

National Heritage Board of Sweden

Operation Heritage – new perspectives on heritage management

Introduction

I will give a short presentation of the development in the Swedish heritage field over the last years. First I will talk about the nation wide project Operation Heritage which ended in 2004, and then I will give you an overview of the current situation; tendencies and ambitions in Swedish heritage management today - at large and more specifically at the National Heritage Board (NHB).

Why Operation Heritage

In Operation heritage the main actors on the regional and national level in Swedish heritage management set out to formulate a joint and renewed vision for heritage management. The main reasons for initiating the project were that there was a need to review our methods, prioritize among our tasks, to show in what ways our work is an asset to society and to unify and act together.

We needed to look at and share experience of how we for example communicated with others, brought new audiences to heritage and engaged local actors in heritage management, and to evaluate and discuss how we could up date and improve our methods.

There was a general apprehension among the professionals within the field that we were always crammed with work, and that we lacked the means and incentives to prioritise among our tasks. The idea was that a joint project would help us find common focal point which we could use to make this process easier.

There was also an understanding among professionals that we do not always get our point across to the general public and to decision makers. We therefore wanted to get together and form clear motives as to how our work contributes to societal development, and put heritage and heritage management into a wider context.

We were convinced that we needed to do all this and to take important steps forward together.

The initiative and setup

The initiative came from the three main actors on the regional and national level in Swedish heritage management. These are the County Administrative Boards, the County Museums and the NHB. (The County Administrative Boards are governmental agencies at regional level and the County Museums are regional museums.)

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A first meeting was held in April in 2001. The meeting was attended by representatives from the NHB, the Counties, the government; NGO:s and the municipalities. The idea to form a project was presented and gained massive support from the participants.

In the budget proposal, in autumn of 2001, the government granted the NHB 1.05 million Euros to use for the project per year for three years.

The main part of the work in Operation Heritage was carried out on the regional level. Each region had their own coordinator and planned and carried out various activities. The coordinators kept in close contact with the national coordination group. There was also a steering group with representatives from all three of the initiating organisations.

The process

To gather information about challenges and possibilities in heritage management surveys and case studies were carried out both at the regional and national level. In various ways we tried to get a better picture of for example how the public and other organisations and agencies perceived our work and what heritage means to people in general. For example a nationwide opinion poll was carried out. There was also a survey directed towards politicians on the national and municipal levels. Other smaller opinion polls were carried out in the regions. Many of the regions also worked with different types of focus groups to grasp the opinions about heritage and heritage management among various groups in society (for example the general public, children, teachers, NGO:s, corporations and politicians).

There was a lot of focus on meetings and dialogues as well between the actors in the heritage field, as with the actors surrounding it, for example NGO's, politicians, other fields of expertise etc. The dialogue was carried out both within the counties and on a national level. Big summits were held on a number of occasions. The purpose of these meetings was to sum up what had happened so far, analyse the results and to the next step forward.

In the early autumn of 2004 a final report was presented to the government. In the final report the results of the project was presented. Along with the final report came a policy statement in which the conclusions about how Swedish heritage management should proceed were presented. This policy statement, "Putting People First", now serves as a platform for continued development.

Direction and Focus

Given that the future is a product of how people perceive the past, the task of heritage management is to raise awareness of the vital role history and heritage can play in society. The conclusion of Operation Heritage was that all successful heritage management must proceed from two basic working methods: 1) broaden society's perspective on the present; 2) enrich the life environment (i.e. the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual environment).

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Common Focal Points

Four general focal points are pointed out in the policy statement. These are meant to be key concepts in Swedish heritage management in the years ahead. In all our efforts and in all the work that we do, we should be able to mark them all off from our imaginary checklist. The four focal points are:

- Putting People First
- Working in Society's Midst
- Preserving in Order to Tell a Story
- Taking on Responsibility for Diversity

Putting People First

History and heritage is created, interpreted and used by people. The historic environment must be accessible to everyone, both physically and mentally. We must therefore ensure that as many people as possible look at heritage and history as vital, useful and accessible tools. And we must make the public's involvement and participation our top priority.

Working in Society's Midst

As institutions with historical expertise, we have what it takes to serve as key forums for dialogue and thinking about the past, the present and the future. Based on our historical perspective, we can provide people with tools for to examine and deal with such issues as democracy, equality, diversity, human health rural impoverishment and the allure of growth regions. Heritage and history are, and should be used as, dynamic assets in a sustainable development of society. It is our responsibility to promote and support such a development. Our work therefore needs to become more proactive and oriented toward society. We must sponsor discussion as well as actively participate in public discourse and social planning.

Preserving in Order to Tell a Story

Behind everything that people choose to preserve are a purpose and a narrative that give meaning to the effort. It is the story that gives historic buildings, landscapes and artefacts meaning and value. The artefacts and historic environments mean nothing if they are not connected with people, interpretations and the stories which lie within them. Thus preservation shall always be made with the aim to tell a story. Our mandate and obligation is to uphold these narratives even when they are temporarily uncomfortable for some people.

Taking on Responsibility for Diversity

Our task is to work with the historic environment so as to promote a multicultural and diverse society. We need to take on responsibility for diversity and to make sure that the image of history which we promote is diverse and multi faceted, and that the perspective of the dominant culture does not limit the content and breadth of a diverse selection.

Issues concerning cultural diversity are currently very much on the agenda since the Swedish government has declared 2006 as the year of "Cultural Diversity". The purpose of the Year of Cultural Diversity 2006 is to permanently increase the opportunities of everyone living in Sweden to participate in cultural life and to create cooperation between various cultural traditions. The purpose is also to create incentives

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for publicly financed cultural institutions and agencies to clearly reflect and incorporate the ethnic and cultural diversity that exists in the Sweden of today.

In a report to the government in 2004 the NHB looked in to the how heritage management can play an active part in and serve as a good example in support of the diverse and multi ethnic society, and to promote a multifaceted image of history. The experiences and conclusions from Operation Heritage had a great impact on this report.

Tools for realisation

To be able to work successfully with the general focal points a number of different tools have been established. Among these are regional guide lines worked out within the regions and a strategic plan for the NHB. The dialogue between the actors within the heritage field has also been revitalised and the NHB has the intention that, to larger extent, serve as and provide national forums for exchange of experience and discussion.

Political initiatives and actions are another result of Operation Heritage. One example of this, and also of how the NHB can serve as a forum for dialogue concerning development issues, is the recent work concerning how the heritage field is organised and set up in Sweden. This has been an issue for a long time. After Operation Heritage the different parts within the field were able to come together and agree upon a joint statement, which was recently passed on to the government. The government, on there hand, is now taking action in the matter and will bring a suggestion forward to the Parliament.

The NHB's vision for heritage management

During Operation Heritage the NHB worked out a strategic plan. In this document the NHB states the following vision for heritage management. *The cultural heritage is vital, accessible and meaningful for everyone. Cultural heritage work is characterised by diversity and openness and constitutes a dynamic and positive force in societal development.* Four priority directions for the Board's work up until 2006 have been identified. These are:

- Strategic orientation towards and evaluation of the external world.
- Apt knowledge and assured competence.
- Format for greater participation and broader responsibility.
- Effective tools and systems.

Core issues

The National Heritage Board aims to motivate, inspire and unite heritage management efforts. The core issues are:

- the national perspective, dialogue and debate,
- core support, coordination and oversight,
- the development of systems and methods.

Key concepts in working towards the vision are; an annual status report, enhanced research and development and a web based meeting point. By focusing its profile around these three key concepts the NHB aims its efforts towards the vision as stated above.

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Annual Status Report

One of the Board's primary tasks is to empower heritage as a force in the evolution of a democratic, sustainable society. The Board works closely with national agencies and organizations, as well as county administrative boards, regional museums and other local groups. The joint effort gathers and disseminates information about heritage and the historic environment, develops new working methods, and identifies innovative ways of exploring the relationship between human beings, their surroundings and society at large.

One way of coordinating all these efforts, and work with them strategically and with a holistic approach, is to present a yearly report in which the status of, and attitudes towards the historic environment are discussed.

With this report the NHB is aiming at drawing attention to, and creating debate around heritage issues. The report will pay attention to physical change in the historic environment, as well as to changes in attitudes towards heritage and its qualities and possibilities.

Sustainable development

In later years we have seen a shift of perspectives in how the role of cultural heritage is looked upon when it comes to issues concerning a sustainable development. Instead of "protection", "preservation" and focus on the physical aspects of the historic environment, key words are now; development, increased collaboration, a holistic view of the landscape and a focus on the human aspects of the historic environment. Issues concerning sustainable development and the role of cultural heritage as a dynamic driving force in this process was addressed by the NHB in a report to the government in 2005. In this report the NHB states that this shift of perspectives towards a more holistic and human oriented approach opens up for the strengthening of the positions for heritage management in the development of a sustainable society and for better and wider collaboration with other central authorities.

Environmental Objectives

Since 2005 Sweden have 16 environmental objectives. These objectives were decided by the Parliament and the ambition is to have solved the great environmental problems by the year 2020. Four authorities have been appointed by the government to oversee certain broader issues. These broader issues are:

- the Natural Environment
- Land Use Planning and Wise Management of Land, Water and Buildings
- the Cultural Environment
- Human Health

The NHB has special responsibilities for developing programmes and strategies concerning the historic aspects in these objectives in areas concerning for example a good built environment, a varied agricultural landscape, sustainable forests and clean air.

Enhanced research and development

Since 2006 the NHB has a new programme for research and development largely inspired by the conclusions of Operation Heritage. To enable multifaceted research and

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development to be carried out in a well coordinated fashion the NHB will be working in even closer cooperation with the Universities. The NHB and the Museum of National Antiquities have also been appointed by the government to look into to the possibilities of initiating a joint institute for research within the heritage management field.

A Web Based Meeting Point

Since a few years back the NHB is working with the development of a web based meeting point with the purpose to serve as an accessible arena for dialogue, debate and information concerning the histories environment, and to promote and inspire to interaction, participation and dialogue. Target groups are professionals within the heritage fields and other fields of expertise, other agencies, organisations and institutions and the general public. Our ambition is to focus on accessibility and to inspire to participation. The main goal is that as large a part of society as possible gets involved in and takes responsibility for the historic environment.

Conclusion

Having said this I would like to conclude by again state that the vision for the NHB is to work in a fashion that makes cultural heritage vital, accessible and meaningful asset to society.

More information in English can be found on the NHB web site, www.raa.se.
Here you can down load:

- **Putting People First** – Operation Heritage Policy Statement
- **Cultural Heritage Past, Present and Future** – the National Heritage Board strategy 2004 – 2006
- **Research & Development Programme 2006-2010**