



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
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# Exploring the Middle Ground between the Traditional and the Reformed Museum

A Study of the Re-Profiling Project at Vänersborg's Museum, the  
Oldest Preserved Museum Environment in Sweden

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## ABSTRACT

The main focus of this dissertation is discussions regarding change in museums. Here, I examine and problematize attitudinal shifts present in discussions regarding for instance, definitions of museums and their function in society; audiences, perceptions of museum collections and objects; accessibility and perceptions of knowledge production. The debate tends to become polarized and thus, inefficient. In this thesis, I argue for a balance and a perspective which involves opening up for and accepting variety as well as the specific in museums. This is discussed in relation to Vänerns Museum, a unique museum which recently underwent a re-profiling process and which is currently implementing the new approaches and ways of thinking as a result of this. I have reviewed the result of this project and examined it in the light of the current discussions regarding change and furthermore, attempted to demonstrate that characteristics of the traditional museum can be combined and coexist with characteristics of the reformed museum. Graham Black's 'model' for a holistic museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century involves ideas appropriate to the situation of Vänerns Museum. This approach focuses on keeping the *core products*, site, collections and associated expertise of the museum uncompromised whilst keeping the *tangible* and *intangible* elements of the museum dynamic and flexible.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

Recent discussions regarding museum practices are often underpinned by an assumption that a new age has entered and is currently influencing the cultural sector and cultural institutions. Some of these discussions and conflicting opinions regarding museums have been around for a long time and some of them were highlighted in relation to a set of ideas that began penetrating the field during the final years of the 1980s. These ideas and ways of thinking about museums are sometimes referred to as “new museology”, a concept that in itself has been heavily debated and questioned. At times, this concept is presented as a new line of thought that is penetrating the museum work whether museum workers like it or not, whilst sometimes, it is presented as a conscious choice in which museum workers have to engage, in order for it to be implemented properly. Some critics state that many of these ideas are incompatible with current museum practices and, furthermore, that these ideas are far from new (Sola 1997; Smeds 2007).

Several museums are currently facing external pressure from the government and the public to reinvent themselves or in other ways respond to social and cultural change and economic pressure in order to serve certain interests. Museums are obliged to become more outward-focused and create meaningful links to the community in order to remain relevant, sustainable and to prove their value so that they may receive proper financial support either from sponsors, governments or municipals in a defensible and justifiable manner. Furthermore, the wide range and ever-expanding forms of leisure time activities that are being offered creates an immense pressure to develop and offer exhibitions and program activities that meet public expectations and generate meaningful experiences. For smaller museums with low monetary and human resources at their disposal these requirements can become overwhelming and at worst lower the overall quality of what is being produced since whilst responding to these demands, it is also crucial that museums continue to manage the more traditional museum work that revolves around preserving, documenting, performing research and exhibiting the collections.

In this thesis, I intend to look at tendencies and indications of change in museums and explore past and current discussions and attitudes concerning these changes as well as the social- and societal role of the museum, the function and purpose of the museum, value production and museum practices. All these topics will be discussed in relation to one specific museum,



namely Vänersborg's Museum - a cultural history museum situated in the small town of Vänersborg, Sweden. The museum is interesting from a museological perspective and, furthermore, relevant to this thesis because it has, to a great extent, remained unaltered since the opening of the museum in 1891. Even though the interior of the museum, with the displays and exhibitions, has been kept relatively unchanged, the ideas, purpose, visions, objectives and practices in connection to the museum have been constantly re-shaped and transformed throughout time and discourses. It might look the same but the museum means something different, communicates something else and creates different knowledge today than it did 130 years ago. Another reason why this is an interesting and relevant museum in relation to studying attitudes about change in museums is that the museum is currently implementing ideas related to a re-profiling project that was initiated by the organization of Västärvet in 2011. This required that the museum began evaluating its current direction, identity as well as what it had to offer the 21st century audience. Thus, this makes a good example for exploring how these changes affect and influence the museum practices and work of a smaller museum with a low budget and few staff to perform and fulfill these requirements – a situation that is becoming more and more pressing.

When looking at museum/institutional changes, changes in attitudes, ideas, approaches, practices and the area of focus in some museums it becomes clear that these transformations or attitudinal shifts are visible in:

- Definitions of museums and their function and role in society
- Thinking about audiences
- Perceptions of museum collections and museum objects; how to use them and think about them. Their role in museums have changed or been questioned
- Perceptions of knowledge production and learning in museums – sharing authority and blurring out the lines between expert- and layman knowledge
- Concepts about accessibility and social inclusiveness in museums
- Perceptions of what value a museum generates

In this thesis, I will study some discussions regarding these areas and, furthermore, see how applicable some of the new ideas are to the object of the study.

Graham Black, author of *The Engaging Museum* (2005), states that museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are expected to be:

- An object treasure-house significant to all local communities
- An agent for physical, economic, cultural and social regeneration
- Accessible to all – intellectually, physically, socially, culturally, economically
- Relevant to the whole of society, with the community involved in product development and delivery, and with a core purpose of improving people’s lives
- A celebrant of cultural diversity
- A promoter of social cohesion and a bringer of social capital
- A promoter of social inclusion
- Proactive in the supporting neighborhood and community renewal
- Proactive in developing new audiences
- Proactive in developing, working with and managing pan-agency projects
- A resource for structured educational use
- Integral to the learning community
- A community meeting place
- A tourist attraction
- An income generator
- An example of quality service provision and value for money (Black 2005: 4).

To some museums, this can appear overwhelming and seem to claim a great part of the monetary- and human resources at disposal. However, several aspects that Black points out in this list relate to a shift in how to approach the audience which does not necessarily have to involve spending a lot of money.

There will be no attempt to sort out which of all statements regarding the areas of transformation that are right or wrong, true or false. Rather, I will explore patterns and identify some social consequences of different discourses and present a critical evaluation of these statements. I will explore the possibilities of finding a middle ground or a way that can perhaps serve as a compromise and, most important of all, be applicable in the ‘real’ world.

#### AIM, PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I argue that museums currently are and have always been under the influence of change and development closely related to social and societal changes and developments. Any attempt to separate museums from their societal role when analyzing issues concerning museology and museum practices would, in my opinion, be to leave out half of the story. When making statements about ‘new ages’ entering the world of cultural institutions, replacing old ideas and

practices with new ones that are more in line with the rapidly changing society, the nature of the debate can become quite polarized and thus, inefficient. As can be seen in chapter four, several scholars that advocate a change of some form often create binary oppositions to prove their point which suggests that there is a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ museology out there and that museums and museum professionals urgently need to take a stand and furthermore make a choice which will affect the direction and future of the museum.

In this thesis, I will attempt to demonstrate how the discussion and debate regarding this transformation in museums have become polarized: elitism versus populism; traditional museums versus reformed/reinvented museums; old museology versus new museology, etc. which is not very effective or relevant since museums can rarely be said to possess qualities limited or restricted to either one side and, furthermore, reality is more complex than what the two extremes and oppositional ends suggest.

The primary object of study in this thesis is, as mentioned, Vänersborg’s Museum. To some, this is a museum that could be seen as the embodiment of a traditional museum - for better or worse. In connection to my internship at the museum during the summer and fall of 2011, I was asked to participate in a re-profiling project which started in March 2011. During the project meetings, new objectives, approaches, target groups and strategies for the future of the museum were discussed and formulated yet the importance of keeping the museum’s identity or “character” was emphasized. During these profile meetings, discussions relating to the areas currently undergoing change were brought up and considered before making any decisions. In chapter five I will review the results of this project and furthermore, look at these results in the light of the discussions and ideas presented in chapter four and thus attempt to find a model or perspective that advocates balance and room for the versatile as well as the specific.

Some of the questions that will be explored in this thesis are:

- What statements, assumptions and discussions are present in the current cultural debate regarding museum practices and museology and how are these visible in the context of Vänersborg’s Museum?
- What cultural pressures are constructed through these attitudes and how does this shape the work, practices and activities of the object of the study?

- How are these ‘truths’ or assumptions present in the museum practices of Vänernsborg’ Museum, i.e. how do discourses manifest themselves in current work, policies and practices?

In this thesis, I will argue that the characteristics of ‘traditional’ museums can be combined and coexist with the characteristics of ‘reformed’ or ‘reinvented’ museums. In my opinion, museums are and have always been evolving institutions which develop, change and are influenced by different discourses existing side by side, rather than one prevailing discourse. Just as different discourses can and do coexist, so do these assumptions of and statements concerning the theoretical- and practical field of museums. Even though different discourses might fight for space, there is room for more than one, which I will attempt to demonstrate in this thesis.

#### DELIMITATION

The main focus of this study concerns different cultural attitudes and shifts of perspectives and how these are visible in museum practices and theory. The discussions explored in this study are based on literature, articles and publications from the Anglophonic world thus excluding research and publications from the German and French speaking parts of Europe. As is mentioned in chapter two, variations in approaches between these differ a great deal according to Kerstin Smeds (2007). It would have been interesting to study and compare the different conceptions of museology and museum practices and the nature of this discussion based on the differences found in literature regarding the subject. For instance it would be interesting to look at basic differences between the “new museology” presented by Peter Vergo (1989) and the ideas presented by a similar movement that formed in Germany around the same time (Mensch 1992: n.p.). Such a comparison is not possible for me due to language barriers and because such exploration is not allowed due to the limited space of this thesis.

As mentioned, the main object of the study is *one* museum, Vänernsborg’s Museum. The museum is a part of a larger organization, Västarvet, which consists of several museums and cultural institutions which were all obliged to partake in a re-profiling project like the one conducted at Vänernsborg’s Museum. Due to restrictions in time and space, the other museums and institutions are not included in this thesis. I will only briefly look at the policies and directives of Västarvet and how these shape discussions and ways of thinking about museum practices at Vänernsborg’s Museum. A comparison between work styles, policies and the development and implementation of a new profile in the other museums and institutions of

Västarvet, which consist of various types, sizes and, furthermore, differences in the amount of resources they have at their disposal, would perhaps have given this thesis more depth. However, this is not a thesis that compares how different museum practices and theoretical approaches are performed and carried out in smaller and larger institutions but rather looks at how current cultural attitudes can shape museum practices in one museum that has issues with budget and staff like many other museums today.

#### DISPOSITION

I begin in chapter two by discussing the concepts of *museum* and *museology*. These are concepts that have been heavily discussed and defined in various ways by different scholars at different points in time, which will briefly be reviewed here. A clarification on how these concepts will be used and applied in this thesis will be presented. Furthermore, various forms of *value* such as *intrinsic*-, *instrumental*- and *institutional* value are frequently discussed in this study, hence, a brief introduction to these concepts will be found in this chapter.

I continue in chapter three by presenting the theory that will assist me and the method of choice. This chapter will furthermore explain how I intend to approach and analyze the issues mentioned above, what analytical tools that will aid me in this study and the methods used in this thesis.

In chapter four the term ‘new museology’, or rather, discussions originating from a new museological perspective, will be explored. Beginning with a brief summary of the history and critique of the concept, the chapter continues with a more thorough account of the most pertinent and distinctive line of thoughts that are jointly referred to as the ‘new museology’ by some scholars such as Robert Lumley (1988) and Peter Vergo (1989), as well as some of the more current discussions relating to the areas where change is visible. Furthermore, the discussions, ideas and approaches presented in this chapter will later be used to explore how current discourses affect and mark (and how they will continue to do so with the implementation of the new profile) the practices and work of Vänersborg’s Museum.

The discussions explored in chapter four deal to a great extent with what is currently perceived as more or less important aspects or focal points of the museum field and museum practices. This influences perceptions and assumptions regarding the value of museums as well as the value production in museums.

Chapter five provides a historical background to Vänerns Museum, from the opening day to the present re-profiling project. A brief summary of the visions and policies of Västerås and the municipality of Vänern will also be given. The main focus of this chapter however, will be the re-profiling project and a review of the decisions and future plans that were discussed and decided on. An analysis of the result of the project will be presented in chapter six where I will discuss the project in the light of what has been discussed in chapter four and, moreover, in relation to the visions and policies of Västerås. Furthermore, interesting approaches and perspectives on how to merge the traditional with the reformed by Graham Black (2005), Elaine Heumann Gurian (2006 [2002]) and Sharon Macdonald (2011) are explored and applied to Vänerns Museum. Here, I will argue for a balance between the two polarized points of departure and attempt to demonstrate that the two discourses can coexist in one museum and, furthermore, benefit from each other. Finally, I argue the importance of variation in museums and discuss the concern of a threatening uniformity that comes with joint directions. An emphasis is therefore placed on embracing and marketing what makes a museum unique. Thus, this chapter brings all previously mentioned statements and assumptions to the museum environment and concerns itself with how it can be applied in the context of the museum.

## 2. SURVEY OF KEY CONCEPTS

In this chapter various definitions regarding the concept of the museum will be presented as well as understandings of some key aspects relating to the field of museology or museum studies will be presented and discussed. This is to demonstrate that the terminology is filled with sometimes opposing understandings and explanations which result in several different conceptions of the field of museology and museum studies in general. Definitions of museums have been re-articulated over time as a response to changes in society and for legal and professional reasons. These conceptions about museums and museology shape and mark convictions and assumptions of, for instance, what should be the developing factor in the field, what function museums should have and what should be the next step on the ladder of museum evolution. This chapter will not recite the history of museums or the history of museology which is brilliantly done by others (Mensch 1992; Bennett 1995), nor will it set out in finding one universally applicable definition to the concepts presented below. Rather, it serves to demonstrate the versatility of ideas in the field and to clarify how the concepts are understood and used in this thesis. Moreover, this chapter gives a brief overview of what has been said about the subject of this thesis.

### WHAT ARE MUSEUMS AND MUSEOLOGY?

In the foreword to *The Museum Time-Machine* (1988), Robert Lumley states that:

Museums are an international growth industry. Not only are they increasing in numbers, but they are acquiring new functions in the organization of cultural activities. It is through museums that societies represent their relationship to their own history and to that of other cultures and peoples. Today, there are great differences and conflicts both inside and outside museums about how this should best be done, leading those concerned with running them to question the traditional concepts of what a museum is, what it can offer its public, and how history is conceived and presented. (Lumley 1988: foreword)

Even though over 20 years have passed since this was published it might as well have been written today. As mentioned, the concept of the *museum* and its function has been and still is defined and re-defined for both legal- and professional reasons. In the *Statutes* of the International Committee of Museums (ICOM), the concept of a museum is defined as:

A non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. (ICOM 2007: 2)

Similarly, the American Association of Museums, (AAM), highlight the museum's public ability and its function of making a "unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving and interpreting the things of this world" (AAM 2000: 1).

As in the definitions formulated by ICOM and AAM, the definition of a museum articulated by the Museums Association (MA) also focuses on the social and public role of the museum rather than the practical functions: "Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens which they hold in trust for society" (MA 2007: 8). According to Caroline Lang, museum consultant and one of the editors of *The Responsive Museum*, the shift towards the social functions of the museum is a result of "changes in society, legislation [and] government initiatives" (Lang 2006: 33) which museums are thus responding to. As can be seen in the previous definition by the MA: "A museum is an institution which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit" (Ambrose and Paine 1993: 8) and by the AAM:

A non-profit permanent, established institution, not existing primarily for the purpose of conducting temporary exhibitions, exempt from federal taxes and state income taxes, open to the public and administered in the public interest, for the purpose of conserving and preserving, studying, interpreting, assembling, and exhibiting to the public for its instruction and enjoyment objects and specimens of educational and cultural value, including artistic, scientific (whether animate or inanimate), historical and technological material. (Ambrose and Paine 1993: 8)

Compared to the current definitions which are more audience- and public centered, these are more concerned with traditional museum practices such as preserving, conserving, researching and exhibiting the collections.

What appear to be constant are the disagreements concerning what museums are or should be, i.e. the nature or the heart of museums. For instance, curator and scholar, Susan Pearce argues that "collections, and the objects and specimens within them, will always be, and should always be, at the heart of the museum operation" (Pearce 1992: preface) whilst John Falk and Lynn Dierking, in a publication from that same year, place a larger emphasis on the educational role of the museum and claim that the collection- and research oriented museum is being replaced by a focus on public learning (Falk & Dierking 1992: xiii). In a more recent publication, Lois H. Silverman proclaims the therapeutic potential of museums and highlights the social work as well as the beneficial-, healing- and therapeutic effects museums have on human relationships extending to encompass the world (Silverman 2010).



Another issue that seems to stretch beyond consent is what sort of institutions or entities can be said to fit under the description *museum*. These different descriptions of what constitutes a museum might stem from what Sharon Macdonald and Tomislav Sola describe as the sudden growth in the number of museums that began flourishing in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Macdonald 2011: 4; Sola 1997: 44). In the ICOM publication *Museum Basics*, from the early 1990s, Timothy Ambrose and Crispin Paine mention that there are different types and variations of museums but their conception seems rather limited, representing only ‘traditional’, open-air-, and historic house museums (1993: 7), in comparison to what Falk and Dierking define as museums: “historical homes and sites; science and technology and nature centers; aquaria, zoos, and botanical gardens; as well as the traditional art, history, and natural history museums” (Falk & Dierking 1992: xiii). This is very similar to the range of institutions defined as museums today by the AAM which include:

. . . governmental and private museums of anthropology, art history and natural history, aquariums, arboreta, art centers, botanical gardens, children’s museums, historic sites, nature centers, planetariums, science and technology centers and zoos. (AAM 2000: 1)

As demonstrated previously, the disagreements regarding the definition, function and purpose of museums makes it problematic to discuss a sole explanation of what museums are and what they primarily should do as well as provide a clear description and understanding of museology, accepted by all. The discussions and conflicts surrounding the term museology and what museology should encompass have been thoroughly investigated and written about by Dutch Professor of Cultural Heritage, Peter van Mensch who dedicates his PhD thesis, *Towards a Methodology in Museology* (1992), to the subject. Here, van Mensch identifies the repetitiveness present in the museum periodical literature and furthermore criticizes the literature for its general and superficial treatment of topics. He highlights what he calls the “big terminological confusion” of the concept of museology where at times it is limited to museum theory but sometimes includes museum practices such as registration and conservation. He states: “The term museology is thus used on different occasions as describing either a defined field of activity, or the totality of knowledge about this field of activity, or even both at the same time” (van Mensch 1992: n.p.). However, for natural reasons, this excellent attempt at sorting out and trying to make the subject of museology comprehensible only extends to the 1990s and, of course, a lot of things have happened since in the field of museology.

According to ethnologist Stefan Bohman, museology is a field of science that explores perceptions and conceptions of the present and, furthermore, how these conceptions are connected to perceptions about the past. Another way of seeing it, he continues, is that museology can be understood as knowledge about the selection-, preserving-, conveying- and use of the historical and *cultural heritage* in society. By *cultural heritage* Bohman refers to the “material, spiritual and natural remains. It consists of art, artifacts, buildings, cultural environments, natural environments, written and oral memories as well as living traditions” (Bohman 1997: 11; author’s translation). Furthermore, he states that museology concerns itself with the social-, political- and ideological reasons that decides what material- and spiritual remains that will be selected for preservation, presentation and use (Ibid.). This is the definition used in this thesis because it is dynamic and allows for social-, political- and economic change. It concerns itself not only with the method of preservation, presentation and use of cultural heritage but also with the interpretation and perception of it as well as a critical reflection of the interpretations and perceptions surrounding it at different points in time. Thus, it covers both the practical and theoretical aspects of the museum field. This definition implies that change is always happening. In fact, change is the implicit force in this definition.

In the midst of the struggle over definitions and how to use the term, Kerstin Smeds points out something of great importance in her article “Vad är museologi?” (What is museology?). She highlights the Anglophonic perspective that education in museum studies in for instance Sweden and Great Britain, are dominated by, thus excluding publications, research and theories from the German and French speaking parts of Europe. This, she continues, is to a great extent the result of current language barriers and the fact that many of those publications are never translated to English. She states that museology in Great Britain and North America is primarily concerned with the educational role of museums whilst in Germany and France museology is more focused on sociological, critical and theoretical aspects (Smeds 2007: 74-75). However, this predominating Anglophonic perspective appears to be shifting. In ICOM’s and the International Committee for Museology’s (ICOFOM) publication *Key Concepts of Museology* (2010) which was first presented at the ICOM General Conference in Shanghai 2010, summaries of twenty-one essays were presented as a preview to the extensive *Dictionary of Museology*. This preview offers a primarily Francophone perspective and view which gives an interesting orientation into a discussion that might not previously have been accessible to non-French speakers. Using authors and scholars from the French-speaking parts

of the world was a conscious choice and served as a reaction towards the predominant Anglophonic perspective (ICOM & ICOFOM 2010).

### *New Museology*

A concept that will be dealt with in this thesis is ‘new museology’, a term that is the source of many discussions due to the fact that it encompasses and stands for different things at various points in time. On the one hand, the term “new museology” can be appointed when referring to the “advent of a radically new phenomenon in the French museological landscape: the ecomuseum” (Poulot 1994: 66) during the 1970s. Dominique Poulot, member of the Institut Universitaire de France, describes a broader movement called ‘new museology’ which was connected to the ecomuseum. This movement was highly engaged in institutional critique and sought to introduce new techniques of display, exhibition and communication as well as transforming the relationship between the institution and the public (Poulot 1994: 67). Several years after the appearance of the ecomuseum and the ‘new museology’ movement in France, other groups and movements, with a similar approach, appeared around Europe. van Mensch briefly mentions two ‘groups’ of interest. The first one he describes is a group which formed in Germany in the late 1980s. The group was to a great extent influenced by Post-modern thinking and drew inspiration from such scholars as German philosopher and art critic, Walter Benjamin; French philosopher and sociologist Henri Pierre Jeudy; French philosopher and sociologist, Jean Baudrillard and German philosopher Hermann Lübbe. van Mensch points out Wolfgang Ernst, Gottfried Korff and Eva Sturm amongst others, as some of the more important authors belonging to this group, however, he highlights that since the literature and articles they produced never were translated into English or French and, moreover, since none of the ‘group members’ ever participated in any ICOFOM related activities, their influence did not extend beyond the German-speaking parts of Europe (van Mensch 1992: n.p).

The second group van Mensch takes an interest in is the one whose ideas and approaches will be referred to throughout this thesis when discussing ‘new museology’, unless anything else is stated. van Mensch calls this group the “Leicester-group” since this movement and the ideas presented came from around the Department of Museum Studies at Leicester (van Mensch 1992: n.p.). The Leicester-group appeared around the same time as the German-group and their ideas share great resemblance. This ‘new museology’ movement and their approach to museum theory and museum practices will further be discussed in chapter four.

As mentioned, I am using the term ‘new museology’ when referring to the ideas and concepts of Peter Vergo, Nick Merriman, Robert Lumley and other members of the Leicester group. Even though this may be a concept with ideas that are far from new, this term simply makes it less confusing than referring to it as the third wave of new museology or something similar. This is to make things easier and simpler and it does not mean that I am unaware of or ignore the fact that this term has been used before or that the ideas included in this concept have been discussed prior to Peter Vergo et al’s *The New Museology* (1989). Furthermore, some of the ideas and discussions presented in this thesis might stem from discussions that the ‘new museology’-concept highlighted but that does not mean that all these ideas generally can be referred to as new museological for that matter. In this thesis, I prefer to refer to these ideas as characteristics of the reformed or reinvented museum as presented by Tomislav Sola (1997) and Gail Anderson (1998) in chapter four.

#### DEFINING AND MEASURING VALUE IN MUSEUMS

The perception of the value that museums generate has been discussed frequently especially since the pressure on museums has tightened. As is highlighted by Falk and Dierking, what is valued in museums today was perhaps not equally valued in the past and vice versa (Falk & Dierking 2008: 233-234). As in the ‘definitions-of-a-museum discussion’ and the ‘what-museology-is-and-should-encompass discussion’, the perceptions, assumptions and conceptions regarding ‘the-value-in-and-of-museums discussion’ is filled with vague terminology and confusion. A discussion, namely with regards to instrumental value or instrumentalism in museums is prevailing. Critique ranges from questioning instrumentality itself to a concern connected to problematic methods and research framework (Holden 2004, 2006; Scott 2009).

Due to time and space restraint I will only give a brief review of what is currently said and discussed in this matter.

#### *Intrinsic-, Instrumental- and Institutional Value*

In “Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy”, John Holden suggests that “publicly funded culture generates three types of value: *intrinsic* value, *instrumental* value and *institutional* value” (Holden 2006: 9). He defines *intrinsic* values as “. . . the set of values that relate to the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally and spiritually” (Ibid. 14); he suggests that *instrumental* values “. . . relate to the ancillary effects of culture, where culture

is used to achieve a social and economic purpose. They are often, but not always, expressed in figures” (Ibid. 16); furthermore, he describes how *institutional* value:

. . . relates to the processes and techniques that organisations adopt in how they work to create value for the public (...) it flows from their working practices, and attitudes, and is rooted in the ethos of public service. Through its concern for the public an institution can achieve such public goods as creating trust and mutual respect among citizens, enhancing the public realm, and providing a context for sociability and the enjoyment of shared experiences. (Holden 2006: 17)

Holden discusses the triangular relationship between the creators and users of these values: the professionals, politicians and the public and recognizes that there is a problem in that politicians often perceive the instrumental value as most important, caring mostly about economical outcomes whilst museum staff and the public often have a different way of looking at the value generated and the outcomes of the museum (Holden 2006: 9-10). Carol A. Scott also points this out and claims that when discussing instrumental value emphasis is often placed on utilitarian outcomes such as “social cohesion, access, urban regeneration and contributions to the general, creative and knowledge economies” (Scott 2009: 196).

Stuart Davies attempts to sort out what he recognizes as a lack of clarity regarding instrumentalism. He comments on some of the criticism about the concept which often see instrumentality as something which is beyond the intended purpose or scope of a museum. Moreover, instrumentalism is often regarded as something that pulls museums away from what is supposedly their true function or purpose towards something that is unnatural to them. Davies point out that since museums are part of a government sector, it is implied that they should be under the same pressure as any governmental sector (Davies 2008: 260). In the report *Capturing Cultural Value*, John Holden’s concerns are with the outcome focused atmosphere and, furthermore, he claims that the evidence base is too unreliable and weak, that statistics do not equal knowledge, hence, there is a problem measuring the value of culture with such numbers and facts (2004: 21). Davies discusses instrumentalism in relation to policy and states that because the cultural sector is non-statutory there need to be substitutes that can determine what is being delivered and produced so that further investment is justifiable. Hence, performance indicators and other instruments must be used in order to evaluate and determine what has been achieved (Davies 2008: 259). Holden recognizes the importance of such measurers of impact but claims that they can never be sufficient in accounting for why culture should be invested in. He highlights the difficulty in proving that investment or funding of a certain project, program or exhibition will generate or produce a

specific outcome (Holden 2004: 18, 21). Furthermore, the value of a museum and the value that a museum produces shifts depending on whose perspective one chooses to study - the visitors', the museum professionals' or the decision makers', stakeholders' and politicians' perspective. Holden claims that unless politicians understand what the public perceives as important and valuable in cultural institutions and unless museum professionals will be able to articulate and communicate this in a clear and effective way, culture will always be in a vulnerable position (Holden 2006: 13).

One problematic aspect of situations where museums are forced to prove their worth to financiers in order to receive further funding is that which Carol Scott highlights in her article *Exploring the Evidence Base for Museum Value*. She claims, like Holden, that the terminology regarding value is disturbingly unclear making it difficult for museums to present or demonstrate their value in any other way than through what is easily measured, that is, presenting stakeholders with visitor numbers (Scott 2009: 196). However, these figures can hardly provide a holistic view of the museums' value or measure the positive outcomes of the museums' existence. Furthermore, if a museum lack adequate and sufficient guidelines or clearly formulated objectives that state desired outcomes and how these outcomes are to be achieved, the museum staff might have immense problems when attempting to declare and present any visible or concrete results of their efforts. Moreover, the museum might end up with a lack of direction that will result in a loss of integrity and identity. Holden points out one of the difficulties with intrinsic value as being a matter of poor articulation and argues that it should be more clearly defined rather than belonging to the category of 'something else'. Another problem with intrinsic value, he continues, is that whilst cultural policy looks to attract and engage the public, cultural experiences are subjective and personal which suggest that an evaluation of how much or what kind of value cultural experiences a museum can generate is problematic (Holden 2004: 23).

Scott suggests a generic set of indicators of use-, instrumental- and institutional value that is based on data already conducted in some form by museums (Scott 2009: 202). These indicators may then be used to collect evidence or support claims of a museum's value by for example comparing data over time. However, attempting to create something measurable out of the un-measurable can only create limited knowledge about a museum's full value production. Nevertheless, it may be useful when creating and presenting evidence of value to stakeholders and decision-makers.

### 3. THEORY AND METHOD

#### DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Whilst discourse theory together with discourse analysis might be a theoretical perspective most commonly used when analyzing the role of language, I believe that it can be useful when applied to other social domains such as cultural institutions. These approaches and tools of analysis may help in my study of how certain ideas and approaches are visible in for instance, the re-profiling of Vänersborg's Museum. The "languages" I will study are spoken, written and in other ways communicated statements and discussions regarding cultural policy, 'new museology' and 'new' museum practices, the value production of museums as well as the perception of museums as makers of meaning and knowledge over time and lastly, how this translates in museum practices.

Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips describe the field of discourse analysis as sometimes vague or unclear, encompassing everything and nothing at once. However, they begin by defining a discourse as "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 1) and by discussing four premises included in all approaches of discourse analysis:

- A critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge
- Historical and cultural specificity
- Link between knowledge and social processes
- Link between knowledge and social action

Importantly, they make a distinction between Michel Foucault's early thoughts on different regimes of knowledge, at different points in time, which determine what is presumably true or false and the more pluralistic approach that contemporary discourse analysis provide by claiming that several discourses can exist side by side (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 5-6, 13). As mentioned in the introduction, this is how the object of the study will be interpreted – as a bearer of different discourses, approaches, ideas and assumptions that can and do exist side by side at different points in time.

#### *Laclau's and Mouffe's Discourse Theory*

Jørgensen and Phillips highlight one important theoretical point in Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's Discourse Theory, which is that discourse is always at conflict with other discourses that explain and understand reality differently and offer other alternatives for social

action. Thus, no discourse can ever be fully established and, furthermore, these conflicts and struggles for the creation of meaning become an important focus in the analysis of discourses. To take this further, Laclau and Mouffe discuss the concepts of *antagonism* and *hegemony*. They use these concepts to explain the collision of discourses antagonistically and how these can be dissolved by *hegemonic interventions*. The hegemonic intervention sometimes manages to create a fixation across the conflicting discourses resulting in a re-articulation of discourse and a new fixation of meaning (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 47-48).

Laclau and Mouffe argue that all social phenomena and physical objects can be understood and treated somewhat as language. Social actions for instance, can be seen as relationally defined, i.e. they receive meaning from their relationship with or by their difference from other social actions. Furthermore, a physical object exists independently of social classification; however, it is only the discursive context which it is a part of that gives it a particular meaning. They suggest that discourse theory is not restricted to analyzing texts and argue that both the physical and the social are discursive elements that can be investigated and analyzed. Moreover, they discuss various key signifiers such as *nodal points*, *master signifiers* and *myths* (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 113-114; Laclau & Mouffe 1990: 100-101). My use of these concepts expands on suggestions made by Jørgensen and Phillips on how to apply these on empirical material (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 35-36, 50). Thus, in this thesis I will look at ‘old museology’, ‘new museology’, cultural- politics and -policies as *nodal points* - they organize discourse. The staff of the museum, the local politicians, the municipal, the visitors and the organization of Västärvet will be viewed as *master signifiers* which organize identity. Finally, the museum can be understood as the *myth* which organizes social space. Jørgensen and Phillips points out that according to the Laclau and Mouffe approach, the social space, in this case the museum, “. . . is not uncontested (...) a *floating signifier*, and different discourses struggle to fill it with different meanings” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 51). Furthermore, they suggest that Laclau’s and Mouffe’s theoretical outlook, “. . . that discourses are never completely stable and uncontested” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 51), can be used as a framework through which the empirical material and the object of the study – the museum, can be analyzed. For example, it will be possible to identify different perceptions of reality and point out antagonistic lines and, furthermore, explore what happens if any of them, perhaps through *hegemonic interventions* or re-articulation, become the dominating discourse which will shape the meaning and identity of the *floating signifier*, the museum. Thus, by using such concepts as *identity*, *antagonism* and *hegemony* and applying these to the object of



the study, it will be possible to explore the following aspects suggested by Jørgensen and Phillips:

- How each discourse constitutes knowledge and reality, identities and social relations;
- Where discourses function unobtrusively side by side and where there are open antagonisms;
- Which hegemonic interventions that are striving to override the conflicts - in which ways and with which consequences (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 51).

#### *Comments and Critique of Laclau's and Mouffe's Discourse Theory*

Associate Professor, Lilie Chouliarakari and Language Professor Norman Fairclough recognize Laclau's and Mouffe's discourse theory as valuable for the analysis of change in discourse. However, they criticize Laclau's and Mouffe's focus on the openness and contingency of the social which they suggest results in that certain *structural constraints* are overlooked. They argue that constraints in the form of structural relationships of dependency form people's discourse and that it is important to identify structural domains which are affected and created by the social yet which are hard to change or re-articulate for some groups. Some constraining aspects that might function as limiting can be that of class, status, ethnicity and gender (Chouliarakari & Fairclough 1999: 124-126; Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 54-55).

This critique by Chouliarakari and Fairclough is fair, which also marks the discussions in this thesis. To give an example, external pressure on a museum and the museum staff that comes in the form of commissions, certain directives and requirements from stakeholders and decision-makers which in turn might derive from current objectives and policies in cultural politics, urges the staff to conform to new ideas and ways of thinking and talking about their work process etc. Staff is obliged to follow these directives if they wish to continue to have a good relationship, continue their partnership, formulate new agreements and receive further funding with commissioners and other stakeholders. Thus, the staff changes their discourse. For instance, they might have to re-consider and re-articulate their current objectives and priorities. This does not happen, however, as a result based on their own wants and wishes but rather, as Chouliarakari and Fairclough argued, the structural relationships of dependency affect the outcome - the discourse. Moreover, this is because the staff is subjected to certain constraints which limit their ability and possibility to have their re-articulations accepted (Chouliarakari & Fairclough 1999: 126-129). Jørgensen and Phillips claim that Laclau's and

Mouffe's Discourse Theory does regard a restrictiveness or limitation in the possibilities for social action. For instance, they state that according to Laclau's and Mouffe's theoretical point:

. . . actors are understood – whether they are groups or individuals – as subject positions determined by discourses. Everyone does not have equal access to all subject positions, and, in our society, constraints can, for instance, be a function of categories such as class, ethnicity and gender. (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 55)

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As Jørgensen and Phillips points out, studying and analyzing the discourses that one is a part of can pose certain difficulties. It concerns difficulties in regarding the discourses as what they are i.e. viewing them as “socially constructed meaning systems” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 21). This means that I am limited in my scope in the sense that I share the taking-for-granted and common sense understandings which the culture, discourses and material, that I am studying, express. Furthermore, something worth addressing is my close relationship with the object of the study, Vänersborgs Museum, due to my internship there. Consequently, distancing oneself from the object of the study is crucial here. However, being a part of the discourses I intend to study, there is no possibility to step out of the discourses and claim to present a pure objective “truth”, since that must also be viewed as a discursive construction. Thus, another consideration highlighted by Jørgensen & Phillips, which might be important to address, concerns the “truths” that researchers produce (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 21-22). I intend however, to be as objective and transparent in my studies, analyses and discussions as is possible.

## METHOD

The empirical material and data in this study have been collected through attending project meetings and studying the reports and documents regarding the re-profiling project of Vänersborg's Museum, studies of annual reports, guidelines, vision and policy documents governing documents concerning Vänersborg's Museum, the organization of Västarvet and the municipal of Vänersborg, articles and literature on the subject as well as one qualitative interview.

### *Studies of Project Documents, Annual Reports, Governing-, Vision and Policy Documents*

A majority of the documents I have studied are official and can be accessed online. However, some documents have been retrieved when attending meetings and such. Thus, not all

documents have been published. The project platform of Vänerns Museum is yet to be finalized. Hence, the version I am referring to in this thesis is under revision which means that the finished document might include some modifications.

### *Studying and Analyzing Spoken and Written Statements*

The primary material I will analyze in this thesis are different sets of spoken and written statements and discussions, communicated at various points in time which present and demonstrate certain patterns and attitudes which I will explore using Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's Discourse Theory (sometimes abbreviated to discourse theory). There will be no attempt to identify or sort out which of these statements that are true or false. However, a critical evaluation from which I will draw certain conclusions and see how this is applied and visible in museum practices will be presented.

### *Qualitative Interviews*

The interview is used as additional information to the governing documents and reports studied in this thesis. The intention with the interviews was to get both the professionals' perspective as well as the decision makers' perspective. Unfortunately, only one out of three local politicians responded to my request. Furthermore, at his request, the interview was conducted via email which affected the content and quality of the interview and added no further information than what I could find in the governing-, vision- and policy documents which is why his response has been left out. The respondents, a total of two, all agreed to be interviewed and were prior to the interviews informed on the subject of the thesis. One of the interviews was conducted through a personal meeting where the conversation was recorded whilst the second was conducted via email correspondence, as mentioned before.

The other respondent is Peter Johansson – head director of Vänerns Museum. The recorded interview with Peter Johansson lasted approximately an hour and was conducted in the respondent's office. The interview has been transcribed and is in the author's belonging.

## 4. ‘NEW MUSEOLOGY’ – RADICAL OR PERPETUAL RE-THINKING?

In this chapter, I will give a brief introduction to the concept of ‘new museology’ and present some of the more pertinent thoughts that are included in this heavily debated term. Moreover, I will look closer at the areas presented in the introduction such as perceptions about museum collections and objects, authenticity, public access and museums as agents of social change. These are all areas where a shift in approach or transformation is highly visible. Some of the discussions regarding change in museums stem from the discussions that arose in relation to the criticism presented by the ‘new museology’ movement. As discussed in chapter two though, the ‘newness’ of this radical re-thinking has been debated.

In this chapter I will furthermore attempt to demonstrate how the nature of some of the discussions regarding change in museums has become rather polarized steering attention away from a constructive dialogue to a somewhat limited and conformed notion of what museums should and should not be doing.

### WHAT IS ‘NEW MUSEOLOGY’?

Peter Vergo’s *The New Museology* (1989) presents a shift in perspective and, furthermore, appeals to a ‘new’ set of approaches to be implemented in theoretical and practical fields of a museum context. Sharon Macdonald accounts for the time when *The New Museology* was published in the 1980s, and describes it as belonging to an expanding line of development that concerned itself with concepts such as *representational critique*, *deconstruction*, *reflexivity*, *objectivity* and *mis-recognition* among others (Macdonald 2011: 3). These perspectives were integrated both in museums and in other cultural and social domains. The theoretical framework influencing the “movement” was based on French philosophers such as Foucault and Bourdieu as well as other post-modernist and poststructuralist thinkers, yet the ideas were marked by a critical and reformative stance (van Mensch 1992: n.p.).

Hilde Hein describes ‘new museology’ as a movement which highlighted the need for museums to critically examine contemporary museum practices and theory. The movement sought to point out that museums had never been as neutral or un-biased as they had previously claimed to be (Hein 2000: 98). What ‘new museology’ did was to look critically at the institutional history of museums and point out systems of power and knowledge authority

that were tied to the practices regarding the museums' collections and exhibitions. As Hein states:

Where the previous educative role of museums had been invoked chiefly for the sake of conserving a culture and transmitting knowledge of it from past to future, now museums were admonished to become agents of social change rather than conservation. (Hein 2000: 99)

The 'new museology' movement criticized the museum institution for not recognizing its position as biased, excluding and power exercising. As Macdonald points out, analyses of museum displays and exhibitions were frequently carried out to somehow find the hidden message; to reveal the true meaning; the political standpoints and, furthermore, the assumptions and values of those exhibiting. However, Macdonald problematizes the interpretations made from such analyses and states that they indirectly imply that the explicit or implicit message communicated will always be in agreement with how visitors read and understand these messages. "It supposes both too clear-cut a conscious manipulation by those involved in creating exhibitions and too passive and unitary a public" (Macdonald 1996: 5). At the other end of the discussion, Fiona Cameron problematizes exhibitions with controversial and contentious content which she claims

. . . act as moral guides as part of a broader process of social moralisation (...) Exhibitions act as tools for constructing and justifying a moral system in a tangible form by constructing a field of visibility through the choice of topics, content including material objects, the moral angle and censorship decisions. (Cameron 2007: 335)

Kerstin Smeds' discussion about 'new museology' comes from a different perspective. According to her, "new museology" is not a new phenomenon since it has already occurred at least three times during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Smeds 2007: 70). Furthermore, she recognizes, like van Mensch (1992) that the development of the subject is marked by what she refers to as a "cyclic amnesia" and she continues:

It appears as though every generation museum worker and theorist is setting out to invent the wheel, introduce paradigm shifts, come up with something "new", and start a "dialogue with society", many of them being totally oblivious to the fact that it has been said and done before. (Smeds 2007: 70; author's translation)

Speaking of introducing paradigm shifts, John Falk and Lynn Dierking present the concept of a new 'Knowledge Age' which is said to have entered the cultural sector and more specifically, the museum environment (2008: 233). The period prior to the 'Knowledge Age' is referred to as the 'Industrial Age' but no thorough definition of this predecessor is

presented in the article, perhaps then the characteristics of the 'Industrial Age' can be presupposed as the opposites of those belonging to the 'Knowledge Age' which encompasses attributes and features which involve "Support of the Public Good"; "Organizational Investment"; and "Financial Stability" (Ibid. 234). They furthermore claim that not that long ago, the characteristics of what would be perceived as a successful cultural institution would be based on the institution's longevity, size and 'worth' of the collections. They compare this to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) guidelines of 2005 and point out several differences between now and then. From what can be interpreted in the highlighted excerpt of the IMLS guidelines in Falk's and Dierking's article, a valuable or successful cultural institution should be focusing towards visitor participation and experiences as well as social- and societal relevance and importance (Ibid. 233-234). As Stuart Davies points out, Falk and Dierking are making several assumptions about museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and, furthermore, he argues that "They declare this to be the "Knowledge Age", as if this is a universally accepted truth and also as if no earlier "Age" was dominated by knowledge and the pursuit of truth" (Davies 2008: 263).

In short, what Falk and Dierking imply is that the conception of value in museums can be said to have changed sometime around the 21<sup>st</sup> century towards a more visitor friendly approach since public value and public experiences has become a greater element of concern for museums than it previously was, or appears to have been according to the authors. In chapter two, this shift of focus was pointed out by the changes and re-articulated definitions of the concept of museums by the AAM and the MA. Furthermore, the perception of a change in museums towards a more audience centered approach is noted and supported by several scholars such as Graham Black (2005), Caroline Lang (2006) and Lois Silverman (2010) amongst others.

What Falk and Dierking indirectly imply though, is that a sudden break or shift in attitudes, within the cultural sector, took place not that long ago and that these oppositional ideas and influences are fighting for space because they cannot exist side by side. Implicitly, they suggest that in the past, a traditional museum existed which is now replaced by a re-modeled museum which will eventually be prevailing and dominant in the current 'Knowledge Age'. They state that:

Surviving, let alone thriving in the twenty-first-century is a very challenging task for the cultural sector, in large part because the rules of the game have changed. The institutions of today, many of which were built (and flourished) in the 'Industrial Age', must consciously and deliberately

develop business models that make sense for the new Knowledge Age in which they find themselves. (Falk & Dierking 2008: 234)

This statement implies that museum professionals are now suddenly waking up from a slumber and finding themselves in museums which have changed little or nothing since the 'Industrial Age' and in order to survive they need to take action and radically change the museum. This is a rather undermining assumption and as can be seen in chapter two, institutional critique, re-shaping and rethinking of museum practices and theory has been going on since the traditional or modern museum entered the scene. What is concerning is that there appears to be no room for museums that do not conform to a certain set of ideas.

Tomislav Sola discusses the complexity and problematic issues of polarizing the traditional and the remodeled museum as well as creating oppositional pairs. He points out that the extremes on both ends are rarely found in actual practice and furthermore, "characteristics from both sides (...) often coexist in the same professional environment, sometimes in the very same institution" (Sola 1997: 36). The chart compiled by Sola (*Table 1*) is said to function "so as to make things obvious, to make clear the distinction between opposed concepts" and as a "reminder of the possible extremes rarely found so clearly opposed" (Sola 1997: 36). For whatever reason this list was compiled, creating a dichotomy by using a set of characteristics that are said to somehow capture the essence of the traditional museum on the one side and the remodeled museum on the other is not very efficient or relevant since as Sola states, hardly any museum can be said to encompass characteristics limited to only one side. These oppositions between the "traditional" and the "remodeled" museum paints a black- and white picture which polarizes the discussion about change and is merely used to define what is "bad" and what is "good", i.e. providing tools so that the right choice can be made.

Table 1. Characteristics of the traditional and reformed museum. Adapted from Sola 1997:37-38

Prevailing characteristics and orientations of traditional museums	Prevailing characteristics and orientations of reformed museums
Product orientation	Process orientation
Object orientation	Concept orientation
Analytical	Synthetic
Specific	Contextual
Specialized	Multidisciplinary, complex
Passeist	Futurist
Rational	Emotional
Scientific	Popular
Formal	Informal
Solemn	Relaxed
Normative	Flexible
Finite	Open
Final definitions	Evolutionary, open definitions
Affirmation	Prefers organization
Preference of positivism	Expresses and provokes problems, questions and speculation
Objects speak for themselves	Sees objects as interpretative start
Aestheticism	Information space design
Production of knowledge	Mediation of experience and wisdom
Dissemination of knowledge	Encouragement of understanding and creative ability
Informative	Communicative
Educational	“cybernetic”, corrective



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Impressive	Friendly
Prestigious	Modest
Extensive	Territorial, communal
Possessive, conquering	Protective
Using technology to ameliorate the existing methods and procedures	Using technology as transforming the museum medium itself
Seeing the museum as a closed complex	Seeing building as the physical center of the action
Serving the dominant forces of society	Serving the community and common interest
Presenting research	Taking research as a basis for the presentation
Collecting “eternalia”	Collecting “ephemeralia” and “quotidiana”
Implying the logic of good investment and market value	Excluding material value judgment
Nourishing the myth of the original object	Accepting substitutes and support material
Presenting the scientific truth	Uses scientific argument to present visions, questions, doubts, possibilities
Scientific orientation comprising users	Users orientation comprising science
Static	Dynamic
Objectivity through historical distance	Objectivity through honest risk of real-time evaluation
“working for the future generations”	Acting for present users
Heritage as “invaluable relics”	Heritage as viable, collective memory
Conflict-free notion of the past	Past as history of confronted interest and possibilities
Heritage of the privileged, important, wealthy, exceptional	Heritage as totality

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In Gail Anderson's *Museum Mission Statements: Building a Distinct Identity* a similar chart (Table 2), as the one created by Sola, is presented and is said to "capture the essence of this paradigm shift" (1998: 21). Anderson describes the increasing pressure on museums to change in order to survive the shifting economic, social and political environment and suggests that museums as they change their working style should also adapt their mission statement according to ideas in line with the paradigm shift. Furthermore, museums are suggested to determine what qualities and/or strategies they wish to adopt and what aspects that should be discarded (Ibid.). This suggests that the renewing or re-modeling of the museum is an active, conscious choice that requires a clear understanding and knowledge about what constitutes this paradigm shift and how to implement it. This is not something that simply happens whether museum workers like it or not - it is something that needs to be actively developed and implemented by museum workers over time. However, it is stated that this change or need to incorporate these new characteristics is necessary in order for museums to survive and, thus, it needs to happen whether staff approve or not. Thus it becomes a concerning issue of making the right or wrong choices – regeneration or degeneration. This, furthermore, implies that such a re-articulation will be appropriate for all museums regardless of what type of museum it may concern or that museum's direction and identity.

Table 2. Qualities of the traditional and the reinvented museum. Adapted from Anderson 1998: 21

Traditional Museum	Reinvented Museum
<b>Governance</b>	
Keeper of mission	Mission driven
Elitism	Equity
Exclusive	Inclusive
Reactive	Proactive
Power base	Empowerment
Monocultural	Multicultural
Internal focus	External focus
Individual values	Shared values
Singular vision	Shared vision
Single visionary leader	Shared leadership
Top-down management	Bottom-up management
Assumed value	Earned value
Good intentions	Public accountability
Oversight	Social responsibility
Paternal	Mutual respect
Managing	Governing
<b>Institutional Properties</b>	
Management	Leadership
Assorted activities	Mission-related activities
Collection-driven	Education-driven
Limited representation	Broad representation
Limited community involvement	Expanded community involvement
Internally based	Community based
Visitor-friendly	Customer service
Business as usual	Institutional self-study
Voice of authority	Multiple viewpoints
Focused on past	Forward-looking
Retrospective	Relevant and current
Present information	Interactive exchange

## Management Strategies

Inwardly driven	Audience-focused
Isolated and insular	Participant in marketplace
Selling	Marketing
Assumptions about audience	Knowledge of audience
Hierarchical structure	Learning organization
Unilateral decision making	Shared decision making
Compartmentalized goals	Holistic, shared goals
Individually driven	Cooperative/collaborative
Cautious	Opportunistic, risk-taker
Fund-development	Entrepreneurial
Individual strategies	Partnerships
Individual work	Teamwork
Site-specific	Diverse sites (gallery to Web site)
Static role	Strategic positioning

## Communication Style

Closed communication	Open communication
Privileged information	Shared information
Suppressed differences	Welcomed differences
Singular voice	Multiple perspectives
Debate/discussion	Dialogue
One-way communication	Two-way communication
Keeper of knowledge	Exchange in knowledge
Cautious and protective	Welcoming and trusting

As can be seen in *Table 1* and *Table 2*, current discourse in museums calls for a presentation of different perspectives and various viewpoints, sharing authority with visitors, offering a selection of many different “truths”, being inclusive and accessible to everyone. All these ideals and attributes can be found in the ideas and formulations articulated by the ‘new museology’ movement (Vergo et al. 1989) and it is probably safe to say that most museums

are working, more or less, towards inclusiveness, accessibility and to bring in different perspectives in the museum environment. At least, it is likely that they do not work against it.

#### SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND MUSEUMS AS AGENTS OF SOCIETAL CHANGE

In *Table 1*, Sola has defined “serving the community and common interest” as a characteristic in the reformed museum as opposed to “serving the dominant forces of society” which is seen as a characteristic belonging to the traditional museum (Sola 1997: 38). Museums acting for the public good and interest are furthermore in line with ICOM’s and AAM’s Code of Ethics. Cameron highlights the variety of things that the current discourse requires from museums such as being places that can improve human conditions and places that can exert influence on the conditions of society. She makes a comparison between the civilizing, moralizing and reforming structures that were practiced by museums in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the somewhat similar requests and desires of and in museums to affect and make societal improvements today (2007: 330). For instance, in the preface to *The Social Work of Museums*, Lois Silverman notes a transformation in museums from benefitting society by collecting, preserving and educating to embracing a role that involves being institutions of social change and improving the well-being of the public. She seeks to highlight the important contributions of museums to society as agents of social change and improvement (Silverman 2010: preface, 2-3).

Silverman calls out for a recognition of museums as places that holds therapeutic abilities in that they can be places where skills regarding social competence can be acquired and where health education can be promoted and carried out. She suggests that museums are fostering stability, identity and self-esteem by educating people about the groups in which they belong, supporting the individual’s and society’s capacity of change and helping individuals to develop skills that will enhance their overall situation (Silverman 2010: 46-47, 55). Moreover, she wishes to expand the area of focus in museums so that it encompasses improving and nurturing human relationships as well as challenging social injustices and she suggests that museums should play a bigger role in the field of social work in general. This has, however, met some criticism from, for instance, Kevin Moore who proclaims that the museum should continue to be valued for its traditional ways of serving or benefitting the public which includes practices such as collecting, preserving, displaying, interpreting and communicating knowledge (Moore 1997: 23). He states that “Museums cannot be apolitical, and they can help to enable their users to understand the world in a political sense, but they are not useful vehicles for directly bringing about political or social change” (Moore 1997: 22). He

furthermore expresses a concern that museums that get too involved in areas or fields such as social work or public benefits often cease to be museums as such and states that “One should simply accept that to survive in these races museums have to become what they are competing with – and hence they do not survive as museums” (Moore 1997: 22).

Silverman points out that the notion of museums functioning as an institution of social transformation and service is far from new:

Museums have *always* been institutions of social service (...) They have fostered solidarity among people with commonalities and facilitated interaction among people with differences. Museums have also aimed to influence public knowledge, attitudes, and behavior; deliver public health and social welfare campaigns; reduce stigma and bias; empower citizens and communities; and mobilize other forms of social action and social change. (Silverman 2010: 12)

She does not, however, recognize any problems or conflicts with museums having that fostering role or position today (Silverman 2010: 5ff). Yet, reformative elements and moral projects in the context of museums have previously been criticized for serving political interests and agendas which do not belong in a museum environment. When studying the history of museums, the reformative approach often found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century museum is presented as something unacceptable and, furthermore, something that contemporary and remodeled museums repudiate and have disassociated themselves from. However, what then is the difference between the reforming treaties in the 19<sup>th</sup> century museum related to improving the conduct and level of education of the lower class and the wish to influence, educate and in other forms improve human beings (especially those belonging to marginalized groups) and society today? Certainly, the rhetoric has changed as well the form that these, in a sense, moralizing and civilizing projects take on. Cameron explores how for instance political and controversial topics are brought up in exhibitions which in turn “raise moral dilemmas, questions about what is right and wrong and circumscribe acceptable forms of behavior” (Cameron 2007: 330).

The directives formulated by cultural politics which museums are to some extent obliged to follow and which are to be implemented in the current museum practices and activities such as exhibitions and educational programs, are marked by an expectancy that museums should function as somewhat of a moralizing instrument in that they should provide visitors with ideas and tools to perform morally right actions. The museum should present multiple perspectives, viewpoints etc. in order to create better, more tolerant and understanding

citizens and human beings in order to face the world with a better perspective. As Cameron states:

All this resonates with a public service institutional model. It positions museums as uniquely qualified to judge what matters in society, what audiences need to know in order to act as good citizens and make informed choices, and in defining the morality on which action is based. (Cameron 2007: 339)

Obviously, the problem that Cameron is pointing out is not that museums create more tolerant and understanding citizens or somehow manipulates them into becoming better human beings. The issue lies with museums who present themselves as apolitical yet democratic because they claim to represent the perspectives and viewpoints of everyone. However, presenting some perspectives, standpoints or “other sides” can at the same time be perceived as giving legitimacy to values, opinions and behavior which are seen as undemocratic, extremist or deviant which is something viewed as problematic topics to address. According to Cameron, this ascribes the museum a role as a “. . . moral protector; that is, in setting moral standards” (Cameron 2007: 336).

#### PUBLIC ACCESS, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

As can be seen in *Table 1* and *Table 2*, the reformed or reinvented museum attempts to be more responsive to its visitors’ needs and desires than ever before. In connection with the ‘new museology’ movement, Hein describes how visitor evaluations and surveys were made in plenty and eagerly undertaken by museums in order to live up to the task of being a place that adequately could serve the public and its needs (Hein 2000: 100). Lang notes a great shift of focus in museums which she recognizes as a result of the increasing requirements coming both from above in the form of governmental requirements and from below in terms of increasing public demands (Lang 2006: 29). The issue of accessibility in museums has definitely become a high priority and puts pressure on museums to live up to expectations that involves being “accessible to all – intellectually, physically, socially, culturally, economically” (Black 2005: 4) and still being able to maintain a high quality concerning the preservation/protection and research of the collections. In ICOM’s *Code of Ethics*, public access mostly concerns reasonable opening hours, access for those with special needs, physical access to and availability of the collections, staff and relevant information (2004: 1, 6).

*Table 2* indicates that in traditional museums the staff is positioned as “keepers of knowledge” and furthermore, serves as the “voice of authority” as opposed to “exchanging knowledge” and promoting “multiple viewpoints” (Anderson 1998: 21). This is something which is visible in ICOM’s *Museums Basics* from the early 1990s describing museum workers as having “. . . a special responsibility in acting as guardians of that memory” (Ambrose & Paine 1993: 3). Here then, the possessive nature of the traditional museum, as shown in *Table 1*, is visible. However, in another section Ambrose and Paine recognize a higher level of participation and visitor involvement:

Museums have to engage interest through active involvement and build on it to achieve their objectives. Museum managers should encourage users to explore and discover the museum’s collections and services for themselves. This is in contrast to the traditional approach (...) where expertise resides in the museum alone and users are viewed as passive recipients of what the museum determines should be on offer. (Ambrose & Paine 1993: 16)

Lang notes that key words such as participation, lifelong learning, diversity, access and partnerships with others are becoming more and more prioritized in UK government policy documents (Lang 2006: 35) as is the case in Swedish government vision and policy documents reviewed in chapter 5. Furthermore, in the 2012 document *Cultural Analysis* (Sw. *Kulturanalys*) compiled by the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis (Sw. *Myndigheten för kulturanalys*), a summary of cultural journalist Amelie Tham’s report regarding the use of and connections between citizenship and a participatory perspective as well as public production is presented. For example, it is stated that the gap or difference between ‘professional’- and ‘amateur’ culture is dissolving (2012: 26). Lang points out that such suggestions and requirements have caused a debate initiated by those who experience that such a priority and direction “. . . will undermine scholarship and focus attention away from collections” (Lang 2006: 35).

Nearly, twenty years ago Ambrose and Paine noted that the biggest challenge for museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was to “recognize that museums are for people” (Ambrose & Paine 1993: 17), something that most museums more or less have signed up for and are to different degrees working towards. A reasonable question posed in the introduction to *The Responsive Museum* “Are museums and the other cultural institutions now being expected to deliver too much?” (Lang, Reeve & Woollard 2006: introduction, Part 1), highlights a concern mirrored in Moore’s *Museums and Popular Culture* (1997). Yet, he does not solely blame government



policies for such a situation but argues that museums are partly responsible for this since they take on work which is not appropriate for the museum environment (Moore 1997: 21-22).

The museum's task of public service calls for accessibility, openness, tolerance and multiple viewpoints, characteristics that are in line with the ideas of 'new museology'. However, being a museum for everyone creates difficulties when discussing value in museums since "cultural experiences are subjective" (Holden 2004: 23) and one can thus never measure or determine to what extent this has been fulfilled.

#### THE ROLE OF THE MUSEUM OBJECT AND THE COLLECTIONS

As is stated in the introduction to *Museum Revolutions – How Museums Change and Are Changed* (2007), "Museums were established to capture and concretise progress" (Knell, MacLeod & Watson 2007: xix). By collecting, preserving and displaying objects, museums contributed to a framework of knowledge, a production of knowledge which was conveyed to an audience. Timothy Ambrose and Crispin Paine state that a museum's collection is a ". . . unique resource reflecting a country's achievements and progress, and its historical development" (Ambrose and Paine 1993: 3), a description that probably would not be used today about the nature of museums' collections.

In connection to the expanding 'new museology' movement during the early 1990s the preoccupation of collecting and conserving that had been central to the museum for ages were undermined by non-collecting institutions which began to establish, such as science centers (Hein 2000: 100). Referring back to *Table 1*, one can see that objects in the context of a reformed museum are viewed as an "interpretative start" and that research based on collections are used as a "basis for the presentation" rather than simply presenting the research (Sola 1997: 37-38). Furthermore, *Table 1* indicates that whilst authenticity is primary in traditional museums who continue to nourish "the myth of the original object", the authentic object is secondary in reformed museums who are more willing to use substitutes (Sola 1997: 38).

Hein discusses the museum object as a "placeholder for a story" (Hein 2000: 12) and claims that:

. . . today's museums are engaged in an entirely new enterprise aimed at eliciting thoughts and experiences in people. That objective is not exclusive of assembling collectibles, but it takes collection seriously as a means rather than an end – and by no means the only means to that end.

The end is the achievement of an experience that is genuine, but undergoing such an experience does not depend on mediation by an authentic object. (Hein 2000: 8)

Susan Pearce states that it is only by understanding museums and the collections within them that the unique experiences that museums can offer can be developed, conveyed and be made available to the visitors. Furthermore, she sees the objects and the collections housed by museums as central to the museum operation (Pearce 1992: Preface). She states that “The point of collections and museums, it is no exaggeration to say, revolves around the possession of ‘real things’ and (...) it is essentially this which gives museums their unique role” (Pearce 1992: 24). Graham Black also emphasizes the ‘meeting’, experience and “individual encounter with the ‘real thing’” as an important aspect of the museum which constitutes one of the unique things a museum has to offer (Black 2005: 270-271). Hein, however, is not convinced of the uniqueness of the object: “A public weaned on television and computer screens has come to accept simulations as adequate indices of reality. Information *about* a phenomenon is routinely substitutable for the experience *of* it” (Hein 2000: 11). Falk and Dierking argue that even though visitors increasingly will use and appreciate other tools for viewing and learning about museum objects, they will most likely choose the real over the virtual if they are provided with an opportunity (Falk & Dierking 2000: 231). Regardless, the relationship between objects and their historical context gives them a unique role when interpreting the past which cannot be replaced by a plaster cast.

There is no denying the fact that most visitors come to museums specifically to see the objects on display and to read the labels in exhibits. Visitors spend most of their time looking at, and presumably thinking about, the objects and labels in exhibits, and leave with images of them. Even though the visitor’s physical context can include a multitude of events or features, it is generally assumed that objects and labels have the greatest influence on the visitor’s museum experience. (Falk & Dierking 1992: 67)

The discussion regarding whether or not ‘real things’ and ‘real objects’ are important and matter to the audience is not really relevant since it is mostly built on assumptions that the audience is likely to care little about. What seems to be generally important is that museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can offer visitors a choice which is only possible if there are variations within museums.

## 5. CONFLICTING IDEALS IN THE HISTORY OF VÄNERSBORG'S MUSEUM

The 130 years that the museum has remained open are difficult to describe in only a few pages. However, in this chapter I will give a rather brief summary of some of the more important lines of thought, viewpoints and perspectives that have marked the museum over time leading up to the present time and what now can be said to constitute the museum's character or identity in some form. Here, I will treat the museum as what Laclau and Mouffe call a *floating signifier* which has been filled with ideas and discourses over a long period of time, molded and shaped by the perceptions, conceptions and assumptions of the founder, various directors, board members and museum staff who formed the museum after what they believed and what was predominantly perceived as the 'right' museology, museum practices, acquisitions, collection and object care, etc. at the time.

The main focus of this chapter will however be the re-profiling project which was carried out in 2011. Some of what was discussed and decided on during the process will be presented and later analyzed in chapter six.

### THE HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM

#### *The 19th Century - Initial Purpose and Function*

On March 13, 1891, when Vänersborg's Museum opened to the public, it was considered a highly modern museum by the standards of that time. The architecture as well as the collections was characteristic of a 19<sup>th</sup> century museum in the sense that they meant to evoke awe, respect and admiration from the visitors. This was certainly in line with the current ideas of how museums ought to be perceived.

Uniquely, Vänersborg's Museum can be said to have been created by one sole man – Adolf Andersohn (1820-1887). His passion for travelling and collecting resulted in the collections that were and currently are displayed at the museum. However, another important character who played an immense role in the establishment and the versatile nature of this museum was Axel Eriksson (1846-1901) who in 1883 donated an extensive bird and mammal collection from Southern Africa to the city of Vänersborg. The generous collection was later transferred to the museum where it has been on display ever since.

To a great extent, Adolf Andersohn was a man of his time; he worked his way up to economic independence and used his fortunes to assist those of lesser fortune. Thus, he became a great

benefactor and donor of the city of Vänersborg. Traces of this desire to serve the less fortunate are present in his intentions with the museum which, besides creating a sense of admiration within the visitors was to educate, civilize and promote moral behavior. It was also meant to induce respect for God and the paternal country. As Head Director of Vänersborg's Museum, Peter Johansson states, statements and comment made by Andersohn indicate that his perception of a museum was not that it would be a medium for facts and knowledge, so much as a conveyor of emotions and experiences. His ideas relate to the idea of museums as mausoleums or repositories of ancient times and as temples where these memories can be cherished and preserved (Johansson 2003: 123). These ideas were consistent with the general contemporary view of the purpose of museums. Tony Bennett describes how culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to be understood as a useful tool for governing and that the conception of the museum's place in the new schemes of urban life changed. Furthermore, as Bennett argues, these provisions could "serve as an index of the development of a sense of civic duty and self-reliance in different towns and cities" (Bennett 1995: 18). Thus, the conception of a museum's public value and its social relevance was set at an early stage in the establishment of museums. At the time when Vänersborg's Museum opened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the contemporary cultural climate and cultural politics were, according to professor in Economic History Svante Beckman, deeply influenced by the public and general education as well as regulating and civilizing the public (1998: 16-17).

Adolf Andersohn passed away a few years prior to the opening of the museum and the exhibitions had to be finalized by a committee. Thus, exactly how he intended the objects to be displayed and exhibited is unknown. Former curator at Vänersborg's Museum, Christian Aarsrud state that the displays were not primarily directed towards educational or pedagogical ambitions but rather intended for pure enjoyment. After the first years, the museum fell into somewhat of a slumber. This, however, was probably because of the lack of monetary resources. The funding at the museum's disposal came exclusively from entrance fees which barely covered the expenses of the museum's only employee, the caretaker (Aarsrud 2003: 133-135).

#### *The Early 20th Century – Changes in the Role of the Object*

Around the turn of the century, certain changes emerged at the museum. Fredrik Nordin (1852-1920) entered the museum board in 1903 and by 1909 he was the director of the board as well as the museum's curator. Nordin's archaeological background, knowledge and experience in museological questions and practices shaped his view on cultural heritage, -

history and –objects and this in turn shaped and changed the character of the collections for some years to come. Aarsrud describes the somewhat clashing perceptions between what types of objects Nordin recognized as important and of relevance and the types of objects that the board members cherished and thought interesting. Clearly, the latter’s conceptions of an important and interesting object were in line with the late Andersohn’s view that the role of the museum was to display the exotic, rare and beautiful (Aarsrud 2003: 137-138). Here, a major clash of ideals becomes apparent which shaped and formed the museum according to Nordin’s perceptions on what is important and ‘real’ and according to the predominant contemporary museum discourse. This clash is described by Hein as two conflicting approaches between:

. . . a fascination with the unique, whose value is perceived to be result of a thing’s rarity, high quality, or unusual history [and] . . . an interest in the universal, or typical, for which purpose ordinary specimens are wanted, often in great numbers so that their individual differences can be reconciled with their generic oneness. (Hein 2000: 17)

Nordin was succeeded by medical doctor and later board member and curator, Karl Gustaf Cedergren (1867-1941). Cedergren’s perceptions about collection practices and acquisitions are completely in line with how Hein describes the second approach. He had a profound interest in archaeology which is also revealed in what he collected. Apparently, he acquired a great amount of dolerite which he claimed possessed local characteristics. However, this was for his private collection. A comparison between the amount of artifacts that Nordin acquired for the museum during his 17 years as a board member and the amount that Cedergren collected for the museum during his 21 years as a curator is staggering with 20.000 from Nordin and only 10 from Cedergren. Cedergren’s collection of archaeological objects was kept together with other archaeological objects belonging to the museum in the so called Hall of Rocks which he had created. The objects were displayed in glass cases and in endless rows arranged typologically, evolutionally and according to site, as was common practice during that time (Aarsrud 2003: 145-146).

As Hein notes, though, these two different approaches of collecting and displaying existed side by side and sometimes still do, in museums (2000: 17). This, furthermore, supports the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe who claim that no discourse can ever be fully established; discourses can and do coexist in one space.

### *The Late 20th Century – Transformation and Restoration*

When Nils Ivan Svensson (1903-1966) succeeded Cedergren after his death, the museum entered a new phase. He attempted to provide the museum with a base or foundation which would promote a more timely function of the museum. Aarsrud describes how Svensson brought in temporary exhibitions in order to increase visitor attendances which meant that some the old exhibitions had to stand back and give up space for the new activities and exhibitions that were growing and expanding. Both Cedergren and Svensson had wanted to expand the museum for different reasons. Cedergren wanted more space so that he could display as many objects as possible whilst Svensson, who rather wanted a small selection of both representative and interesting objects at display, intended to use the extra space for storing the rest of the objects (Aarsrud 2003: 151-153). As Hein points out, the two conflicting ideals mentioned above existed side by side but were (and still are) sometimes merged together and combined in museums “. . . sometimes harmoniously under the same roof and sometimes in ideological conflict” (Hein 2000: 17). Svensson’s approach tends to be a combination of these two ‘methods’, since he on the one hand wanted to display the representative and the typical and on the other hand a small and carefully selected collection of interesting objects.

After Nils Ivan Svensson had to leave his position due to illness, Sven Axel Hallbäck (1915-2002) became the new curator. He was also faced with similar problems as Svensson which involved the old-fashioned feel of the museum, not enough space and lacking resources. He did what he could with what he had. Hallbäck put on several art exhibits in partnership with Göta Älvdalen Art Association and produced new permanent exhibitions. During the late 1960s and the early 1970s several changes were introduced into the museum. The Nordic Animals-exhibition was closed and transformed into office space, the Porcelain-exhibit was closed and instead the hall was used for temporary exhibitions and several ambulating exhibitions were displayed at the museum. However, by 1976 everything could be restored back to how it had looked, since Hallbäck left in 1967. However it was not until some years later that the cultural history value of the building and the old exhibitions were recognized (Aarsrud 2003: 155-157).

An attempt to transform the museum and make it come alive was made during the 1990s. In 1991, a report formulated by the head director of the museum at the time, Margareta Hallin, suggested that Vänersborg’s Museum, which had just undergone an exterior restoration, was also in great need of interior restorations. The restoration was planned to be completed in

1994, in time for the city's celebration of its 350 year anniversary. Furthermore, a proposal to transform the museum into a "museum history" museum was also presented in this report. During 1992, preparations for this transformation were ongoing and between the years of 1993 and 1994, the museum was closed due to the necessary restorations and work required to restore the interior of the museum so that the exhibitions would look as they did on the opening day in 1891. Three main goals were formulated in connection to the transformation:

- Making the museum attractive to a broader public
- Making it both regionally and internationally interesting
- Making it interesting to visit more than once

Another objective stated in the report was that the museum in the future would contribute to a greater understanding about Swedish museum history with the support from various museum organizations and the Educational Program of Museology at the University of Gothenburg.

Suggestions on future exhibition themes were presented with topics ranging from museum history to current museum practices. The activities tied to the museum would highlight museum history from different perspectives expanding on the collections of Vänersborg's Museum. This was supposed to draw more visitors and, furthermore, promote multiple visits per visitor (Hallin 1991).

The 1990s were, as mentioned in previous chapters, a period introducing the movement of "new museology". The ideas presented in Peter Vergo's *The New Museology* (1989) can also be identified in some of the ideas that were presented in the proposal presented by Hallin in 1991. For example, one of the suggestions on future exhibitions regarded museum artifacts – how their meanings have changed over time and in different contexts (Hallin 1991: 8-9).

#### *Shifts in Attitudes and Perceptions – The Museum as a Place of Conflicting Discourse*

As can be seen above, conflicting ideals have marked the history of the museum and obviously the museum, its collections, exhibitions and associated activities have been shaped and continue to be by the perceptions, values and assumptions of those who were and those who are in position to influence the museum.

When looking at the interior of the museum, one could get the impression that not much has happened or changed at the museum during 130 years. However, when exploring the history of the museum it becomes clear that the museum has undergone changes that have to do with its purpose, function, identity as well as museum practices. Furthermore, changes happened

gradually and it is thus difficult to point out one great shift of ideas and perspective that changed the museum radically, if one was to be mentioned however, it would be the conflicting ideals existing between Fredrik Nordin and the initial board members. Yet, it also becomes visible that rather than removing one idea to make place for a new one, differing perspectives and ideas have merged together. Thus, it is possible to argue for the coexisting of different conflicting discourses in the museum without the prevailing of one single discourse.

As can be seen throughout the history of the museum, the two approaches mentioned and discussed by Hein (2000), were antagonistic in that they represent two different identities within one subject, the museum – which consist of “. . . contrasting demands in relation to the same actions within a common terrain” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 47). The antagonistic ideals appear to have become undermined at various points in time. For example, the identity of the museum, as it was during the initial years where the beautiful and exotic was collected and displayed, was undermined by another colliding discourse within the museum which possessed another perspective and approach towards cultural objects, i.e. what should be collected, preserved and displayed, as well as how. The perceptions of what constituted a valuable object were also colliding. Thus, this second ideal or discourse dissolved the other approach by a re-articulation. It is problematic, however, to claim that one discourse became the dominating one since they both, in different degrees, continued to exist within the subject. One could thus imply that they were never antagonistic in the first place because if they were, one would have to block out the other. However, it appears as though a re-articulation occurred which shaped the identity and qualities of the museum yet the initial approach appears to never have been completely out-dominated by the second. Hence, it would be problematic to claim that this process was a successful *hegemonic intervention* since only aspects of the second approach became dominating. As Jørgensen and Phillips point out: “the hegemonic intervention has succeeded if one discourse comes to dominate alone” (Ibid. 48). It is nevertheless, possible to see differences over time and argue that by a certain time in the museum’s history, the second discourse was prevailing – the time when Cedergren was curator. Yet, Svensson’s perspective, which seems to have been a combination of both approaches, makes this problematic. As Jørgensen and Phillips highlight, though, “At particular historical moments, certain discourses can seem natural and be relatively uncontested (...) But the naturalised discourses are never definitively established and their moments can again become elements and thus objects for new articulations (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 47).



Adolf Andersohn, Fredrik Nordin, Karl Gustaf Cedergren and Nils Ivan Svensson, amongst others, were all shaped by contemporary discourses and lines of thought which in turn shaped the character of the collections, the displaying techniques and the identity and direction of the museum. Through this perspective one can see how the staff of the museum has created the identity and strengthened the *myth* of the museum. Moreover, the museum stands out as a *floating signifier* which has been filled with ideas and meanings according to different discourses, partly by cultural politics, museum discourse – *nodal points* as well as museum staff – *master signifiers*. In other words, staff have expanded from various points of thinking determined by the contemporary discourse and acted according to these, thus assuring the myth.

By the time that the museum was restored back to its original appearance it had undergone several changes – a result of a constantly changing society and, as mentioned, because of the shifting ideas and perceptions of the staff which were shaped by societal changes. Even though the exhibitions might look as they did at the time of the opening, they certainly do not communicate the same messages or give rise to the same questions or experiences. The museum is not a static entity and its meaning will constantly be re-shaped and re-articulated. Interestingly, this conscious choice of returning the museum to its original state – a traditional, object-centered museum was decided on in the early 1990s, a time marked by new influences and institutional critique.

#### *The 21st Century – The Re-Profiling Project*

In 2011, the organization of Västarvet decided that by the year 2013 all museums and establishments in the organization were to have undergone a transformation of their external profiles. Vänersborg's Museum was one of the first museums within Västarvet to undertake such a process. Hence, a working group was created and the project was initiated with a meeting in March of 2011. It is important to stress that the profile platform is still under revision, i.e. the information presented here has not yet been made official which means that the final report can be slightly modified.

The purpose of the re-profiling project was, from the perspective of Västarvet, that all units within the organization would have a clearly formulated profile as well as a strategy for working with this profile. Externally, this project had the purpose to increase public awareness of the museum in terms of what makes it unique, what it offers and what it communicates whilst internally the purpose of the profile project was to strengthen the

internal culture and create a more unified concept of the purpose and identity of the museum. Something that was clearly emphasized during the discussion within the working group was that the uniqueness and the identity of Vänersborg's Museum were to be kept uncompromised. However, at the same time what encompasses the identity of Vänersborg's Museum as well as what the museum has to offer its audience needed to expand.

#### VISIONS, MISSIONS AND POLICIES OF VÄSTARVET AND THE MUNICIPAL OF VÄNERSBORG

Before looking more closely at the results presented in the profiling platform it can be of interest to get an overview of the visions and objectives belonging to the organization of Västarevet as well as the municipal of Vänersborg. As these, more or less, shape and influence the work and activities of Vänersborg's Museum it is important to include them here.

##### *Vision, Mission and Policy of the Organization of Västarevet*

Västarevet, owned by the Region of Västra Götaland, is the largest administrator of natural- and cultural heritage in Sweden. As mentioned in the introduction, Västarevet encompass museums, institutions and historical sights of various types, directions and sizes, Vänersborg's Museum being one of them. Västarevet is commissioned by the Region of Västra Götaland Cultural Affairs Committee (Västarevet 2012).

The cultural politics of the Region of Västra Götaland are founded on two governing documents adopted by the Regional Council in 2005 – *Kulturvision Västra Götaland*, Vision and Cultural Policy of Region Västra Götaland (Region Västra Götaland 2005) and *Vision Västra Götaland – Det goda livet*, Vision Västra Götaland - The Good Life.

Västarevet's vision and policy are the same as the vision and cultural policy of the Region Västra Götaland and concerns issues such as *diversity* and *multiculturalism*, *cooperation* and *openness*, *dialogue*, *participation*, *accessibility* and *availability*, *equality*, *democracy*, *renewal*, *use* and *maintenance*, *public space*, *regional development*, *international perspectives* and *public health* (Region Västra Götaland 2005: 14-18). All activities associated with Västarevet are thus expected to expand from *equality*, *diversity*, *accessibility*, *international perspectives* and *regional development*. The values which should mark and characterize the organization and its work are:

- Democracy and participation
- A holistic view and collective responsibility

- Openness, renewal and innovative thinking
- Quality and credibility (Västarvet 2012)

The mission and purpose of Västarvet is to administrate the natural- and cultural heritage of the region of Västra Götaland and, furthermore, make it accessible and enriching. The activities of Västarvet are expected to contribute to the realization of the Vision and Cultural Policy of Region Västra Götaland, the Vision Västra Götaland - The Good Life described above, as well as the Cultural Affairs Committee's plan of action for Human Rights (2010) (Västarvet 2012). Furthermore, Västarvet will prioritize the areas of focus suggested by the Cultural Affairs Committee and work collectively, including all units, towards fulfilling the commissions given by the Cultural Affairs Committee, which are as follows: 1). Västarvet's position and role as an organization of knowledge in great demand will be further established and strengthened; 2). Västarvet will contribute to the attractiveness of the region, the regional development and furthermore participate in the work towards regenerating the nature- and cultural tourism; 3). Västarvet will establish and strengthen its role as an agent of knowledge and life-long learning and work towards increasing participation and accessibility; 4). Västarvet will work towards increasing equality and diversity in the natural- and cultural heritage field; 5). Västarvet will perform qualified work within the fields of archaeology and conservation and preservation, and finally; 6). Västarvet will increase the digital access of natural- and cultural heritage in collaboration with local, regional and national partners. Finally, *children* and *young people* are especially emphasized in the vision and cultural policy of Region Västra Götaland and thus the vision and policy of Västarvet (Västarvet 2012).

#### *Vision, Mission and Policy of the Municipal of Vänersborg*

The community/municipal council is focused on seven different areas of development in the municipal of Vänersborg, culture being one of them. Furthermore, objectives and expected outcomes within each area of development have also been formulated. The objective regarding culture concerns itself partly with accessibility and democracy: "A community full of cultural- and recreational activities makes it attractive to businesses, local citizens as well as visitors" (Vänersborgs kommun 2012: 1; author's translation). The expected outcome within the area of culture focuses on an increase in attendances at libraries, museums and art galleries as well as attracting new audiences. Furthermore, bigger events and more cultural activities directed towards a younger audience are focal points. All work within the developing fields should expand from the following five perspectives:

- The perspective of children and young individuals
- Partnerships
- Equality
- International perspectives
- Integration (Vänersborgs kommun 2012: 1-2; author's translation).

### *Some Focal Points*

As can be seen, the visions and policies of Västarvet and the municipal of Vänersborg are all in line with several of the ideas presented in previous chapters such as a focus on the public and audience - namely children and younger individuals, accessibility, diversity, partnerships and collaborations.

### RESULT OF THE RE-PROFILING PROJECT – VISION, CORE VALUES, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

The result of the project will be presented in a profiling platform. A new mission, vision and strategy was decided on and formulated in a profile platform with the intention to be used as a guideline which the museum will base its forthcoming work and decisions on.

### *Small Facts about Vänersborg's Museum*

Before introducing the results from this project it might be of interest to present the current situation at the museum prior and during this profile work. A regional survey was performed by Västarvet in 2011 which concluded that 40% of the respondents were aware that Vänersborg's Museum existed. Vänersborg's Museum was mostly known for its bird collection and their focus on zoology. This perception of the museum is something that the staff to some extent wishes to alter and expand (Profileringsplattform 2011).

The total number of visitors at the museum in 2010 was 12, 092 which was a decrease of 4000 compared to the year 2009. This is something that can be explained by the decrease in program activities that year.

Table 3: Aims and objectives regarding visitor numbers and level of awareness.

Aim	Number of Visitors Vänersborg's Museum	Number of Visitors Website	Public Level of Awareness (%)**
2011*	13,500*	12,000*	40
2012	14,500	14,000	50
2013	15,000	15,000	50
2015	17,000	25,000	60

\*The aims set up for 2011 were exceeded with a total of 13,779 visitations at the museum and 14,434 visitors at the website.

\*\* Regional surveys regarding the publics' level of awareness about the museum will be conducted every other year by Västarvet (Profileringsplattform 2011).

Target groups - Prior to the profile project no formal target group was determined for the museum, making it difficult to evaluate whether or not the museum managed to communicate its message or identity properly.

During the re-profiling project several aspects were discussed and decided upon such as:

- Core Values/Identity/Direction/
- Internal Vision
- Objectives
- Target groups
- Products and Services
- Strategies

#### *Core Values and Mission Statement*

The core values shall function as the foundation and the set of values that the museum rests upon and are as follows:

- Outward-looking – The museum seeks to be a link between the local and the global, between the past and the present. Open the minds of the visitors as well as stimulating the imagination and curiosity in a learning environment.
- Surprising/Unpredictable – By engaging the audience with multifaceted and enriching program activities, exhibitions and stories associated with the diverse nature of the collections in a unique environment, the museum seeks to create gratifying and memorable experiences.

- Authentic - Authenticity regarding the museum environment and the collections, it also speaks about credibility and quality which should be visible in the exhibitions and program activities. What is communicated by the museum should be intellectually accessible yet carry scientific weight and be interesting and appropriate to visitors at different levels of cultural literacy and who have different amount of knowledge of the subject. Furthermore, the information should be relevant and layered so that it appeals to a wider audience (Profileringsplattform 2011).

As mentioned, the re-profiling platform is still under construction which is why the mission statement and the main message that the museum wishes to convey is not yet finalized. The main message will expand from the core values and be the basis for all communication seeking to strengthen the knowledge about the museum and what it stands for. The key arguments that support the main message are as follows:

- Sweden's oldest preserved museum environment – authenticity.
- International collections, internationally interesting.
- Interesting and exciting stories connected to the museum and the collections.
- Accessibility.
- Exciting experiences appropriate for all ages and interests.
- No entrance fees (Profileringsplattform 2011).

### *Internal Vision*

During the meetings a vision for the museum was developed which would serve as guiding in terms of deciding on which direction would take in the future. Just as the mission statement, the vision is under development

### *Target Groups*

Determining a target group for the museum was, as mentioned, of vital importance and was thus decided on during the early stages of the profiling work. After some discussions, it was determined that the main target group was to be families with small children as well as schoolchildren. A second primary target group was determined to be a group referred to as WHOP (Wealthy Healthy Older People). Secondary targets groups included tourists and temporary visitors. The geographic areas that the museum will focus on when spreading its message will be Vänersborg as well as the surrounding municipals of Vänersborg. Thus, a local and regional focus is intended. Furthermore, the museum currently offers program

activities that attract visitors of local origin which is something that the museum intends to continue doing (Profileringsplattform 2011).

### *Products and Services*

The development of new products, activities and services should expand from an audience centered perspective which for instance involves keeping the target groups' needs and interests in mind. Moreover, the activities and services offered should mirror the core values and the identity of the museum which in turn will further strengthen the profile of the museum.

### *Strategies*

In order to reach and fulfill the objectives, strategic areas of development need to be identified. The strategy to be used when implementing and establishing the new profile includes communicating and creating positive associations in connection to the museum as a creator of experiences; the museum as a social and public forum; and the museum as a center of knowledge and learning. This includes, as mentioned above, developing new activities, products and services that are in line with the core values and, furthermore, that these are directed towards attracting the main target groups.

In order to fulfill formulated objectives the museum will work actively to increase the awareness about the museum, this can be done by for instance becoming more visible in local and regional media. Developing partnerships, collaborations and networking with other museums, local and regional cultural institutions as well as artists; tourist centers and organizations, schools and student organizations are crucial elements in order to reach and fulfill articulated goals and objectives. Contacts have already been initiated with museums that have a similar approach or direction as Vänersborg's Museum (Profileringsplattform 2011).

To summarize the decisions, discussions and results of the re-profiling project, which ideas and values are now to be implemented and established in the museum, the primary focus still revolves around the collections and the stories connected to the museum. An emphasis on authenticity connected to the site, the exhibitions as well as the collections has also been highlighted as an important part of what makes up the identity of the museum and, thus, what makes it unique. What indicates change and a shift in thinking about the museum, however, is the outward-looking and audience focused approach presented in the profile platform, which for instance will be in the form of various partnerships and collaborations. A focus towards

attracting new audiences and, furthermore, being responsive to the needs and interests of the main target groups are important priorities. Exhibitions and program activities that will expand from the diverse collections and the engaging stories will help create meaningful and enriching learning experiences appropriate for a greater variety of visitors. An important area of development will be collaborating and networking with other cultural institutions or agents such as other museums, local artists, local student organizations and tourist centers.



## 6. REFLECTIONS ON THE ESTABLISHED PROFILE

The re-profiling project is intended to be a process of change which is meant to affect areas such as: product development, networking, organization, all external communication which includes conveying messages and stories to the target groups, internal communication within Västärvet and the municipal of Vänersborg and, finally, the supply of services available at the museum. As is stated in the profile platform, some of the challenges for Vänersborg's Museum will be to identify and expand its current direction and identity as well as developing what the museum has to offer to the public and how this is being communicated and conducted. A lot of time was put into defining the museum – its identity, purpose and function – what role it had in the past and what role it should have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Head director of Vänersborg's Museum, Peter Johansson relates the museum's identity to the cultural history values as well as its role as a museum of museum history, a direction which was decided on in the 1990s as can be seen in chapter five. However, he also recognizes another important part of the museum which can be tied to its identity:

On the one hand, the museum and the environment have a clear identity as a museum of museum- and cultural history and on the other hand it is also used as a culture house, a meeting place for other activities of culture. For example, we have approximately 25-30 concerts every year, lectures and events which are not specifically a part of that identity, but belong to the museum. (Johansson 2012; author's translation)

This indicates that more than one discourse is currently present in the museum and that they do coexist side by side. These do not necessarily fight for space but rather benefits from each other and to some extent strengthen each other's purpose as well as the perception of the museum. Thus, even though they are seen as two different parts which generate different sets of meanings by different groups using the museum and perceiving it differently, they are merged together to form the totality of the museum's identity. If there would be one prevailing discourse, the museum would to a great extent lose a part of what belongs to the museum's identity.

Early on in the project process, it was decided that the museum should not separate itself from its past in the sense that the authenticity of the building, the exhibitions and the museum objects as well as the stories connected to the museum, will remain a key selling point and argument that will mark the exhibitions and related activities as well as forthcoming products. This is one of the characteristics that distinguish Vänersborg's Museum from other museums (Profileringsplattform för Vänersborg's Museum 2011).

As is stated by Elaine Heumann Gurian:

...even if we agree that museums have an overarching public responsibility, they are not and should not be programmatically uniform. Museums should choose among the many possible emphases and carefully define their vision so that their stated mission and direction are accurately articulated and achievable. (Gurian 2006 [2002]: 48)

One challenge highlighted by Peter Johansson is to rather strictly reject certain ideas over others in order to strengthen the identity and profile:

It is going to be rather painful to dismiss certain activities or exhibitions simply because they do not fit the frame of the profile. At the same time, this is necessary in order to be able to distinguish oneself and become really good at something. I believe though, that it is very important to clearly communicate this to the audience and then have the courage to follow through and of course the ability to deliver what it is that has been communicated and promised. (Johansson 2012; author's translation)

Another great challenge when thinking about how to implement these new approaches, ideas and ways of thinking in the museum context has been to find a balance between the traditional and the reformed. In the light of what was said in chapter four, the task of applying and implementing the characteristics of the reformed museum into Vänerns Museum with special regards to exhibitions, activities and ways of approaching and communicating with audiences might cause problems because of the characteristic, specific, traditional, object-oriented and subject-focused approach of the museum. Because of the distinctive nature of the museum as the oldest preserved museum environment in Sweden and because this is perceived as a distinguishing part of the museum's identity, it is problematic to start interfering too much with the permanent exhibitions, for example. Nevertheless, I believe it to be quite possible to merge together elements that characterize a traditional museum with elements that characterize a re-modeled museum, especially in the areas of program activities, communication regarding how to convey the information and stories attached to the museum and its collections to a wider audience. A call for a museum which recognizes its public responsibilities yet which manages to uphold a strong identity and clear direction is what I will discuss and attempt to demonstrate in this chapter.

#### AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT AND PRIMARY FOCUS IN VÄNERN'S MUSEUM

As can be seen in chapter five, during the re-profiling project the museum decided on a clear direction with a primary focus on maintaining the museum's identity as a museum of

museum- and cultural history and, furthermore, develop such elements, aspects, perspectives and areas as:

- The collections, associated stories and research as well as exhibitions and program activities
- Authenticity
- Experiences
- Partnerships/Collaborations/Networking
- Museum as a social place/forum
- Accessibility (Profileringsplattform 2011)

The majority of these key ‘products’ are meant to define and strengthen the identity and profile of the museum further. All areas will be developed in line with the core values: *outward-looking*, *surprising/unpredictable* and *authentic*. What can be identified as a shift in attitudes or a change of perspective is how the museum is set on becoming more accessible to welcome a wider audience. This can be seen in the core values which focus more on qualities that speak to the senses or give an idea of what to expect in the museum in terms of what visitors will experience rather than focusing on qualities that speak more about the functional side of the museum. The core value, *authentic*, works on both levels, it invokes certain expectations within the visitor regarding what the museum offers in terms of functional values but it also speaks about the atmosphere and the feel of the museum, i.e. visitors will experience an authentic environment which displays authentic objects. As mentioned in chapter two, a focus on the public value and audience-centered articulations are also visible in for example the AAM’s and the MA’s definitions of a museum. The core values are meant to bring out positive associations regarding what kind of experiences one will have at the museum rather than qualities and aspects normally associated with a cultural history museum such as their collections, objects, stories, knowledge and information about the past etc. It is the experiences that will distinguish Vänersborg’s Museum from any other cultural history museum.

#### *The Collections, Associated Stories and Research as well as Exhibitions and Program Activities*

Elaine Heumann Gurian identifies five different types of museums: the object-centered; the client-centered; narrative-centered; national; and community (Gurian 2006 [2002]: 48). Based on Gurian’s description, Vänersborg’s Museum would, in my opinion, fall under the heading

of the object-centered museum. This is because the original 19<sup>th</sup> century exhibitions are designed or developed after this principle entirely and because these exhibitions are still a major part of the museum. The museum has a history of being a repository of treasures with beautiful and fascinating objects on display. This is also what Hein describes as “...the appeal of the shiny pebble to the magpie – is exalted as connoisseurship when eccentric taste devolves into full-blown aesthetics” (Hein 2000: 17). Furthermore, Vänersborg’s Museum can be identified as object-centered because it still concentrates on the material owned or borrowed and the museum’s collections and objects are to a great extent what shape the program activities and the temporary exhibitions.

In many ways though, Vänersborg’s Museum is not a purely or exclusively an object centered museum. As Gurian points out, many museums today are a mix of different types, and everyone borrows from everyone else (Gurian 2006 [2002]: 48). Gurian discusses the critique that object-centered museums often face which relates to a “. . . lack of responsiveness to a wider, less informed audience” as well as a “Lack of conceptualization (...) with no indication of the object’s place in its surroundings, its uses, and its meaning” (Ibid. 49). This is also something that Johansson highlights when asked how the core values will be implemented in the museum:

One of the first things we want to do is deal with what we are often criticized for not doing – making the stories and the information connected to the museum more accessible to the public (...) This is of vital importance – to bring out and communicate what stories this house holds, rather than simply focusing on the beautiful and the extraordinary environment. (Johansson 2012; author’s translation)

Thus, the stories connected to the museum, the collections and the objects on display are clearly emphasized in the profile platform. In this perspective, the objects do to some extent serve as placeholders for stories as Hein suggest (2000:12); it is through the displays that the diverse and engaging stories can come alive and be communicated. To the contrary of what Hein discusses though, authenticity does play an immense role at the museum which I will return to below. Hence, the museum objects have at least two purposes in the exhibitions of Vänersborg’s Museum: 1). the objects are there to be reflected- and contemplated on, evoke feelings. As mentioned in chapter five, this was the intention of founder Adolf Andersohn, who wanted to astound the audience with exotic and beautiful objects. The aesthetic qualities of the objects were of importance, not necessarily their related information about where or when they came from or what their previous function or purpose was 2). the objects serve as a

medium to make stories come to life. Now the same objects and displays are used to convey stories and information related to the time when they were collected.

There are many forms of value connected to Vänersborg's Museums. One that is particularly highlighted is the cultural history value of the museum and the exhibitions. Turning the museum into a 'museum history' museum, a meta museum, in the 1990s, as previously mentioned, was an attempt to make use of and market this particular value. The cultural history value of the museum is still an important part of what museum staff would refer to as the identity of the museum as Johansson points out above (Johansson 2012). Any interference or explicit changes are carefully deliberated before carried out in order to keep the overall feel of the museum as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, a more traditional direction of the museum has been embraced rather than perceived as a hindrance. As mentioned previously, these are all aspects presented as secondary to the social function in the reformed and reinvented museum where objects and collections are viewed more as ". . . elements of a narrative, forming part of a thread of discourse which is itself one element in a more complex web of meanings" (Vergo 1989: 46); ". . . an interpretative start" (Sola 1997: 37) and; ". . . reservoirs of meaning" (Hein 2000: 55). Hein further suggest that "A narrative recalling or reconstructing an event can thus take the place of a physical object that merely stimulated the event's occurrence" (Hein 2000: 12).

The staff of Vänersborg's Museum has clearly stated that it does not want to be a city museum in the sense that it only displays and concerns itself with the local history of the town. On the other hand, they are not discarding the local history entirely for that matter. They want to focus on the international collections but find ways of connecting them to the city and the community, making them interesting and relevant for local, regional, national and international audiences (Profileringsplattform 2011).

Current activities at the museum are not directed towards the new target groups but have rather been more focused towards general local visitors, visitors with special interest and visitors with an interest in the history of Vänersborg. One challenge is thus to create activities and products that will attract groups such as families with small children and schoolchildren. To some extent though, the current activities at the museum appear to already attract the second major group that the museum is targeting, the so called WHOPs.

### *Authenticity*

Authenticity is something that is presented as of great importance for the uniqueness of Vänerns Museum, one of the key aspects that separates the museum from other museums. As mentioned before, Hein discusses the secondary role of the authentic object and suggests that the experience that a substitute can offer is equal to the experience that the authentic object can provide, there is no difference, and thus the authentic object does not bring anything special to the table (Hein 2000: 8, 11). However, it would make all the difference in a museum such as Vänerns Museum. Partly, since this is one of the core values and key arguments for the museum. The museum interior and the exhibitions that it houses cannot be replaced by substitutes since the atmosphere and experience of an authentic space is one of the elements that distinguish the museum from any other cultural history museum. Hence, it is to a great extent dependent on authenticity. The ability to learn from substitutes might be equal and knowledge and experience do not necessarily have to be mediated through an authentic object but as Falk and Dierking state, there is no evidence of visitors only coming to museums to learn something, reasons for visiting might be social, recreational and reverential (1992: 13-14).

As mentioned, in the 1990s the exhibitions were restored after original plans as much as possible in order to create a 'museum of museums' and thus turn it into a museum of museum history. Even though the direction and identity of the museum still involves the cultural- and museum history values and what makes it unique, the museum will not actively market itself as a meta museum namely because of two reasons:

- The message - *museum of museums* is not developed or formulated with the new target group's interest in mind nor is it in line with how the museum will market itself
- It does not create the positive connotations or associations that the museum now wishes to implement such as *experiences, discovery, stories* and *international perspectives* (Profileringsplattform 2011).

### *Experiences*

As mentioned previously, the exhibitions at Vänerns Museum were initially intended as pure enjoyment to the eye and meant to lift the spirits of the visitors. The visual sensory was thus, highly predominant. The didactic or educational purpose was never a primary objective which is clearly seen in some of the permanent exhibitions. This partly goes against

current museum discourse where museums should be places that support learning and social relevance. As mentioned, this traditional way of displaying objects is also one of the things that the museum has been criticized for (Johansson 2012). Furthermore, just because the nature of the exhibitions is contemplative, does not mean that they have to be boring to the visitors. As Gurian states, many object-centered museums today have been made more lively by implementing and bringing in tools and formats that make displays, exhibitions and objects more understandable and appealing to visitors. For instance, making information about objects accessible is crucial (2006 [2002]: 49).

#### *Partnerships, Collaborations and Networking*

One of the aspects emphasized in the visions and policies of Västarvet and the municipal of Vänersborg is increased networking and collaborations with other local, regional, national and international cultural institutions and related activities. This is in line with the reformed museum characteristics of opening up the museum building which is described as closed or isolated in the characteristics of the traditional museum. One of the core values presented in chapter five highlights that the museum will have a more outward looking approach connected to all activities and the work at the museum. This involves creating and developing contacts and partnerships with institutions, organizations and others. As mentioned in chapter five, some first steps have been made which hopefully will lead to an exchange of ideas, knowledge and inspiration

#### *The Museum as a Social Space and Forum*

Vänersborg's Museum has an educational and practical purpose in communicating how the world was perceived during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is done through exhibitions relating to the subject as well as program activities in the form of a series of lectures amongst other things. Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter five, the museum will begin implementing products and services that fit this direction during 2012 and onwards to the best of their ability and resources. This is a way of strengthening the profile and the identity of the museum which also means that the audience with a high level of cultural literacy and knowledge of the subject will be included as well as the visitors who are less oriented in the subject.

The purpose of the museum not only offers a deeper knowledge about the period in question but could be a forum where discussions relating to current perceptions of the world may be highlighted. Since visitors with a specialized interest or a deeper knowledge about the topics at the museum are not represented in the target groups, the focus of developing the museum as

a forum where likeminded can meet and exchange ideas about their common interest may be beneficial to this particular group. This, furthermore, increases the level of participation from a visitor's point of view.

### *Accessibility*

The visions and policies of Västarvet and the municipal of Vänersborg are much in line with what characterizes the reformed museum. As mentioned, cultural policy exhorts active work in promoting and increasing diversity and accessibility in cultural institutions. Efforts and work with digitalization and making the collections accessible online is continuously ongoing.

Diversity and the issue of accessibility, participation, social inclusion and relevance are important aspects of the visions and policies of Västarvet and the municipal. These directives can to some extent be identified in the results from the profile project such as the main target group which is directed towards families with small children, schoolchildren as well as a younger audience. These are also the groups that both the organization Västarvet and the municipal of Vänersborg are expected to prioritize as stated in their visions and policies.

### TRADITIONAL MEETS REFORMED – REVISITING THE 'ROOTS'

Rather than polarizing characteristics of the traditional- and the reinvented museum, Black argues that:

The *core product* of the museum will continue to be its site and collections and the associated expertise of its staff. What is changing and developing enormously, however, is the huge range of both *tangible* and *intangible elements* through which visitors can access this core product. Also developing rapidly is the *underpinning ethos* of the museum, characterised by a clear sense of direction, a detailed understanding of audiences, a commitment to quality and an outward-looking agenda. (Black 2005: 268-270)

This supports the idea of finding ways to strengthening the direction and identity of any given museum whilst still keeping an audience centered approach or methodology to meet demands found in cultural policies as well as in discussions about democratizing the museum. This line of thinking promotes individuality in museums and places emphasis on the uniqueness in museums. By keeping the primary focus towards the collections, the site and the expertise of curators and museum professionals, what Black refers to as the core products and, from that, developing and strengthening the tangible and intangible elements such as those presented in Table 4, so that it fits the expectations and requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century museum but still



keeps the underpinning identity or ethos of the museum – museums such as Vänersborg’s Museum can be of great relevance and have an important role in society.

Table 4: Black’s holistic approach to the 21<sup>st</sup> century museum. Adapted from Black 2005: 269

The 21st century museum: a holistic approach to the visitor experience	
<i>Core Product</i>	<i>Underpinning Ethos</i>
Collections	Clear sense of direction
Collection documentation	Diversity of thinking
Site/building	Quality, regular audience research
Expertise	Community relationships
	Local partnerships
<i>Tangible Elements</i>	Commitment to service quality
Orientation and signage	Planned framework
Displays	Service blueprinting
Layered display content	
Palette of interpretive media	<i>Intangible Elements</i>
Temporary exhibitions	External image
Events and activities	Sense of welcome
Handling collection	Staff friendliness, courtesy
‘Always something new’	Staff responsiveness to visitor needs
‘Something for everyone’	Supportive, stimulating atmosphere
Education programme	Sense of belonging
Outreach and in-reach programmes	Safety
Guided and self-guided tours	Inclusive
Website	Informal
Opportunities to volunteer	Empathy
Diversity to staff	Responsive to visitor needs
Members organization	Innovative
Physical accessibility	Appealing/interesting
Seating	Enjoyment/fun
Café/restaurant	Enriching
Shop	Supports social interaction
Restrooms	Stimulating
Opening hours	Engaging
Pricing differentials	Participative
Marketing materials	Multiple points of view
	Encourages discovery
	Encourages reflection
	Supports learning
	Memorable
	Sense of the special
	Engenders a sense of achievement

By implementing and using the core values developed in the profile project and by implementing the ways of thinking presented by Black, Vänersborg’s Museum could strengthen its worth and function in the eyes of decision makers as well as becoming more

attractive to a wider audience yet still being able to satisfy the visitors with a special interest and without losing the museum's uniqueness and identity. As Falk and Dierking state:

Museums' major weapons, besides history and current popularity, are their long-standing as honest, neutral, and informed experts and the possession of real things presented in real ways. The quickest way museums can undermine these advantages is by trying to out-Disney Disney (...) It is not that museums should not be entertaining and fun, quite the contrary. Quality learning experiences that are transformed are enjoyable. Rather, museums should never compromise on authenticity, and they should never do anything that compromises their standing as neutral and knowledgeable experts. (2000:232)

#### *Developing and Strengthening Tangible- and Intangible Elements*

Some of the tangible elements presented in *Table 4* that, firstly, do not necessarily have to stretch the budget immensely and, secondly, would be suitable for Vänerns Museum to develop further in accordance with the new profile or strengthen even more are, for instance:

- Temporary exhibitions, events, activities and educational programs - Vänerns Museum arranges several events, activities and temporary exhibitions per year, both self-produced as well as in collaboration with other cultural institutions. When beginning to implement the new profile however, the museum obviously needs to adapt new activities and exhibitions accordingly. In the profile platform, these elements have all been identified as *'conveyors of the profile'* meaning that these are the areas where the profile must be strong, i.e. the activities should mirror the core values and where the profile is strengthened (Profileringsplattform 2011).
- *'Something for everyone'* - As Johansson states "The museum is a public space and should be open and welcoming to all. However, the museum can and will never be interesting to all" (Johansson 2012; author's translation). This has to do with the narrowed down direction of the museum which will make it easier for the museum to strengthen its identity and profile rather than trying to be exclusive.
- Guided and self-guided tours – Because of the challenges involving communicating and making the stories associated with the museum accessible to a wider audience, without interfering too much with the interior, personal guides as well as audio guides could serve the museum and the audience in an excellent way. This would offer layered information that would be appropriate for visitors with different levels of cultural- and subject literacy. This is one of the elements that perhaps require the most out of the budget but it is also an area where improvement is crucial.

- Website – The website is also undergoing changes related to the re-profiling project.

Many of the intangible elements listed by Black in *Table 4*, consist of qualities that can be found in Sola's chart (*Table 1*) when referring to characteristics belonging to the reformed museum such as: *responsive to visitor needs, inclusive, informal, empathy, participative and multiple points of view*, to mention a few. Furthermore, many of these qualities can more or less already be seen in the museum, but there are some specific areas where the museum needs to focus a little more and strengthen its position, in order to be more in line with the new profile and manage to live up to the expectations presented in the core values, such as: *external image, appealing/interesting, enriching, supports social interaction, engaging, encourages discovery, encourages reflection and supports learning*.

If the museum continues to develop and improve the tangible and intangible elements of the museum it will keep the museum dynamic and ameliorate quality visits. Expanding on some of the reformed characteristics such as focus on audience, accessibility, partnerships and collaborations and experiences but also bringing in some of the more concrete 'traditional' perspectives of museum work such as embracing and nurturing the expertise of the staff and working actively with the collections in exhibitions and associated activities can offer a middle ground. What this suggestion is aiming for is perhaps what Macdonald recognizes as "a reconnecting of the critical study of the museum with some of those "how to" concerns that the "new museology" saw itself as having superseded" (Macdonald 2011: 8). She notes another change than what has been described above, a change that to some extent involves revisiting some of the "old museology" roots. Thus, it appears as if the swing of the pendulum has begun to stabilize. Gurian highlights an important point which I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this thesis:

. . . rhetoric most appropriate to one noble mission is sometimes grafted inelegantly and even inappropriately onto a museum with another purpose (...) Measure, respect and celebrate every museum for what it actually is (...) make it safe for museums to narrow their direction, to specialize. (2006 [2002]: 48)

## 7. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this thesis, I have studied the often polarized discussion concerning change in museums. An attempt to demonstrate the need for balance as well as an approach of compromise so that there can be room for distinctiveness and variety in museums such as Vänerns Museum has been made. I have tried to incorporate some of the ideas that are currently predominant in museum discourse and cultural politics and attempted to demonstrate that in order to be a museum of relevance and value, appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one does not have to blindly act upon the sometimes fatalistic statements that are being made about the importance of radical change in museums by some scholars. Obviously, museums need to follow directives coming from above; listen to criticism from within and demands from below, however; there should be place for individuality, variation as well as the specific. Rarely, reality is what any of those oppositional ends suggest, museums are not homogeneous entities and there is no sole model or definition that can be implemented with success in all museums or that is appropriate for every type of museum simply because museums are versatile by nature and should remain that way. As Sharon Macdonald simply states "*the museum does not exist*" (Macdonald 1996: 4).

In smaller museums where budget is low and where other more acute issues are prioritized, this can be implemented more in ways of approaching the activities rather than it becoming another budgetary or time consuming matter. What is important to highlight is that most museum workers are doing their best to improve visitor attendances, accessibility, fulfilling directives of cultural politics, facilitate gratifying experiences whilst still managing the more traditional tasks such as preservation, documentation, exhibiting and interpreting the collections, according to their potential and available resources. Most museums realize and fully accept that they are public spaces and most of them are not consciously trying to shut visitors out or make them feel inferior, they are not trying to hide from their social and public responsibilities and they are not trying to manipulate visitors with political statements hidden within their exhibitions or exhort power through their displays. There should definitely be an open, active critical discussion and evaluation coming both from inside and outside the museum walls, however, the polarization can at times become an issue about 'good' and 'bad', rather than a constructive discussion regarding how museums actually can improve.

In an attempt to find reason and uniformity, trying to come to any conclusion in the definition of museums, discussions about what the purpose and function of museums should be as well

as trying to formulate what museology and museological theory should encompass, the museum field both in theory and practice seems to be moving towards a place where museums should conform into different standards and requirements that are not appropriate or applicable to all museums, such as for instance Vänerns Museum. This generalization can also be seen in some of the directives regarding accessibility, social inclusion and diversity coming from above as West and Smith point out.

. . . a high level of expectation is combined with minimal indication of how museums may implement such general points as engaging with the socially excluded: the terminology used is often vague and hence defeats the objective. (2005: 279)

As mentioned, there is in my opinion a problem in polarizing the new and the old museum and creating simplistic, binary oppositions since it implies that a crucial choice somehow must be made between the two extremities. Reluctance or criticism towards this set of new ideas and ideals indirectly implies reluctance towards progress and development in cultural institutions.

I have argued for a perspective that involves opening up for a variety of museums where both traditional and reformed characteristics can be deployed. Either extremity is limiting and will result in a conformed and restricted museum. Instead, embracing the differences and the variety and the specific in museums should be called for.

Issues of clashing interests between the institution and the directives coming from above, in the form of, for instance, a difference in what is conceived as prioritized matters are likely to arise in some form. For example, museums may not be in a position to decide what audiences they wish to target and how this should be done. As a consequence, this might result in an overall lower quality because the museum's specific purpose and/or direction do not fit the directives given. However, this can be refuted by stating that museum's should be accessible and welcoming for all. Still, in a worst case scenario, this not only takes away the specific, it could lead to that many of the smaller museums cannot keep up with the tough competition if what they are offering no longer appeals to those with a special interest and if the museum does not have the capacity of attracting new audiences, which will inevitably lead to less public interest and perhaps decommissioning.

In this thesis I called for a combination of the characteristics of traditional versus reformed or reinvented museum. As I have shown, expectations of museums are extremely high and the rhetoric is harsh and the greatest concern highlighted in this thesis regards the survival of

small museums which are low on monetary and human resources but who are put under the same pressure as larger institutions with more resources at their disposal. I conclude this thesis with an encouraging proclamation for the acceptance of a variation of museum types within the museum world which hopefully mirrors a future stance.

It may be time, however, to say that some of these object-centered museums might proudly remain what they wish to be: displayers of objects for their own sake, unabashedly and without apology (...) it may be time to allow stunning objects to take their place as just that. And if that is the intention of the museum, then the institution should say so, and we will all understand. (Gurian 2006: 49)

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##### *Interview*

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## 9. APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, PETER JOHANSSON – KULTURLAGRET VÄNERSBORG

1. How would you define the present identity, orientation, function and purpose of Vänersborg's Museum?
2. How will the changes that come with a new profile shape the museum, its identity, direction, purpose and associated activities?
3. How will the new objectives and the new vision be implemented into the museum?
4. How will you work towards meeting the needs of the new target groups and other visitors?
5. What kind of social, economic and cultural value does Vänersborgs Museum create today?