

History of Sweden

Thursday 27 May 2010 marked the occasion of the opening of the exhibition “History of Sweden” by H.M. King Carl XVI Gustaf in the presence of H.M. Queen Silvia at the National Historical Museum in Stockholm.

The exhibition covers 1000 years of Sweden’s history, from around AD 1000 to the present time. It is one of the largest and most ambitious exhibition-projects undertaken at the museum in modern times. Chronologically structured and covering some 600 m², the exhibition starts with a prologue and is divided into ten “scenes”, each representing a century. It ends with an epilogue reflecting on present-time developments and on history as a continuous process.

On a meta-level “History of Sweden” tells the story of the “realm”, which becomes the “state”, which becomes the “nation”, which is now part of a “union”. A fluorescent time-line in the floor projects the flow of time throughout the exhibition and gives information on Sweden’s rulers. It also connects Sweden’s history to important international events. The selection of objects in the exhibition has been strict, resulting in a selection of about 350 carefully curated objects. With a few notable exceptions, most objects are from the collections of the National Historical Museum.

The main purpose of the exhibition is to give an informative, coherent, accessible and exciting introduction to Sweden’s history for a wide audience of domestic and international visitors. Due to the fact that Sweden’s various National Museums to a significant extent are founded and structured around the traditional academic disciplines (i.e. art history, ethnology, archaeology, etc.) such an exposition has been lacking in modern times, and has frequently been requested by many visitors to the National Historical Museum.

In the production of the exhibition, special attention has been given to developing interactivity and to providing an experience for all senses.

An additional aim has been to present an updated view on Sweden's history from a scholarly perspective, thus incorporating gender and class as well as devoting attention to what is sometimes referred to as marginalized groups. Addressing difficult issues and events in Swedish history has also been an integral part of the project.

Building on the need for positive visitor-experiences, dramaturgy is a key element of the exhibition, allowing for intense and dramatic narratives as well as quieter presentations in a thought-out manner.

Communicating the exhibition, the National Historical Museum has co-operated with the media corporation TV4-Gruppen and with the publishing house Norstedts Förlag, the former viewing a series of 11 television programs called "Sveriges historia" (History of Sweden) during 2010–11 and the latter producing a series of eight volumes with the same name: "Sveriges historia" (History of Sweden). The co-operation has mainly had a communication and marketing focus with a view to reaching new audiences and to collectively support each other to penetrate through the "media buzz".

An exhibition like "History of Sweden" should be considered a process rather than a product. The idea is that the exhibition will function as a platform onto which programming activities, guided tours, special events, written material, etc. will be added.

The use of new social media has been built into the concept from the outset with the double aim of increasing awareness and creating a dialogue with visitors and potential visitors. Thus, an exhibition blog <http://blogg.historiska.se/sverigeshistoria> (only in Swedish) has been set up, accessible through the website www.historiska.se of the National Historical Museum. A twitter-feed (#svehist) has also been set up, where questions and comments may be posted and which the staff at the Museum (@Historiska), including myself (@LarsAmreus), regularly follow. Communication also takes place through Facebook accounts such as "Historiska Museet", "The National Historical Museum" and "Kvinnan Från Bäckaskog".

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