



Putting People First

Operation Heritage Policy Statement

Introduction

The Operation Heritage (*Agenda kulturarv* in Swedish) project began as part of a transformation that was already under way among the Swedish heritage sector's public institutions. The project re-channelled and accelerated that process. The heritage sector has moved forward since the project started. Operation Heritage created space for reflection about the heritage sector's function in society. Common and individual assumptions, roles and responsibilities became clearer. The project identified many perspectives upon which to develop and expand. This is just a beginning – the renewal effort has a long way to go.

The purpose of Operation Heritage was to work with society at large to reinvigorate the direction, democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of heritage management. This Policy Statement is the product of the project, which regional museums, county administrative boards (representing the Government and Parliament at the regional level) and the Swedish National Heritage Board launched in 2001. The project ran through the end of 2003. The Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities also participated. Funded by the Culture of the Future Foundation and Government appropriations for conservation of the historic environment, the project involved every county in Sweden.

When putting together this Policy Statement, we wanted to include as many viewpoints as possible. For that reason, local heritage societies, museums that focus on working life, volunteer organizations, national and local museums and archives, educational and other associations, schools, municipalities and the private sector took part. To get an overview of the status quo, we also arranged many conferences and seminars, as well as public opinion polls and other kinds of surveys. The project's final report, which is available in Swedish at <http://www.agendakulturav.se>, discusses those efforts in greater detail.

This Policy Statement is intended primarily for those of us who work with history and heritage at regional museums, county administrative boards and the National Heritage Board. We want to get better at what we do and cooperate more closely with others. But this Policy Statement would not have been possible or turned out the way it has without the lively discussions and input from the other participants as well. We hope that the Policy Statement will also appeal to and inspire many other people.

"The most important caretakers of the historic environment aren't us, but the general public."

May Meeting – a major gathering sponsored by Operation Heritage to outline this Policy Statement, May 2003

The Changing Face of Society

The working methods that have long guided our institutions arose in a different kind of society than the one we're living in today. The trend now is toward greater international cooperation based on agreements and joint objectives. While national borders are opening up, regions within countries are becoming more important and influential. Meanwhile, the emergence of new social structures is creating an imbalance between populous growth regions and those characterized by depopulation and poor economic growth. That makes collaboration and support for regional development all the more important.

As international contact networks broaden, people are more mobile and exposed to greater diversity and encounters with other cultures than ever before. At the same time, fewer people vote in elections, and politics has moved beyond its traditional arena. Thus, a great need has arisen for identifying ways that people can more effectively participate in and influence the direction that society takes.

National and international efforts to ensure sustainable development must also focus on empowering people to make a difference. Sustainable development calls for an interplay between environmental, economic and social progress.

The challenges faced by heritage management are changing. Diversity, involvement and sustainability are the watchwords of the future. In other words, society demands our involvement in many different spheres of activity. If we are going to meet those expectations, we must explain and refine the how, what and why of heritage management. Thus, integral to Operation Heritage was an examination of our working methods and attitudes, along with the implicit and explicit value systems from which they spring. Our goal was to construct a common platform for regional museums, county administrative boards and the National Heritage Board based on the realities of contemporary society. This Policy Statement is one part of that platform. Equally important are all the processes that the project has set in motion around the country.

Some Basic Assumptions

In the Service of Society

Society has assigned us the task of enabling and encouraging people to draw on the power of their history and heritage to shape their lives and surroundings. Our mission is to promote the evolution of a sustainable, multicultural and democratic society. Our work is political in the sense of its being public. Our tasks and goals are the product of democratic decisions, and we must keep the best interests of the general public and a sustainable, democratic society in mind. We must learn to understand and carry out our assignments with a long-term view of society's overall needs and prospects. For that reason, we must continually think about and define the essential features of heritage management.

"Those of us in the public sector who are engaged in heritage management must examine and articulate our role in the various situations that we encounter."

Report of the counties to Operation Heritage coordinators, March 2003

Encouraging Sustainable Development

The promotion of sustainable development has become a major national and international priority, and the concept of sustainability is central to every area of Swedish political life. A sustainable society is one in which economic growth, welfare and social cohesion coexist with a healthy environment. Such a society satisfies its basic needs without endangering the ability of future generations to do the same.

In Sweden, the effort to promote sustainable development has focused primarily on the environmental dimension. But the Government's national strategy for sustainable development emphasizes the importance of the social and economic dimensions as well. Because awareness of history and heritage incorporates all three dimensions, the strategy pinpoints it as a key success factor. That challenges agencies like the National Heritage Board and county administrative boards, not to mention regional museums, to define the role that the historic environment plays in sustainable development.

"Access to knowledge about the historic environment is a right in a democratic society. People are entitled not only to a point of view, but to a point of reference."

Report of the counties to Operation Heritage coordinators, March 2003

People Create, Use and Reinterpret History

Everywhere you go, people use history in a variety of situations and for many different purposes. History is like memory in the sense that it evolves from the ways in which people interpret and construct interrelationships among past events. People write history and define their heritage in order to unify the group or nation to which they belong, to reinforce and pass on values, and to confirm their view of reality. They also do so in order to exclude or silence others. People use history and heritage in varying, multifaceted and contradictory ways. That's the way it is, and that's the way it has always been. For that very reason, history and heritage have enormous significance for a society. That's also why history, heritage and the way they are used constitute the focus of our work.

Cultural Policy Goals

- *protect freedom of expression and create the conditions for everyone to take advantage of it*
- *expand opportunities for everyone to experience and participate in cultural life and creative efforts*
- *encourage cultural diversity and artistic revitalization and quality in order to counter the negative impact of commercialism*
- *provide culture with the tools it needs to serve as a dynamic, stimulating and independent force in society*
- *preserve and make use of the historic environment*
- *foster educational efforts*
- *support international cultural exchanges, as well as encounters among various cultures within the country*

Government Bill 1996/97:3

Direction and Focus

Heritage management that meets the expectations that are placed on it must encourage more people to see remnants of the past as assets rather than as problems or obstacles to progress. Social change is not necessarily a threat to the historic environment – it can be an opportunity as well. Given that the future is a product of how people perceive the past, the task of heritage management is to raise awareness about the vital role of history and heritage in social change.

We must work in two basic ways: 1) broaden society's perspective on the present; 2) enrich the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual environment (what we have chosen to call the *life environment*). Regardless of whether we represent an agency or a museum, these two working methods illuminate the big picture from which successful heritage management must proceed.

"Knowing what has happened before helps people understand the world we live in."

Public opinion poll, March 2002

Broadening People's Perspective on the Present

Broadening society's perspective on the present involves providing new ways of looking at the modern world and the changing conditions under which people live. That makes it easier for people to question conventional beliefs and to understand what is happening on a deeper level. History and heritage are powerful tools for examining and comprehending the present.

As long as remnants of the past are preserved and protected, it can be constantly interpreted and re-interpreted, paving the way for new insights and outlooks. That requires an abundant reservoir of everything from landscapes to photographs and artefacts. Gathering, documentation and museography – along with use of the heritage sector's guidelines for conservation and protection – belong largely to this area. History and heritage can help us present alternative paths of development, ways of organizing society and approaches to being human.

"The most important task is to serve as a springboard for thought, particularly in today's society."

Survey of the attitudes of politicians toward heritage and its public institutions, 2002

Enriching the Life Environment

Enriching the life environment means making room for history in everyday life. It also involves the promotion of comprehensible, living landscapes in both urban and rural areas. Such spaces make it easier for people to feel secure and at home in their surroundings, to interact with a past that blends remnants of different eras.

Enriching the life environment also helps people utilize the practical knowledge accumulated by previous generations, such as how to construct buildings or care for meadowlands. In addition, older environments and artefacts represent an economic potential that needs attending to. The historic environment is often a precondition for traditional business activities. It is also an asset for continued growth of the private sector.

Cooperation with the rest of the public sector, such as environmental protection and infrastructure development, falls largely within this area. Ultimately this effort is a matter of economizing on resources in order to enrich the human environment, as well as shaping attitudes toward our world and what we want to pass on to future generations.

"The historic environment consists of buildings, artefacts and archives, but it is all about people."

May Meeting, 2003

Renewal Poses Challenges

In order for heritage management to evolve in the direction described above, we need to become stronger and better in the following areas. Although we are already active in those areas, our position and role often need renewal. By describing the challenges we face, we can also formulate the watchwords of our renewal effort.

Putting People First

Our work focuses on the experiences and situations that constitute the human condition. Based on history and heritage, we must illuminate and provide a framework for understanding how people have organized their lives and societies under different circumstances and in different eras. While starting off from contemporary society and its concerns, we must also take the needs of future generations into consideration. We must be aware that the historic environment is valuable not simply as source material for historical research, and we must respect that it can be preserved and used in many different ways. We must ensure that as many people as possible look at history and heritage as vital, useful and accessible tools. Our activities must be appealing and readily available. We must make the public's involvement and participation our top priorities.

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, present and future. We must sponsor discussion, as well as actively participate in public discourse and social planning. In order to do so, we must devote time and energy to continually and systematically identify current trends, problems that are common to all of humanity and needs that future generations may face. Based on our historical perspective, we can provide people with tools to examine and deal with such issues as democracy, public involvement, equality, biological diversity, health-related social ills, rural impoverishment and the allure of growth regions. If those of us who work with the historic environment as public servants want to be more effective in carrying out the assignment that society has entrusted to us, we must cooperate more closely with each other.

"Activities that are not based on input from the society at large quickly lose touch and become irrelevant to those who are not directly involved."

Report of the counties to Operation Heritage coordinators, March 2003

Preserving In Order to Tell a Story

All that people remember from the past belongs to their heritage. Behind everything that people choose to preserve are a purpose and a narrative that give meaning to the effort. The motivation for preserving an object or an environment comes from the need and desire to tell a story. Thus, our mandate and obligation is to uphold these narratives even when they are temporarily uncomfortable for some people. But in dialogue with the society at large, we must continually re-examine our selection criteria and the ways in which we evaluate the historic environment. That is our task as publicly financed institutions. We must be aware of – and knowledgeable about – how the active and passive selection processes that we engage in here and now shape the historic environment of tomorrow. We want future generations to benefit from our efforts, to understand what we have done and why we have done it. So every time we make some kind of selection, we should ask ourselves questions such as: What do we want to accomplish? Who will be affected? Whose viewpoints and values are we reflecting?

"If the historic environment is a way of seeing – whose perspectives are permitted? And if it is a way of remembering – whose stories will be told?"

"Operation Heritage – Inspiration & Discussion", Part 2

Taking on Responsibility for Diversity

Anywhere that people live or have lived embraces a heritage that must be managed. Our task is to work with the historic environment so as to promote a multicultural society. That's why we invite many different groups to talk about what they consider important to preserve. Including diverse remnants of history in our heritage encourages the interest and commitment of all these groups in the conservation effort. We must see to it that the perspective of the dominant culture does not limit the content and breadth of a diverse selection. We must make sure that our selection reflects the realities of the greatest number of people, and that vital social developments are narrated in as multifaceted a manner as possible.

"We must turn luxurious parlors into living rooms that everyone can enter."

May Meeting, 2003

Where We Need to Improve

Ultimately it is up to the institutions themselves to identify and carry out most of the concrete measures that are needed to meet the challenges posed by this Policy Statement. But we can point out some common areas in which improvements are required.

A Centre of Gravity for Information

Specific knowledge is the basis of all our work. That's what gives us legitimacy. As the historic environment expands and our efforts are increasingly in the spotlight, our knowledge must keep pace. We still lack sufficient knowledge in many key areas. We need to know more about how history and heritage have been used in the past and are being used today. And we need to identify areas in which the historical perspective must be broadened. To accomplish all that as part of our institutional effort, we must strike a better balance among various areas of expertise, and we must improve our procedures for gaining an overview of the available knowledge. We must also work more closely with colleges and universities to discuss long-term trends and relevant knowledge.

"There is a great deal of concern about the expertise that is under threat. I would be just as concerned about the expertise that the National Heritage Board has not traditionally had but that it might need in order to serve the needs of a changing society."

From the National Heritage Board's panel discussion, April 2004

Thoughtful Dialogue

Reflection and dialogue are vital ingredients of our work. They enhance our working methods and provide social legitimacy for our activities. Thoughtful dialogue promotes broad participation, generates consensus and produces new insights. Such conversations must take place regularly and proceed from different points of view. That means that we must take part in public forums, brainstorming sessions and decisionmaking processes. And we must always be clear about the capacity in which we are participating. We must be voices that discuss, inspire and argue. We must listen to and consider the views and analyses of others. Just as important as listening is to take positions of our own. We must put our arguments to the test and explore the consequences of our viewpoints.

But the idea isn't for us to agree all the time. Differences pave the way for diversity and the ongoing renewal of heritage management. Unless there is genuine debate, that effort withers.

"Those engaged in heritage management must get involved in new areas and forums. Make your voices heard!"

Survey of politicians, 2002

The Challenges We Face

Regional Museums, Operation Heritage and Historical Diversity – Everywhere and for Everyone

The task of regional museums is to pursue a variety of activities that help as many people as possible view themselves and their society through the lens of culture and history.

Operation Heritage stressed the responsibility of public institutions to promote the conservation of diverse historical remnants and the availability of an abundant reservoir of artefacts that can ensure diverse historiographies and multifaceted narratives. In that way, the project encouraged museums to continue in the direction they had already staked out.

The work of museums is growing in importance. Today's society features not only rapid change, breathtaking progress, steady globalization and growing diversity, but chauvinism, antidemocratic tendencies and short-sightedness about the consequences of human action. Thus, the historical and cultural perspectives that museums, along with historical research and heritage management, provide are increasingly essential.

The focus of museum activities is to broaden people's understanding of the contemporary world and to serve as a clear, persuasive voice in society's midst. That is often best accomplished through narrative – exhibitions, education, collections, documentation and much more. The emphasis on expanding people's horizons also lays the groundwork for enriching the life environment. Museums are engaged on both fronts, as formulated by Operation Heritage. A rich and diverse history – accessible to citizens of both today and tomorrow – is the common denominator.

A museum is a meeting place for dialogue about history and the present among people from a wide variety of backgrounds. It provides a forum for discussion about contemporary and future society, with history as a vehicle of thought. A museum conducts activities throughout its region – exhibitions, study kits for classrooms, lectures, school programmes, counselling, tourist projects and a lot more. It is a department store of accessible expertise, offering a variety of lectures, courses, programmes, books, and reports, as well as projects for children and adolescents. A museum is available to and used by many different kinds of people. It is a stimulating partner for schools, voluntary associations, county administrative boards, government agencies, municipalities and many others. That is Operation Heritage's vision of a valuable regional museum, now and for the future.

County Administrative Boards, Operation Heritage and a Sustainable Society

The task of county administrative boards is to carry out the Government's policies at the regional level. The varying organizational structures and scopes of the boards reflect regional differences. The objective of encouraging economic, social and environmentally sustainable growth plays a prominent role in their current activities.

Conservation of the historic environment requires a holistic approach that advocates for and embodies important values during various planning processes, views heritage and humanity in a broad time frame, and promotes the good society.

Additional objectives include preserving and protecting the historic environment, as well as raising awareness about the need to use it cautiously, considerately, and for the benefit of as many people as possible. From a different angle, the spirit of democracy demands initiatives to provide everyone with greater access to history – both their own and that of other people. That goal is integral to both equal opportunity and integration efforts.

The collective undertaking to preserve the historic environment extends to many areas. Among them are working on regional environmental issues, supporting ecological agriculture, shaping future landscapes, planning sustainable life environments, promoting cultural tourism, and spurring overall regional growth.

By preserving the historic environment and supporting other heritage management efforts, county administrative boards can help everyone experience a broad spectrum of inspiring surroundings and gain a more far-reaching perspective on social change. That entails a major obligation to evaluate what should be preserved and protected. The basis for exercising such a responsibility must be a conscious antiquarian approach, the continual acquisition of knowledge and a lively dialogue with regional museums, municipalities, the National Heritage Board, the private sector and volunteer organizations.

The specific value of efforts to preserve the historic environment is to make it known and available to contemporary society and future generations. But such efforts are also vital to broader initiatives – one of the most pressing and undeveloped of which is to promote a sustainable society.

The county administrative boards have been energized by the challenge of taking practical steps based on the main points of this Policy Statement. Operation Heritage paved the way for greater democracy and diversity, strengthened the social role of the historic environment, and set the stage for renewed heritage management efforts aimed at a sustainable society that stresses the value of people and their legacy from the past.

The National Heritage Board – Promoting Knowledge for the Modern Age

The National Heritage Board's vision for the future is that the historic environment be vital, useful and accessible to all of society. The Board is to furnish people with the kind of knowledge and perspectives that will help them understand and draw their own conclusions about social developments. That is the Board's biggest contribution to building a sustainable society characterized by diversity and the spirit of democracy.

The vision is a product of the Board's discussions during Operation Heritage. The discussions focused on the responsibility of the Board to ensure that issues involving values, attitudes and the way history is used are kept alive – not only at the agency but within the heritage sector's public institutions and society at large. The discussions also took up the role of the Board and ways of creating conditions under which the general public can influence and take part in heritage management.

The task of the Board is to serve as the administrative authority, as well as to manage historic environment and heritage concerns at the national level. If the Board is to meet that responsibility in accordance with its vision for the future, it must improve in the following key areas:

- national overviews, dialogues and discussions
- national support, coordination and supervision
- systems and methods development

The watchwords for that effort are participation, accessibility and communication. That requires more closely knit networks with colleges and universities, as well as more extensive contact with new partners.

In order to fulfil that vision and meet society's expectations both now and in the future, the Board put together a strategy entitled "The Historic Environment in Our Times – Vital, Accessible and Useful." The Board identified four areas on which the development of working methods should focus in the next few years:

1. Strategic social and environmental studies and evaluation
2. Vital knowledge and solid expertise
3. Ways of broadening participation and responsibility
4. Efficient tools and systems

Based on that approach, the Board can work with others in the spirit of Operation Heritage to serve as a dynamic force in the effort to make history a comprehensible, accessible vehicle for building a sustainable society.

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Translation made by Ken Schubert

Operation Heritage's Policy Statement

The purpose of this Policy Statement is to support regional museums, county administrative boards and the National Heritage Board in their attempt to renew the direction, democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of heritage management. The Policy Statement presents the assumptions and watchwords that should inform the renewal effort. Those of us who work with history and heritage must provide the general public with means of interpreting its heritage and with effective tools for shaping a sustainable, multifaceted society. By crystallizing and making available the power of history and heritage, we stimulate demand for our knowledge and expertise. Ultimately that creates more latitude and potential for improving on what we do. Operation Heritage encouraged a thoughtful attitude and laid the groundwork for a constructive dialogue. This Policy Statement is not the end of the road, but only a beginning.