft at the Central Finland Aviation Museum
 2008 István Kecskeméti: From Papyrus to Megabytes: Conservation Management of Archival and Photographic Collections
 2009 Ulla Knuutinen: The Past and Present of Cultural History Materials - The Heritological Functions of Materials Research of Conservation

2016 Helena Lonkila: Deep in the Backwoods - Kainuu of Yrjö Blomstedt and Victor Sucksdorff

2016 Nina Robbins: Museum Collection Disposal – The Role of Museological Value Discussion in Collection Management

2017 Magdalena Laine-Zamojska: The Role of Small, Local History Museums in Creating Digital Heritage: The Finnish Case.

To be completed in 2018: Leena Hannula: Senior citizens in the museum.

Also in other universities and subjects, some dissertations have been written on the theme of e.g. museum history or education.

4. UNESCO:

1987 the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (adopted 1972)

2013 the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (adopted 2003)

Finland has not so far ratified the UNESCO 2003 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (adopted in 2003) despite the fact that Baltic Sea which has low salinity and where wood-eating shipworm (*Teredo navalis*) cannot live, is a “treasure area” of well-preserved sunken wooden ships from different centuries. European Council:

1992 The Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada, 1985).

1995 The revised Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe (Malta/ Valletta 1992)

2006 The European Landscape Convention (Florence 2000).

2017 Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro 2005)

- 5 The Finnish Museum of Natural History is an exception because it is mentioned in the 2010 University Act as the keeper of the national natural history collections.

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This article is mainly based on the Finnish Museum Statistics of 2016 (the National Board of Antiquities), on the journal *Museoväki* (in English: Museum People), on 2013 survey (Finnish Museums Association) and on the author's articles “Suomen museoalan organisoituminen 1945–2009” (in English: “The Organization of Finnish Museums in 1945–2009”) and “Museologia ja Suomen museot” (in English: “Museology and Finnish museums”), *Suomen museohistoria* (in English: Finnish Museum History, ed. Susanna Pettersson and Pauliina Kinanen). Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura (in English: Finnish Literature Society), Helsinki 2010.

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