
IN HOW FAR WILL ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUMS DIFFER FROM SOCIAL HISTORY MUSEUMS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM? The case of two museums in Antwerp, Belgium

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401

For nearly a century now, Antwerp has had a museum of social history or local folklore and a collection of non-European ethnographic art. The latter became the Ethnographic Museum in 1952. The Folklore Museum collected objects referring to local traditions in the town of Antwerp, like traditional puppet theatres, giant processional effigies of local heroes and mythic figures, objects of religious devotion etc. Most of the objects refer to the social life in a big harbour town. The Ethnographic Museum shows the material culture of African, Asian, American and South-Sea cultures and tribes mostly through art objects. Owing to the countless ships from all over the world which entered the port of Antwerp in the course of several centuries, exotic objects of art arrived to the town and the collection constantly grew in importance. During the colonisation of Congo by Belgium the African collection of the museum acquired international significance. Nowadays the Social History or Folklore Museum contains nearly 200.000 objects, the Ethnographic Museum about 30.000.

By coincidence the newly erected building of the Ethnographic Museum which opened in 1988 lies next to the Folklore Museum. They share a common garden. Both institutions developed in their own way. The Folklore Museum became one of the biggest folklore collections in the country. The Ethnographic Museum went in an anthropological direction and gained a reputation by exhibiting masterpieces of art from the four non-European continents.

In 1995 the newly elected alderman for culture in Antwerp launched the idea of fusing both museums on the basis of cross-cultural terms. Since that time there has been a continuous discussion between the expert on local folk-art, social history, cross-cultural ideas, cultural anthropology and non-western tribal art. Initially, the discussion was perhaps purely theoretical:

-Why is it that so few examples exist of a fusion of non-western ethnographic and European social history collections?

-Should local European folk-art be treated in the same way as 'tribal' art or ethnographic art from other continents?

- Is there a difference between the "ethnographic" art of important non-European cultures and the art of the so-called "great ancient civilisations". For example: classical Indian Art (from India) is mostly treated as ethnic art, while classical Egyptian, Greek or Roman art are treated on another level.

- Now that cultures are increasingly close to each other and frontiers fading, will museums in the new millennium have to treat the art of the world's cultures in a more comparative way.

But in the end we also arrived at some practical findings:

402 - One has to know the collections concerned. For instance, since the ethnographic collection is mainly an art collection, the market value of the objects is usually much higher than the local objects in a social historical context.

- One has to take into consideration that both museums historically grew separately and were influenced by different scientific approaches, aims and circumstances. Moreover, each museum's public of interested visitors seems to be quite different.

- A study showed that of the 200,000 objects in the Folklore Museum, a maximum of 1,000 objects can be treated in a cross-cultural or anthropological way: for example by placing them in the comparative context of a 'life cycle', or of 'magic and witchcraft'. The remaining 199,000 objects are connected with the social and religious history of the town of Antwerp itself.

Another "coincidence" is the fact that the Vleeshuis (Butcher's Hall) Museum and its impressive 16th-century building will soon be turned into a new Museum of the History of Antwerp. Up to now it housed archaeological findings from Antwerp and historical musical instruments. If no substantial arguments come up in order to link, or on the contrary, to break up the links of non-European ethnography or anthropology with Antwerp's social history or local folk art, the Folklore Museum's collections will probably join the ethnographic collections and become mixed with them in the presentations of the Ethnographic Museum. This was the situation just before the annual meeting of NET in September 1997.

The evolution after the meeting

The meeting in Ljubljana contributed to making it clear that the 'Folklore Museum' in Antwerp has all the characteristics of a social history museum. The scientific, ideological, presentational and managing approach is totally different from that of non-western ethnographic museums.

The several outstanding and beautiful Slovenian collections we visited with the NET-representatives convinced me that much more can be realised in a logically planned, strategically homogenous and budgetary well-defined museum project.

The preparation of the new 'Museum of the history of Antwerp' shed new

light on the discussion. The staff of the Folklore Museum itself was much more inclined to link its collection with the new History Museum instead of with the Ethnographic Museum. A number of talks in which the alderman for culture, the responsible staff of the Folklore Museum and the author of this article participated finally led to an agreement. Our joint conclusion was that the collections, scientific approach and museological rationale of the Folklore Museum is much more in tune with the new History of Antwerp Museum than with the Ethnographic Museum. The idea of joining non-western ethnography with Antwerp folklore was aborted.

At the moment both museums continue their activities in their own way. The Folklore Museum wants to pay more attention to the impact of immigrants on the culture and social life of Antwerp. The Ethnographic Museum will extend its activities to 'non-western' cultures living in Europe or to European ethnic groups with distinctly non-European roots and remnants like the Finno-Ugrian or Ural-Altai peoples.

Whenever we shall wish to organise a cultural or comparative exhibition with European and non-European cultures, we can always rely on our own Folklore Museum and on many others and vice-versa. An exhibition project can be worked out in perfect co-operation without having to mix both museum collections on a permanent basis.

KOLIKO SE BODO V NOVEM TISOČLETJU ETNOGRAFSKI MUZEJI RAZLIKOVALI OD SOCIALNOZGODOVINSKIH? Primer dveh muzejev v Antwerpnu v Belgiji

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404

Antwerpen se že skoraj stoletje ponaša z muzejem socialne zgodovine oz. lokalne folklore in z zbirko zunajevropske ljudske umetnosti. Slednja je leta 1952 postala Etnografski muzej. Folklorni muzej je zbiral predmete povezane z lokalno tradicijo v mestu Antwerpen, npr. o tradicionalnih lutkovnih gledališčih, o ogromnih lutkah lokalnih junakov in mitskih oseb v sprevodih, o pobožnih predmetih itd. Večina predmetov je povezana s socialnim življenjem v velikem pristaniškem mestu. Etnografski muzej povečini prikazuje afriško, azijsko, ameriško in južnomorsko materialno kulturo in plemena z umetniškimi predmeti. Zaradi neštetihi ladij, ki so stoletja pristajale v antwerpenskem pristanišču, je v mesto prišlo nešteto eksotičnih umetniških predmetov in pomen zbirke je ves čas naraščal. V času belgijske kolonizacije Konga je afriška zbirka muzeja postala mednarodno pomembna. Danes hrani Socialnozgodovinski ali Folklorni muzej blizu 200.000 predmetov, Etnografski muzej pa okrog 30.000.

Po naključju so novo stavbo Etnografskega muzeja zgradili poleg Folklornega muzeja, tako da si delita vrt. Obe ustanovi sta se razvijali po svoje. Folklorni muzej je zrasel v eno največjih etnografskih zbirk v Belgiji. Etnografski muzej se je bolj usmerjal v antropologijo in pridobival ugled z razstavljanjem mojstrov in umetnosti s štirih zunajevropskih celin.

Leta 1995 je novoizvoljeni svetnik za kulturo v Antwerpnu sprožil pobudo, da bi muzeja združili na interkulturni osnovi. Od takrat stalno potekajo razprave med strokovnjaki za lokalno ljudsko umetnost, za socialno zgodovino, za interkulturne koncepte, za kulturno antropologijo in za zunajevropsko ljudsko umetnost. Na začetku je bila razprava morda čisto teoretične narave:

- Zakaj je tako malo primerov združitve zunajevropskih ljudskoumetnostnih in evropskih socialnozgodovinskih zbirk?

- Ali naj evropsko ljudsko umetnost obravnavamo na isti način kot "plemensko" ali ljudsko umetnost drugih celin?

- Ali obstaja razlika med ljudsko umetnostjo pomembnih zunajevropskih

Koliko se bodo v novem tisočletju etnografski muzeji razlikovali od socialnozgodovinskih?

kultur in umetnostjo tako imenovanih "velikih starih civilizacij"? Na primer klasično indijsko umetnost običajno obravnavamo kot umetnost etničnih skupin, medtem ko klasično egipčansko, grško ali rimsko umetnost obravnavamo na drugi ravni.

- Bodo muzeji sedaj, ko so si posamezne kulture vse bližje in ko izginjajo meje, v novem tisočletju morali obravnavati umetnost svetovnih kultur bolj primerjalno?

Na koncu smo pa vendar prišli tudi do nekaj praktičnih ugotovitev:

- Potrebno je temeljito poznavanje zbirk. Ker je, recimo, zunajevropska zbirka v glavnem umetnostna zbirka, je tržna vrednost predmetov v njej običajno mnogo višja kot vrednost lokalnih predmetov v socialnozgodovinskem okviru. 405

- Upoštevati je treba, da sta se oba muzeja zgodovinsko razvijala ločeno in pod vplivom različnih znanstvenih pristopov, ciljev in okoliščin. Poleg tega se zdi, da je ciljna publika obeh muzejev zelo različna.

- Raziskava je pokazala, da izmed 200.000 predmetov v Narodopisnem muzeju največ 1.000 predmetov lahko obravnavamo z interkulturenega ali antropološkega vidika: na primer tako, da bi jih postavili v primerjalni kontekst "življenjskega kroga" ali "magije in čarovništva". Ostalih 199.000 predmetov je povezanih s socialno in versko zgodovino samega mesta Antwerpna.

Drugo "naključje" je dejstvo, da se bo muzej Vleeshuis (Cehovska dvorana mesarjev) v mogočni stavbi iz 16. stoletja kmalu pretvoril v novi Muzej zgodovine Antwerpna. Do sedaj so v njej hranili arheološke najdbe iz Antwerpna in zgodovinske glasbene instrumente. Če ne bo tehtnih argumentov ne za povezovanje in ne za prekinitve povezav zunajevropske etnologije ali antropologije s socialno zgodovino ali z lokalno ljudsko umetnostjo Antwerpna, se bodo zbirke Narodopisnega muzeja verjetno pridružile zunajevropskim zbirkam in se pomešane z njimi predstavile v razstavah Etnografskega muzeja. Tako je bilo stanje tik pred letnim sestankom NET septembra 1997.

Razvoj dogodkov po sestanku

Po sestanku v Ljubljani je postalo precej bolj jasno, da ima Narodopisni muzej v Antwerpnu vse značilnosti socialnozgodovinskega muzeja. Znanstveni, ideološki, predstavitveni in upravni pristop se popolnoma razlikuje od pristopa neevropskih etnografskih muzejev.

Številne izredne in čudovite slovenske razstave, ki smo jih obiskali s predstavniki NET-a, so me prepričale, da lahko dosežemo veliko več v logično načrtovanem, strateško homogenem in proračunsko natančno opredeljenem muzejskem projektu.

Priprave za novi Muzej zgodovine Antwerpna so prispevale nove vidike k razpravi. Strokovni delavci Narodopisnega muzeja so bili bolj nagnjeni k temu, da svoje zbirke združijo z novim zgodovinskim muzejem kot z zbirkami

Etnografskega muzeja. Vrsta razgovorov, ki so se jih udeležili svetnik za kulturo, odgovorni delavci Narodopisnega muzeja in podpisani, so končno privedli do sporazuma. Skupni sklep je bil, da so zbirke, znanstveni pristop in muzeološka logika Narodopisnega muzeja veliko bolj usklajeni z novim muzejem zgodovine Antwerpna kot z Etnografskim muzejem. Zamisel o združitvi zunajevropske etnologije z antwerpensko folkloro je bila opuščena.

406
Trenutno oba muzeja nadaljujeta svoje aktivnosti vsak po svoji poti. Narodopisni muzej želi posvečati več pozornosti vplivu priseljencev na kulturo in na socialno življenje mesta. Etnografski muzej namerava razširiti svoje aktivnosti na zunajevropske kulture, ki živijo v Evropi, ali na evropske etnične skupine z očitno neevropskimi koreninami in ostanki, npr. na ugro-finske, na uralske in altajske narode.

Kadarkoli bome želeli organizirati kulturno ali primerjalno razstavo evropskih in zunajevropskih kultur, se lahko vedno zanašamo na Narodopisni muzej in na številne druge muzeje in obratno. Projekt razstave se lahko izdela v popolnem sodelovanju, ne da bi morali za stalno pomešati zbirke obeh muzejev.

BESEDA O AVTORJU

Jan van Alphen, indolog in etnolog, podiplomski študij iz sanskrta in indijske umetnosti je opravil na univerzi v Bombayu v Indiji. Je kustos azijskega oddelka Antwerpskega narodopisnega muzeja od 1985 in kustos direktor od 1995. Napisal je številne članke o etničnih skupinah srednje Indije (Bastar) in o indijskih umetnostnih temah. Je tudi avtor večih razstav in katalogov, med njimi so Korejska keramika (1993), Medicina Vzhoda (1995) ter Šamanizem v Tuvi (1997-1998).

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