

Forming a Network for Museums in Europe: NEMO



Altonaer Museum, Hamburg



Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana

Photos © Altonaer Museum/Elke Schneider
Documentation department of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum

NEMO came about 18 years ago. When the Maastricht treaty in 1992 introduced culture as a political subject in the EU, the time seemed appropriate to initiate a form of cooperation between museum organisations which could match the supra national institutions in the EU, act as a political body in the field and contribute to the visibility of museums and their conditions.

At that time there was no type of cooperation among the professional museum organisations within Europe, and it was a considerable problem obtaining general knowledge of the existing organisations. Fortunately, the chairman of the Danish National Council of Museums, Michael Lauenborg, and the Danish Ministry of Culture provided the necessary support to bring the museum associations together.

The idea for a network was presented at a conference in Copenhagen that same year, and a unanimous decision was reached to establish a network of museum organisations within EU and to invite colleagues from the rest of Europe to participate. Since the beginning Manus Brinkmann from the Netherlands and Mark Taylor from the UK were very actively involved in NEMO. At the constituent meeting held in Frascati, Italy, the statutes and a

name were decided. The next four years, the Danish Ministry of Culture provided the necessary grants for running the secretariat in Roskilde, Denmark, and contributed to the expenses for the annual meetings.

“**From the onset of the creation of NEMO it was essential to ensure the organisation was uncomplicated and transparent, establishing equality as a leading principle.**”

These criteria have since remained very important attributes to NEMO. They are the main reason for the success of the network and will perpetuate as values securing the future for NEMO.

18 years later, there are numerous achievements to mark NEMO's legitimacy:

- NEMO has brought together the museum organisations and procured knowledge about national conditions for running museums. Looking back to the beginning, where nobody knew of each other and comparing it with the excellent personal relations

– both professional and social – today, this is a major achievement.

- NEMO has established an independent and professional political body, with a voice that is heard in Brussels, and which is called on for advice in relevant matters. NEMO has engaged in solving formal problems in the cooperation of museums in Europe and in disseminating information from the EU to museums as well as between museums.
- NEMO has been able to advise new countries in the EU on such matters as organising museums and establishing museum legislation.

Reflecting on the years in NEMO, the personal relations dominate the picture and describe the core of the European network. Eventually, it is all about people, inside NEMO, but also outside, like the people working in the Commission and the Parliament in Brussels, many of whom have given their support and inspiration to the European museum community. Confident for the future I only would like to say the following about NEMO: Keep it simple, keep it independent, keep it informal, keep the equality – keep it going!

By | **Frank Birkebæk**

Frank Birkebæk is the director of the Roskilde Museum in Denmark and founder of NEMO. Over the past 18 years he has actively developed and advanced the network.

NEMO

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NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations is an independent network representing the European museum community. For more information about NEMO, visit: www.ne-mo.org

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Online Consultation on Accessibility of Europe's Cultural Heritage

In April 2010 the European Commission set up a 'Comité des Sages', a reflection group consisting of three members: Elisabeth Niggemann, the Director General of the German National Library; Maurice Lévy, the Chief Executive of Publicis, a French communication company, and Jacques De Decker, a writer.

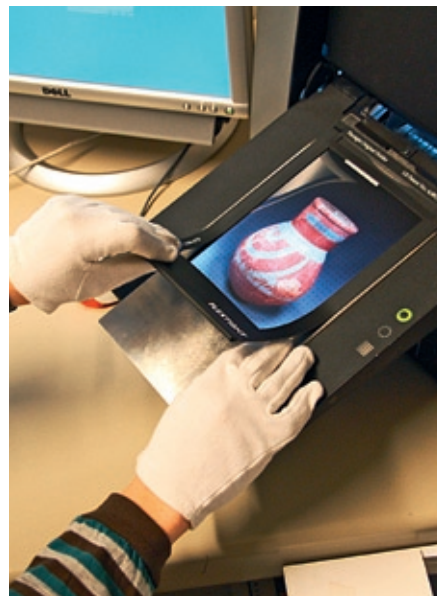


Photo © Thorsten Siegmann

Digitising museum artefacts

The task of the reflection group is to make recommendations to the European Commission on Europe's cultural heritage and creativity and how it can be made widely accessible through the Internet.

Questions given to the committee were:

- how to develop more funding resources for digitisation,
- how cultural heritage institutions could work closer together with the private sector;
- what are the responsibilities and solutions regarding the digitisation of cultural heritage which is in the public domain as well as under copyright protection.

The committee's view is asked not on written culture only but on cultural heritage in general. This issue is therefore relevant to museums as well.

In order to involve as many institutions as possible, the committee launched an online consultation and a public hearing. Digitisation and accessibility concerns all museums in Europe.

Therefore, NEMO took part in the consultation and stated among other things that the decision what to digitise should be taken by the cultural heritage institutions themselves as they know their collections best. NEMO also stated that digitised information should be accessible free of charge for non-commercial use in education and as information for the general public.

By | **Monika Hagedorn-Saupe**



More information about the reflection group, the public hearing and the results of the online consultation – once all incoming questionnaires have been analysed – is available under:
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/comite_des_sages/index_en.htm

A Letter from the NEMO Chairman

Cold winds of budget cuts blow over Europe, and museums haven't been spared the chill. Though just as the weather differs throughout the continent, the consequences of economic downfall for museums differ from country to country and even from city to city.

The good thing in a crisis is when it brings out the best in people. At the NEMO meeting in Copenhagen we discovered that this can be applied to museums across Europe. The resourcefulness of museums in coping with drawbacks in funding is impressive. Through cooperation museums found ways of cutting back costs and being more effective in their marketing and exhibition programme. But there are limits. In some countries museums are at the point of closing down.

As the new chair of the executive it is my aim to focus on the added value of having a European platform for national museum organisations. In the light of the current crisis this means that we enable NEMO members to share their knowledge and experience in coping

with it. But also addressing the seriousness of the situation in Brussels, for a European museum policy is nowhere with museums in trouble at national level. And last but not least, we initiate and participate in European projects that foster the possibilities of further cooperation between museums across Europe, either through mobility of collections, professionals or digital content.

NEMO has proven to be an added value in the past. Established in 1992, it has grown from an informal network of fax numbers and annual meetings to a widespread platform for national museum organisations throughout Europe, active in European working groups and visible in Brussels. And still, for its members, it hasn't lost the initial feel based on personal contacts, respect and fellowship.

What lies ahead? NEMO wants to grow further as the platform for museum organisations active in the European field. Next to the national organisations it opens its network for pan European



Photo © Fred Ernst

museum organisations. We believe that the many voices of museums in Europe can make a lasting impression on the European Union, the European Commission and the European Parliament if they sound in unison.

By I Siebe Weide

NEMO Activities

NEMO Elections to the Executive Board

At NEMO's annual meeting on September 25 and 26 this year, Siebe Weide, director of the Netherlands Museums Association, was elected as the new chairman of the network. The executive board can count on Peter Assmann, President of the Austrian Museums Association, Elizabeta Petruša-Štrukelj, board member of the Slovenian Museums Association, Margherita Sani, representative of the Istituto Beni Culturali Regione Emilia-Romagna in Italy and Mark Taylor, Director of the Museums Association (UK). The NEMO members, who represent national museum organisations in all EU member and associate countries, also elected Anja Schaluschke, German Museums Association's director, as a new member to the executive board.

NEMO Newsletter and RSS Feed

Starting in November 2010, NEMO will publish a monthly newsletter, which shall inform about relevant matters for the European museum community, about European projects, calls and consultations, as well as about events and conferences with a European dimension. The newsletter addresses the national museum organisations, European museums, museum workers and other institutions and individuals interested in the European heritage sector. To subscribe to the newsletter, please send an email to office@ne-mo.org.

In addition, NEMO has installed an RSS feed on its website www.ne-mo.org. The RSS feed allows to stay up to date with the latest news, publications and events that are published on NEMO's website!

Surviving the Crisis: A Strategic Perspective

How to face the consequences of the financial crisis that began in the autumn of 2008? The answers provided here are based largely on my colleague Helmut Anheier's January 2009 essay, which was published on the LabforCulture website entitled 'Preparing for the Future'.

First, we have to distinguish between strategic challenges that were already present before the crisis and those that emerged because of it. In the first category, several trends stand out.



There will be ever-increasing demand for cultural goods and services but ever-decreasing funding.

Competition models developed in sectors such as health, social services and education will be applied increasingly to cultural institutions – an example of the increasing hegemony of the business paradigm. But there seems to be a special twist here, in that the emphasis, applied to the cultural sector, is on cost control rather than outcome and quality – in a true 'enterprise culture' the two would be in much better balance. Also, an abiding fickleness in private philanthropic support, hence continuing fluctuations in revenue streams, accompanied by overly optimistic expectations – and a great deal of talk – about what non-state sources can actually provide for arts and culture. We are therefore faced with the need to develop new business models and new operational mixes.

There are two corollaries of these major trends:

- There will be an even greater need for professionalisation of management, finance, fiscal transparency and service delivery.
- Increasingly, cultural institutions must establish their legitimacy as institutions in and for society. Also, museums today tend to be included somewhat more within different paradigms of representation rather than within

paradigms of aesthetics or elevated scholarship. So the institution is in many cases no longer valued principally for, say, the art historical quality of its collections or the professional excellence of its curators but for the ways in which the museum's diverse 'communities' find recognition in the ways collections are presented and contextualised.

Now none of the above trends, except the reductions in expenditure both public and private, are direct outcomes of the crisis in the financial sector. Instead, they have come about through the progressive abandonment of welfare state and public service principles in Western Europe, as well as, throughout the world, the growing demand for cultural representation among individuals and groups.

Yet new challenges have been generated by the financial crisis:

- At the societal level, a loss of trust in the 'system', a general sense of insecurity.
- An accompanying opportunism among political actors on both the left and the right of the political spectrum.
- A rediscovery of Keynesianism by some European governments, which, because they are more fiscally secure than the US and have more room to manoeuvre, have launched large-scale public spending programmes. But only a small portion of the money will reach cultural institutions. These increases in public investments are being offset by budget reductions, which in turn are creating shortfalls, of which some are being passed on to the publicly supported cultural sector.
- The increasing fondness in the business sector for short-termism and the concomitant reassurance of shareholders. As a result, companies



Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Photo © Luuk Kramer

are eliminating or reducing spending on corporate social responsibility. At the same time, they are looking for government handouts and subsidies in return for some guarantees, typically related to employment and performance.

- Dramatic declines in the asset values of philanthropic foundations, which are leading them to reduce their grant budgets and pay much closer attention to the sustainability of current programmes and commitments.

It's important to stress here also that cultural institutions are different from business organisations in three ways:

- They embody deeply embedded values (religious, political, humanitarian, moral, artistic). These values influence organisational behaviour in a variety of ways, but their presence implies at the very least a more complex means-goals relationship between operational and higher order objectives.
- They have a more complex array of stakeholders (trustees, staff, visitors/audience, state agencies, private foundations, etc.). This means that managing them entails creating and coordinating coalitions around a common purpose.
- They operate with multiple revenue sources (markets, quasi-markets,

membership, transfers from government, donations and sponsorship, contracts, rentals of space etc.), yet price mechanisms – which are still some of the best indicators of performance – are generally absent.

These specificities lead me to focus on two issues: management and legitimacy. There is much work to be done still to adapt the core of standard management principles and techniques to the particularities of cultural goods and service provision. The cultural manager has to be at once a strategist, a financial planner, a fundraiser, a marketer, an educator, a good manager of human resources and a persuasive advocate.



The need for museums to conquer legitimacy in response to the demands of multiple stakeholders and plural claims for cultural recognition and representation is by any means a new idea.

The cultural sector justifies the value of its activities and services in terms of their intrinsic and instrumental value, in other words, either 'art for art's sake' kinds of arguments or arguments based on how cultural institutions can contribute to say, economic growth, employment or social cohesion. Institutional value relates to the processes and techniques that organisations adopt in order to create value for the public. These issues can be seen to be germane to the challenges that face museums as public institutions in the present climate. Yet ways of measuring and talking about how they actually add this kind of value – or how this kind of value is evidenced – have hardly been fully articulated or brought into everyday practice.

Helmut Anheier's six short-term options for weathering the storm are the following:

- Revisit the value base of your organisation so as to reinvigorate the meaning and significance of these values, basing all major decisions on values rather than economic rationale

alone. If values are less central, make economic sustainability a priority.

- Consolidate your resources around mission-critical, resource attractive programmes, and prune activities that are less mission-critical and less resource attractive. Align stakeholders accordingly and build appropriate coalitions.
- Cooperate with others only around mission-central programmes, and consider merger and franchise models.
- Cross-subsidise only if less mission critical programmes have a proven and significant capacity to generate revenue. Rededicate assets and reserves accordingly, and divest cross-subsidising programmes.
- Spread risk in revenue streams by avoiding dependencies on government, donors etc. and by diversifying earned income options (sliding fees, charging above marginal costs, using assets, cross-subsidising, etc).
- Run an active information campaign about what your plans are and how you seek to achieve them. Transparency and public awareness with all stakeholders are important for any re-organisation to achieve legitimacy and success.

A thought through and strategic response to a transformed environment will require asking tough questions about a cultural institution's very existence, functioning and impact. The options for survival include:

- A more determined focusing of programmes, target groups, fields etc.
- Developing a scale of operations adequate to both mission and resources: right now, is that scale the right one?
- Building partnerships and networks along economies of scale.
- Exploring multi-site and franchise models accordingly.
- Reinvigorating advocacy and lobbying campaigns.

In addition to short and medium-term inventiveness, there are steps that can be taken to make preparations for long-term. These are:

- Establishing a Public Trust Fund for museums to smooth organisations through a period of fiscal uncertainties, budget shortfalls etc.
- Developing a membership base that

can be mobilised politically for advocacy purposes as well as economically for resource generation.

- Exploring institutional innovations for the museum sector as a whole: i.e. dedicated financial institutions such as insurance funds, forms of capital markets etc., as well as smart public private partnerships with profit/reserve options.
- Investing in more deeply grounded advocacy, in some measure by strengthening the watchdog function.

Students of capitalism have long argued that crises are necessary correctives. In this perspective, the crisis offers as much perhaps in terms of opportunities as it does in terms of threats. It will lead



Bode-Museum, Berlin

Photo © German Museums Association

to the demise of some institutions, but the birth of others; the decline of some, but the flourishing of others. Some patterns of organisation and leadership will be replaced, at least partially and new ones will emerge.

Surviving the crisis will require much more than asking for old wine to be served in new bottles. Instead, it will mean mobilising those capacities for creativity and innovation that the cultural sector claims as its own, but that it advocates rhetorically more often than it demonstrates concretely.

By | **Yudhishtir Raj Isar**

Economic Downturn in Museums in the UK

Disabling or enabling people to become active agents?

Over the span of half a century, museums changed from being about something to being for somebody.

With many strands of public engagement funding coming to an end, this work is at risk. Rather than simply lamenting this, it can also be argued that decades of well-meaning public funding of museums placed community members in the role of supplicant or passive beneficiaries.

Illustrating the effect of museums taking it upon themselves to distribute resources on behalf of communities was a workshop on public engagement that recently took place in a publicly funded gallery in the UK. The group was given the task to depict – without words – the current relationship between the gallery and its local community partners. A participant chose a plate of sliced cake. He arranged those present into positions, so that the staff members held the plate while the community



Staff and young offenders in a team at Ryedale Folk Museum, Yorkshire, UK

Photo © Bernadette Lynch

participants formed a queue. This raised talk of the community members as ‘supplicants’ and ‘beneficiaries’. It was asked how groups or individuals were selected by the museum or gallery to work with and how it was decided to allocate the ‘resources’.

Typically, when people are invited to participate, it’s on terms set by those doing the inviting. The museum or gallery maintains the space and decides what gets on the agenda and what remains off. An illusion of creative participation is what is on offer, but decisions tend to be coerced, or based on the institution’s agenda, manipulating a group consensus of what is inevitable, usual or expected.

The experience for participants is so-called, ‘empowerment-lite’, while the real needs, concerns, complexities and ‘messiness’ of people’s everyday lives are filtered out.

The image of the cake is a useful metaphor for present circumstances, especially in terms of limited access to decision-making, limited choices and resources. In the UK, the state’s support for the social role of museums is diminishing. Difficulties posed by scarce resources are big next to pressure to maintain a level of public engagement.

In another ‘depiction’ a museum director distributes water (representing scarce resources) to staff members, who stand in a circle. The director then pours the little water that’s left into a glass for the ‘public’. The problem demonstrated here is that the public is outside of the frame, with existing resources all tied up in the institution’s core work. The lack of funding, painful as it will be, may actually force museums to re-consider what is core, and where their relationship with the public sits within that; and secondly, find ways of engaging people at a much deeper level.

Some museums have already seized upon new opportunities for innovation, making their case for social investment (and the museum’s role) in local community development key to sustainability and long-term economic returns. Through civic association and the economics of co-ownership, a new economy based on civic society, mutualism and social enterprise is actively developed by museums. According to this vision, partnerships and local participation are key, while sustainability is achieved when the development process is owned and managed by the local community itself, and not dependent on outside help.

In recent years, some museums, in collaboration with other organisations and communities, have realised additional roles for themselves at the heart of civil society, in such areas as economic

regeneration, mediation, civic dialogue, entertainment, and therapy. For Ryedale Folk Museum in Yorkshire, the on-site work involves young offenders, school students, retired volunteers, mental health volunteers and staff in real work that requires not only physical labour but also teamwork with others. Fundamentally, it places ‘work’ itself as a central value. The central contribution that museums can make is in the opportunities they can offer in increasing people’s capabilities. This requires however, that museums re-examine sharing of authority, decision-making and offering real opportunities for shared work.

Tough decisions and choices must inevitably be made during a world economic recession. But the fact is that these choices are made by museums on behalf of the public. By relying on short-term project funding, museums have maintained public engagement as outside their core work and thus in the margins of their organisation. This raises the question what is ‘core’ and where does the museum’s public engagement stand in this regard. The Director of the UK’s Museums, Libraries and Archive’s Council recently noted:

“**There is an urgency to embed the needs of the public within new models and to take a long-term view about remodelling services around changing public needs.**”

Most importantly, we can look again at how the model of project funding public engagement in museums served not only to keep this work in the margins of museums, but more worryingly, made ‘beneficiaries’ of our community partners, rather than active agents in their own right.

By | Bernadette Lynch

NEMO Partner Projects

Museum Networking in Europe: LEM – The Learning Museum

New on the museum scene is the European project, LEM – The Learning Museum – which aims to create a network of museums and cultural heritage organisations active in the lifelong learning arena. Supported by the funding of the Lifelong Learning Programme Grundtvig and with 23 partners from 17 countries, including NEMO as an associate partner, plus the United States, LEM wants to establish a permanent space for museums and adult educators to learn from each other, develop professionally and contribute to a learning society and a knowledge-based Europe.

The project sets out from the conviction that, in order to face the challenges of the present and future decades, museums are not only expected to be places where people learn, but must be learning organisations themselves: learning

from the communities, from the public, from their stakeholders and also from other agencies, with whom they have to build alliances to accomplish the ambitious objectives set by policies at national and European level.

LEM will promote research and public debate in the following areas:

- The role of museums in the 21st century
- Improving audience research and visitors relations
- Widening access and learning
- Supporting intercultural dialogue
- Catering to an ageing population

The outcomes of these, as well as of other working groups will be made available through conferences, reports and publications, but mostly through the website: www.lemproject.eu. LEM will also pilot a mobility scheme within the partner countries where

museum educators and professionals will be hosted in some of the partner institutions for study visits, assistantships or job shadowing periods.

LEM has the ambition to grow by ten associate partners per year and beyond, to potentially reach the whole museum and heritage community and a large part of the adult education sector.

After all, this is what networks are for, also in order to meet EU expectations: to become European key players in the thematic field of their expertise, to demonstrate their capacity to generate and promote development across different countries, and, most of all, to grow and reach out to as many institutions as possible.

By | Margherita Sani

Collections Mobility 2.0: Lending for Europe, 21st Century

Since 2009, NEMO has been involved in the European project, 'Collections Mobility 2.0'. The aim of the project is to introduce the most recent concepts, standards and procedures on lending and borrowing of museum collections into the every day museum practice.

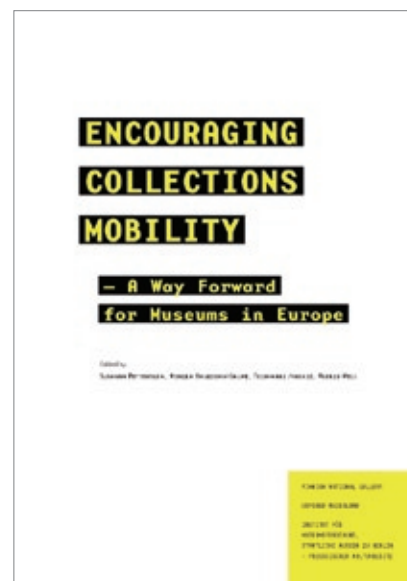
The recently published handbook 'Encouraging Collections Mobility – A Way Forward for Museums in Europe' provides theoretical background to the subjects covered by the training programme.

The handbook contains articles on different aspects of collections mobility. It provides information about the history of collecting and suggests different ways in approaching museum collections and collecting related activities. It proposes that museums

should be encouraged to build 21st century collection strategies rather than repeating old patterns based on the concept of eternal growth. Most of the articles provide a philosophical context for the collections and their use, but the book also addresses the practical issues concerning collections mobility such as immunity from seizure, insurances, non-insurances and state indemnities, long-term loans, loan fees, and digitisation. It is pointed out that standards, trust, and good networking form the basis for all cooperation. By bundling current good practices in developing loan procedures, the book maps them in a clear format.

For more information visit the website: www.lending-for-europe.eu

By | Dieuwertje Wijsmuller



About: DENMARK

Denmark is rich with many ancient sites and monuments of which four are on the cultural World Heritage List. The burial mounds, rock carvings, runic stones, castle mounds and castle ruins can be found all over the country. The Danish Museum Act, which is administered by the Heritage Agency, protects all these sites and monuments. Also, there are hundreds of museums in Denmark – from the large national collections to small, private museums. Three state museums have a special status and offer expert advice to other museums in Denmark on specific issues. These are the National Museum of Denmark, the National Gallery of Denmark and the Danish Museum of Natural History.



Under the Danish Museum Act all state-owned and state-subsidised museums must work to secure the country's cultural and natural heritage in the terms of five specified priorities: collection, registration, preservation, research and dissemination. The act ensures that museums add relevant new objects and documentation material to their collections, which are thoroughly

by five regions. Especially effected by this was the distribution of tasks between central government, regions and local authorities. Since then, many of the state owned and subsidised museums have already merged or are planning to. These changes have brought about the development of a new role for the museums in society, a public debate on sustainability, partnerships on teaching and research, joint ventures on certain areas such as example storage facilities, and higher quality on basic areas such as registration and teaching.

Currently, a national survey is examining how museums understand and practice educational programmes and will attempt to pinpoint the challenges museums are facing related to a professional handling of their learning potential in the 21st century knowledge society.

Also this year, preparations unfold for a new Museums Act. The new act will mainly be concerned with issues around a new vision for museums, sustainability, cooperation and internationalisation and professionalisation of management. The proposal is expected to be presented to the Minister of Culture in 2011.



Photo © Per Morten Abrahamsen
The main entrance of the National Museum of Denmark

The common goal of Danish museums is to secure and provide access for visitors to the national heritage. Since 2004 the Danish government allocated

registered and preserved for posterity.

Furthermore the act guarantees that objects and collections are stored under suitable conditions, and objects properly conserved. The Danish museums are research institutions and must seek to gain new insights into their respective areas. Their knowledge and collections should be made accessible and disseminated accordingly. Additional tasks and duties state that the cultural heritage museums engage in preserving the listed monuments in Denmark's countryside and towns and cities.

Introduced in 2007, new reforms in the Danish public sector caused major structural changes in the Danish museum landscape. Local municipalities were reduced from 275 to 98 and 13 county authorities were abolished and replaced

several million euros to reach an agreed level of collections management. The plan for preservation and registration was characterised by a strong focus on the collections and their conditions. The topics included: shared storage facilities, conservation, unique national value, digital registration of all museum pieces and issues around disposal. To support access to cultural heritage and develop the educational role of museums in society, in the last three years, six million euros annually were made available for the dissemination of cultural heritage. And under the Finance Act of 2006, five million euros annually were invested to compensate free entrance for children and young people under 18. Additionally supported was the general free entrance to The National Museum and The National Gallery of Denmark.

By | Anna Bas Backer



Denmark

The Kingdom of Denmark, which also includes Greenland and the Faroe Islands, is the Southern most of Europe's Scandinavian countries. Its population is estimated around 5,5 million and the capital city is Copenhagen.

Denmark is a member of NATO (1949), OECD (1961), EU (1973) and OSCE (1997).