



## National Museums in Norway

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### Summary

Norway has no formal national museum(s), i.e. recognised as such by the Norwegian State, the Norwegian Parliament or the Norwegian Government. Nevertheless, since the early nineteenth century there have been collections and museums with the obvious and explicit aim of displaying national culture and national history and with the Government and Parliament as important sources for funding and contributors to museum policy making. On the other hand, not all Norwegian museums or collections with 'Norwegian' as part of its official name should be considered national museums not even with respect to the functional definition chosen in the EuNaMus project – e.g. the Norwegian Road Museum, Oil Museum, Canning Museum etc. The Norwegian museums chosen for this report have an explicit and permanent national cultural narrative ambition; have their origins in the nineteenth century and have played an important role in the development of the museum field in Norway. The National Collection of Antiquities responsible for the Viking ship findings was the leading institution in regard to Norwegian nation-building during the nineteenth century.

As shown by the table below, the most important national museums in Norway were established in periods when Norway was eager to demonstrate national identity and independence. Norwegian state institutions were few and weak in 1814, the first year of the new state of Norway. Accordingly, many of the first museum initiatives (1-4) were taken by Professors at the University in Oslo, which was established in 1811. The links between the University and these museums have all been intact until the present. The main perspective in these nineteenth century museum initiatives was to combine the need to establish academic competence, the necessary safeguarding of National antiquities and culture, and the search for comparative research material. The Norwegian Parliament engaged directly in the establishment of a National Gallery (5, 7), while the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design (6) was a private initiative aiming at encouraging the understanding of aesthetic values in public and private spheres by comparing decorative styles from Norway and other parts of Europe. The aim of the privately-founded Norwegian Folk Museum (8) was to display Norwegian culture, both urban and rural, from the sixteenth century onwards, a period not covered systematically by the University Museums. This museum is still privately owned, but with substantial public funding.

National museums in Norway, and the Antiquity Collection in particular, played a major role in developing and sustaining important national symbols like the Viking ships, the Viking and Medieval heritage of a nation proud of its ancient past and material representations of urban and especially of rural origin from the more recent cultural history of the nation. In the last decades, however, official Norwegian policy on migration issues and multiculturalist ideology has challenged the traditional museum narratives, but only moderately changed them.

## Summary table, Norway

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
1. Commission of Antiquities <i>Antiquitets-commissionen</i> Continued as:	1811	1811	Private organisation	Private	Archaeology	Norwegian Pre-History and History	Antiquity to Medieval times.	Christiania Cathedral School, located in Christiania (former capital).
2.The University's Collection of National Antiquities <i>Universitetets Oldsaksamling</i>	1829	1823	University professors	State	Archaeology	Norwegian Pre-History and History	Stone Age to Medieval times.	Old university building (1828). <i>Domus Academica</i> (1852) in Neoclassical style, Oslo.
3. The University's Coin and Medal Collection <i>Universitetets Mynt-kabinett</i>	1835	1817	University professors	State	Cultural History	Norwegian and International Foreign Coins and Medals.	650 BC to today.	Old university building (1835), <i>Domus Academica</i> (1852) in Neoclassical style, Oslo.
4. The University's Ethnographic Museum <i>Universitetets Etnografiske Museum</i>	1857	1854	University professors	State	Cultural History	Norwegian Folk Culture, Sami Culture, Non-European cultures	No specific time span.	<i>Domus media</i> (attic) in Neoclassical style, Oslo.

1-4. United as Historical Museum <i>Historisk Museum</i> (1904), Museum of Cultural History <i>Kulturbistorisk Museum</i> (2004)	1904	1902	University professors	State	Archaeology, Cultural History	Norwegian Pre-History and History, Non-European cultures		Art Nouveau and 'Norwegian' style, located in the central cluster of Museums, Oslo. Viking ship museum, as part of the above in modern, 'sacral' style, located close to the Norwegian Folk Museum.
ART AND DESIGN: A SECOND LINE OF MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT								
5. The National Gallery. <i>Nasjonalgalleriet</i>	1842	1836	Parliament, Bank of Oslo	State	Art	Norwegian and European Art	Antiquity to 1950(emph asize: 1800s-1900s).	The Royal Castle (1842-) in Neo-classical style. The National Gallery (1880)in Neo-Renaissance style, in central cluster, Oslo.
6. The Museum of Decorative Art and Design. <i>Kunstindustrimuseet</i>	1877	1876	Professors, architects, artists.	Private	Art	Norwegian and European Design	Antiquity – present time.	Neo-Baroque and Art Nouveau, in central cluster.
7. Museum of Contemporary Art <i>Museet for Samtidskunst</i>	1990	1990	Parliament, museum curators.	State	Art	Norwegian and International (1945)	1945 to today.	Old Norwegian bank building (1907) in Jugend style. Located in historical city centre and Art museum quarter, Oslo.

5-7. United as National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design <i>Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design</i>	2003	2003	Parliament, museum curators	State Foundation	Art	Norwegian and International Foreign art		Still kept in original exhibition buildings, Oslo.
POST-REFORMATION MATERIAL: A THIRD LINE OF MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT								
8. Norwegian Folk Museum. <i>Norsk Folkemuseum</i>	1896	1894	Professors Private initiatives	Private foundation	Cultural History	Norwegian and Sami culture	1500 to today.	Visitors centre (1995) in postmodern style, exhibition complex (1934 - 38) in modern style and 158 historical buildings, located in Museum cluster. outside Oslo.

## Introduction: Historical development in Norway

Reviewing the museum history of Norway makes it necessary to present some major issues in the political and cultural history of the country. As a consequence of the political processes of the late medieval and early modern history, Norway became part of the Danish Empire. Under Danish rule, Norway to a certain extent developed a separate legislation and economy. In 1814, European Post-Napoleonic politics resulted in the forced dissolution of the dynastic union between Denmark and Norway. Despite the Swedish demands on Norway based on the Kiel Treaty in 1813, Norwegian politicians managed to establish a parliamentary assembly, to sign a new Constitution and to elect a new King, the Danish Prince *Christian Fredrik* (1786 -1848, king of Denmark 1839-1848). The new King abdicated after a few months, but the permanent result of the political actions in 1814 was that Norway was established as an independent country with its own Constitution but in personal union with the Kingdom of Sweden.

As a result of the separation from Denmark and the personal union with Sweden, Norway was a perfect case for nineteenth century national development. After 1814, Norway had its own Parliament and independent administrative, economical, religious and legal structures. The union with Sweden was dynastic and political, but the cultural development of the two countries was individual and distinctly different.

Norway's political and cultural elite strongly defended independence from Sweden and distance to Denmark. In Norway after 1814, both the intellectual and cultural elite were seeking distinct expressions of national identity following traditional nineteenth century standards: language, material culture, historical remains, narratives and ethnical origin. Despite the fact that members of the Norwegian cultural and political elite in the nineteenth century were of Danish ancestry, wrote Danish and continued their close contacts with Denmark, scholars, literates and politicians vividly took part in different cultural and institutional projects aiming at developing Norwegian language, literacy and symbols (Hodne 2002).

Especially with regard to Denmark, Norwegian scholars and writers redefined and restructured dominant historical narratives. The “grand narrative” was about the independent, expanding and powerful Viking age and Medieval kingdom of Norway (Haavardsholm 2004). The Scandinavian Kalmar Union from 1397, the Lutheran Reformation in 1537 and the introduction of Absolutism in 1660 were regarded as continuous steps towards Denmark colonising and deteriorating Norway.

*The Norwegian History* was continuously written by new generations of national scholars as something distinctively separate from the history of Denmark, and Norwegian museums were established in order to publicly show the material remains of such a separate Norwegian past (Kjus 2003). Also, *The Norwegian Art* was described as something specific and national, art museums were established to display this national art – a development further strengthened by the establishment of art history as a separate academic discipline at the University of Oslo.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the definite heyday of Norwegian nationalistic sentiment. Central persons like author *Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson* (1832-1910) and arctic explorer and scientist *Frihthjof Nansen* (1861-1930) were important exponents of Norwegian pride in the nation, the language and the potential of the young state. On a political level, this nationalistic sentiment resulted in a peaceful dissolution of the personal union with Sweden in

1905. Cultural and scholarly interaction between Sweden and Norway during the nineteenth century had not been as close as the interaction with Denmark, so the dissolution of the political union between the two countries had little impact on museums and other cultural institutions in Norway. For instance, the returning of 'Norwegian' objects from Danish to Norwegian museums has not been a central issue. On the basis of what was still kept in the country, Norway was able to establish its own national, regional and local museum collections in the nineteenth century.

### **National museums and Cultural policy in Norway**

In Norway, political and cultural authorities started to develop museum policies immediately after 1814. However, these actions were based on historical and private initiatives. Already in 1767, a group of Enlightenment scholars had established a Museum of Natural Science and Archaeology Knowledge in Trondheim, in the 1820s Bergen was the location of a similar museum establishment, and in the Norwegian capital of Christiania (Oslo) collectors and scholars established different public collections (Shetelig 1944:23.26ff. Andersen 2009).

Norway, in fact, never established a formal National museum during the nineteenth century. What happened was that different central museum initiatives in the Norwegian capital successively developed and interacted. Some of these museums were ideologically national in perspective and practice, but they were never officially recognised by the Norwegian State as such. In 1863, the archaeologist *Nicolay Nicolaysen* (1817-1911) suggested the establishment of a Norwegian *Riksmuseum*, and university professors discussed the question for several years but with no final result. Another archaeologist *Ingvald Undset* (1853-1893), tried to revitalise these plans in 1885 without success. The reasons why these attempts gave no results are complicated and will be explained after a general presentation of the institutions involved.

The University of Oslo was established in 1811 and at a very early stage, collections and museums were established within its institutional framework. Collections of natural history, cultural history ('antiquities') and coins were parts of the University of Oslo from its very beginning. The initial phase of these collections was actually the result of a private initiative. In 1811, the *Royal Norwegian Society for Development* (this is the official English name of this Society, established in 1809; a more historically correct translation might be the Royal Society for the Benefit of Norway, Det Kongelige Selskab for Norges Vel) established a so-called Commission of Antiquities (*Antikvitetscommissionen*). This Commission started the collection of 'antiquities' related to Norwegian history. The objects were on public display in the Norwegian capital. This collection was handed over to the University in 1823 as the basis for the University's Collection of National Antiquities (*Universitetets Oldsaksamling*). From 1829, a new exhibition, designed by the later Professor *Rudolf Keyser* (1803-1864) and after a few years based on the new periodic system advocated by the Danish archaeologist *Christian Jürgensen Thomsen* (1788-1865), was opened to the public – 'The collection of Nordic antiquities'.

These early collections were not formally labelled museums, even if they acted as such in the respect that they were open to the general public. They were, on the other hand, closely connected with academic activities - both research and teaching - of University professors. The collections were formally owned by the University, which, in its turn, was owned by the Norwegian state. In 1852, the collections were moved to the newly built University buildings close to the Royal Palace.

After more than 20 years of discussion and planning, the Norwegian Parliament in 1897 decided to fund a new building to house the historical and ethnographical collections of the University. This building in yellow brick and granite located in a cluster of important national institutions close to the city centre and the Royal Castle was called *Historisk Museum* (The Historical Museum) and designed by Architect *Henrik Bull* (1864-1953). It was completed in 1902 and opened to the public in 1904, offering a modern yet patriotic architectural framework for the exhibitions. A Vienna Secession inspired art nouveau style is mixed with ornamental references to the Viking age, 'Norwegian style' being the architectural trend of the time. Bull was familiar with animal ornamentation from church restoration projects, and it is likely that he found inspiration from the collection material when planning ornamentation for facades and interior (Shetelig 1944. Bergstøl & al. 2004). The Norwegian Government acknowledges the building's historical and architectural importance in a conservation plan for central parts of Oslo ([www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no)).

There are several reasons why a Riksmuseum was never established during the nineteenth century. To mobilize a strong public opinion was difficult as a University Board treated requests from the separate collection managers individually before passing them on to the Government or Parliament. Moreover, museological and disciplinary specialization led to fragmentation rather than gathering of the different departments, and prominent scientists might have found their positions threatened by the idea of a national museum institution. Strong regional forces additionally challenged the plans by wishing to counteract scientific dominance from the Capitol city as fast-growing museums in every major town competed for material (Bergstøl & al. 2004. Hestmark 1999).

### **Case studies in chronological order**

The Collection of National Antiquities (*Universitetets Oldsaksamling*) is Norway's largest and most comprehensive collection of objects from its earliest history until the Lutheran Reformation (1537). The collection of the 1811 Commission of Antiquities was the basis for this part of the University collection. Among other things, the collection comprises a representative number of objects from the Viking period and the Middle Ages.

In 1867, the first of the famous and nationally important Viking ships (The Tune Ship) was excavated and included in the Collection of National Antiquities. The two next important excavations were made in Vestfold in 1880 (The Gokstad Ship) and in 1904 (The Oseberg Ship). All ships were temporarily placed in the University Garden in the centre of the capital together with Runic stones and, for a period, even a reconstruction of a Sámi settlement. In 1913, Professor *Gabriel Gustafsson* (1853-1915) suggested a separate museum building for the Viking ships. The Norwegian Parliament granted the necessary funding, and between 1926 and 1932 all three ships were transferred to the Viking Ship Museum in Bygdøy, close to the premises of the Norwegian Folk Museum. The winner of the architect competition for the new Viking Ship Museum was *Arnstein Arneberg* (1882-1961), one of the most famous and nationally-acknowledged Norwegian architects of his time, known to find inspiration for his modern expression in regional building traditions. With its white facade and symmetrical-structured nave and aisles, the Museum resembles a church. Its sacral expression is highly intentional as it is created to frame important national treasures. The museum environment on Bygdøy places the Viking ships in a milieu of

explorers, while both the fleet on which Thor Heyerdahl crossed the Pacific Ocean in 1947, and the vessels of Nansen and Amundsen are exhibited nearby.

In 1905, the first Norwegian legislation on antiquities and listing of cultural heritage was drawn up and the University's Collection of National Antiquities was given the responsibility for antiquities and medieval objects in Southeastern Norway on behalf of the Norwegian State. Still, and according to the Cultural Heritage Act of 1978, objects from periods older than 1537 are automatically defined as owned by the Norwegian State. The Collection of National Antiquities accordingly carries out the authority of administrating this legislation.

The University's Coin and Medal Collection (*Universitetets Myntkabinett*) was established in 1817 as a result of the purchase of 6,000 ancient coins from the Royal Collection in Copenhagen. The founder of this collection was Professor of Greek language, *Georg Sverdrup* (1770-1850), who wanted a collection for his teaching and research in Classical history. The collection was not open to the public until 1835. In 1876, the Coin and Medal Collection consisted of 43,000 objects, including important hoards from the Viking and Early Medieval period and the medals and orders of *Fridtjof Nansen* (1861-1930) and *Roald Amundsen* (1872-1928). At present, the number of objects surmounts 250,000.

In 1854, an ethnographic collection (*Universitetets etnografiske samling*) was also established with direct funding from the Norwegian Parliament and located in the new University buildings. The collection was mainly based on donations from Norwegian explorers, adventurers, missionaries, anthropologists and seamen. The first exhibition was opened to the public in 1857 and was designed by Professor of History, *Peter Andreas Munch* (1810-1863). Many nationally well-known persons have been among the donators, e.g. Roald Amundsen and *Carl Lumbholtz* (1851-1922).

In the late 1800s, The Runic Archives were established as a result of prolific academic work on Norwegian runic texts. The archives had its first formal director in 1948, and at present they document about 1,600 Norwegian runic inscriptions.

Not until 1999 were the four collections formally united as one museum organisation within the University organisation. In 2004, the name of this united museum was changed to The Museum of Cultural History (*Kulturbistorisk Museum*). The natural history collection has continued as a separate organisation, and it is today named *The Natural History Museum*.

### **Art and design museums**

A second line of museum development in Norway was within the field of art and design. In 1836, the Norwegian Parliament formally established a national gallery of art. It was opened to the general public in 1842 and housed in the newly built Royal Castle in Oslo. The first aim of the National Gallery (*Nationalgalleriet/Nasjonalgalleriet*) was to put international works of art on display to a Norwegian public. From ca. 1850, the board of the Gallery changed the aim towards collecting pieces of high quality by Norwegian contemporary artists.

In 1882, the National Gallery was moved to a separate building which was paid for by the Private Savings Bank of Oslo and designed by architects *Heinrich Ernst Schirmer* (1814-1887) and *Adolf Schirmer* (1850-1930). The institution demonstrates how important it was for Norway during this period to establish a monumental building for supreme art and sculpture collections. A public hearing from the Directorate of National Heritage on Conservation of the building dated 09.06.2011 argues that the National Gallery constitutes central elements in the development of

Christiania (Oslo) as a cultural centre in an independent State together with the Historical Museum and the National Theater (Riksantikvaren 2011).

The central part of the collection of the National Gallery was contemporary Norwegian art, and works by nineteenth century national romantic artists were included, e.g. *August Cappelen* (1827-1852), *Johan Christian Dahl* (1788-1857), *Thomas Fearnley* (1802-1842), *Adolph Tidemand* (1814-1876) and *Hans Gude* (1825-1903). The Gallery also built up collections of works by *Edvard Munch* (1863-1944) and French artists of nineteenth century.

As a separate initiative in 1869, the Private Savings Bank of Oslo had funded the construction of a substantial collection of plaster casts of antique pieces of art. This Sculpture Collection was meant to be displayed in the new building funded by the Savings Bank designed by the Schirmers. However, the National Gallery was also allowed to use the new premises and in 1903, both the museum building and the Sculpture Collection were donated to the Norwegian State and united with the National Gallery – together with a large collection of prints and drawings established in 1877.

Between 1903 and 1920, the official name of this united museum was the State Museum of Art. The museum building was enlarged in 1904-1907, 1918-1924 and finally in 1937 with a separate gallery for the art of Edvard Munch (Willoch 1937 & 1981. Lange 1998).

In 1990, the National Gallery's collection of post-1945 art was established as a separate museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art (*Museet for samtidskunst*). On display in the old building of National Bank of Norway located in the historical city centre are works by Norwegian and international artists from 1945 onwards. The collection consists of about 5,000 works of art but in addition, the Museum, on a regular basis, also displays loaned items.

An initiative by Professor of Art History in Oslo, *Lorentz Dietrichson* (1834-1917) resulted in The Museum of Decorative Arts and Design (*Kunstindustrimuseet*) being established in 1876. The museum's first leader was *Henrik August Grosch* (1848-1929). Grosch collected Norwegian popular arts and crafts in order to stimulate national aesthetic values. In 1904, the museum was installed in a new, costly building of monumental proportions (granite and redbrick in a style mixture of neo-baroque and Art Nouveau) designed by the architects *Adolf Bredo Greve* (1871-1931) and *Ingvar Hjorth* (1862-1927). Its interior was decorated by one of the most prominent nationalist painters, *Gerhard Munthe* (1849 - 1929), famous for his Saga illustrations and motifs. The building was also designed to house the Norwegian National Academy of Craft and Art Industry established in 1876. The museum collection was built up using classical Greek and Roman objects, national and international artefacts within arts and crafts. The museum's national perspective is obvious, but not the only one. The initial purpose of the museum was to expose Norwegian artists and designers to aesthetically valuable models from both past and present. However, among these models, the nationally important are very visible and highlighted – ranking from the Medieval Baldishol tapestry (twelfth century), glass and faience from Nøstetangen in Hokksund and Herrebøe in Halden (both 18<sup>th</sup> century) and the Royal dress collection of Norway's first Queen (after the union dissolution of 1905) *Maud* (1869 - 1938) as well as contemporary members of the Royal family. Dominant parts of the museum's Norwegian folk art objects were transferred to the Norwegian Folk Museum in the 1950s (Glambek 2010).

In 2003, the Norwegian State established its National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design (*Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design*) which included the National Gallery, the

Museum of Contemporary Art, the Norwegian Museum of Architecture (established as a separate unit in 2008) and the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design.

The official aim of the new museum was to "raise the level of knowledge about and commitment to the visual arts, architecture, the decorative arts and design, develop critical faculties, stimulate new perceptions, increased historical consciousness and tolerance of diversity" ([www.nasjonalmuseet.no](http://www.nasjonalmuseet.no))<sup>1</sup>. However, the Norwegian public vividly and quite critically discussed the collecting and exhibition policy of the new national museum. A main criticism was that the museum's new policy did not refer to a specific National canon of artists or artistic works or to Norway as a nation at all. The new, Swedish (!) director of the museum, *Sune Nordgren* (1948-) however, argued that Norwegian artists should be contextualised and displayed in an international perspective. A central concept was the propagation of 'new perceptions' of art, architecture and design. The harsh public contributed to Nordgren resigning from his position in 2006. A few years later, the Norwegian Government decided to build a new National Museum in Oslo, a decision that also provoked very stormy reactions and protests (Burch 2011).

### **Norwegian Folk Museum**

A third line of museum development with national ambitions was the Norwegian Folk Museum (*Norsk Folkemuseum*), which was founded in 1894 by the curator, *Hans Aall* (1867-1946). It was – and still is – a private foundation, and also included, since 1907, the former Union King Oscar II's collections of old Norwegian buildings and furniture (founded 1881). These collections had been situated in rural environments at Bygdøy close to the capital.

According to its first program, the Norwegian Folk Museum wanted to "collect and exhibit everything that elucidates the cultural life of the Norwegian people". This program managed to unite a substantial number of supporters across quite severe political conflicts and social differences in Norway at the time. Conservative and liberal university professors, artists and politicians supported Hans Aall's plans for a museum of Norwegian culture, among them were artists like *Erik Werenskiold* (1855-1938) and *Gerhard Munthe* (1849-1929), as well as professors like *Moltke Moe* (1859-1913), *Yngvar Nielsen* (1843-1916) and *Bredo Morgenstjerne* (1851-1930), and *Eva Nansen* (1858-1907), Fridtjof Nansen's spouse.

In fact, there had been several earlier plans for establishing a museum for Norwegian cultural history. Around 1880, Professor Yngvar Nielsen had started to collect private funding for such a museum, but the Norwegian Parliament refused to contribute, and Nielsen had to put an end to his ambitious plans. In 1892, an association was established in Bergen with the aim of creating a 'national ethnographic collection'. Funds were raised and a collection created, but in 1897 the collection was handed over to Bergen Museum (established in 1825). In 1894, dentist *Anders Sandvig* (1862-1950) also started collecting old houses and other material objects from the inner parts of Southern Norway in order to establish a regional folk museum in Lillehammer. From that time on, Sandvig's museum was developed parallel with the Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo, but it stayed a regional collection (Sandvig 2001). Its Olympic Room, however, displays an extensive collection of Olympic memorabilia along with awards presented to members of the Norwegian Royal Family and the Lillehammer Olympic Committee (LOOC) and must be considered an exhibition of national proportions. A Norwegian Sports Honorary Gallery displays 250 photographs of Norway's best athletes over the past 150 years ([www.maihaugen.no](http://www.maihaugen.no)). An

even stronger national narrative constitutes the permanent exhibition from 1994 "We won the land" which starts with a small crowd of people settling in the land of today's Norway when the ice melted, soon to grow in numbers and increasingly exploit nature. Despite the explicit aim to present everyday life in a small nation with hardly any influence on European development, the political history of Norway is thoroughly presented, especially in the digital version from 1998 meant for educational use in Norwegian schools ([www.maihaugen.museum.no/lblve/hmeny/hmeny.html](http://www.maihaugen.museum.no/lblve/hmeny/hmeny.html)).

The ideological and political background for all these museum initiatives obviously was the renewed Norwegian national self-esteem. With Fridthof Nansen's arctic expeditions and a prolific interest in national art and national identity based on the vernacular peasant culture, Norwegian nationalism was at its peak – a development ending in a unilateral revolt against the union with Sweden in 1905. Still, the plans for a museum designated to Norwegian cultural history were not undisputed. The founder of the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, Professor Lorentz Dietrichson, was not in favour of a new museum without explicit aesthetic norms: according to him collecting museum objects of little artistic value was not worthwhile.

The Norwegian Folk Museum opened in 1896 in an apartment in Oslo, and during the growing organising of the collections, the exhibitions were distributed regionally – the museum's objects were displayed according to their regional origin. Accordingly, the visitors were offered a journey through the most important Norwegian valleys. Closely connected with the Norwegian Folk Museum was the ambitious Cultural History Exhibition at Bygdøy in Oslo in 1901, covering all the regions in South Eastern Norway and divided between urban and rural cultural history and with separate exhibitions on Norwegian church art, military history and the Norwegian coronation regalia. The exhibition was a major national event and cultural demonstration in Norway a few years before the Personal Union with Sweden broke down.

In 1902, the Norwegian Folk Museum was permanently moved to Bygdøy, where the first old house in the open-air museum was rebuilt a few years earlier. The Norwegian Folk Museum has never had formal status as a national museum, but intentionally its collections cover the whole country with special emphasis on popular and peasant culture, urban culture and Post-Reformation church art. Since 1897, the Norwegian Parliament contributed to the funding of the museum. Since 1902, the Norwegian Ministry of Church and Education appointed one of six members of the museum board. In 1906, the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Oslo handed over its collection of ca. 1,600 objects representing popular Norwegian culture and the Collection of National Antiquities (Oldsaksamlingen), its Post-Reformation collection of ca. 3,000 objects, to the Norwegian Folk Museum. The Ethnographic Museum's Sámi collection was additionally transferred in 1951, resulting in a total collection of 4,300 objects. The Folk Museum also includes national historical relics like the Gol stave church (originally a part of King Oscar II's collection) from around 1200 and several other buildings from the Middle Ages, and even the first assembly hall of the Norwegian Parliament, moved to the museum in 1913 (By og bygd 1978. Rentzog 2007. Tschudi-Madsen 1993).

At present, the Norwegian Folk Museum is the largest museum of cultural history in Norway with approximately 150 antiquarian buildings placed within the museum area and 230,000 artefacts in its collections.

In the last decade, the Norwegian Folk Museum has redefined its aims by including the official museum policy of the Norwegian Government (Framtidas museum 2008); thus on an intentional level reducing its historical references to nineteenth century national narratives. The museum will – according to its present bylaws – “promote knowledge, understanding and tolerance through (the display of) historical and cultural plurality (...and) constitute a central arena for cultural experiences” (www.norskfolkemuseum.no)<sup>2</sup>. A Pakistani apartment interior is, from 2002, exhibited in Wessels Gate 15 – an old three-storey brick building in downtown Oslo, and temporal exhibitions like ”a Pakistani wedding in Norway” (2008) and ”Africans in Norway” (2008) are examples of how the new museum policy influences the material on display.

Old photographs of fishermen are published on the museum websites, and the oil industry is briefly mentioned in an exhibition related to the 1970s, but regional tensions on behalf of previously omitted costal perspectives are not re-negotiated in the museum to the same degree as other non-rural perspectives (like the life and work of industrial workers). These parts of the national narrative are renegotiated elsewhere. As previously mentioned – regional forces stand strong in Norway, and have done so almost from the very start of the national movement. A good example is the western region – where a famous Saga Viking, *Fritjof the Bold*, allegedly was born and raised (i. e. Sognefjord) – developing an early consciousness of their role in the national narrative. Establishing the Bergen museum with a fine ethnographic collection already in 1825 (open to the public in 1853), the President of the Norwegian Parliament, *Wilhelm Frimann Koren Christie* (1778 - 1849) anticipated the nationally-motivated process of mapping and collecting cultural historical material. Western Norwegians wishing to counteract scientific dominance from the Capital city established a Scientific Society in Bergen during the 1880s (Hestmark 1999. Eriksen 2009). Tromsø museum, established in 1872, demonstrates some of the same regional cultural integrity, and from 1978 was given administrative authority over pre-reformation material north of Rana (Tromsø Museum 2008).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In Norwegian: ”å heve kunnskapen om og engasjementet for billedkunst, arkitektur, kunsthåndverk og design, utvikle den kritiske sansen, stimulere til ny erkjennning, skape økt historisk bevissthet og toleranse for mangfold”.
- <sup>2</sup> In Norwegian: ”Norsk Folkemuseum skal fremme kunnskap, forståelse og toleranse gjennom historisk og kulturelt mangfold. Norsk Folkemuseum skal være en sentral arena for kulturoplevelser.”

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