

Negative to That of Others, But Negligent of One's Own? On Patterns in National Statistics on Cultural Heritage in Sweden

Daniel Brodén, researcher, Centre for Digital Humanities and Swe-Clarín, University of Gothenburg

Abstract

In 2015–2016 the Centre for Critical Heritage Studies at the University of Gothenburg conducted an interdisciplinary pilot project in collaboration with the SOM-institute. The aim was to demonstrate the usefulness of combining an analysis rooted in the field of critical heritage studies with statistics. The study was based on a critical discussion of the concept of cultural heritage and the data was collected from the nationwide SOM-surveys.

The paper highlights some patterns in the SOM data from 2015 on sociodemographic and attitude differences in activities traditionally associated with national cultural heritage institutions: 1) women are more involved in activities than men; 2) besides gender, class and education are also important variables in this context. 3) The most important finding in this paper is that people with a negative attitude towards immigration to a lesser degree participate in activities that are traditionally associated with their 'own' national cultural heritage.

Keywords: *statistics, national survey, cultural heritage, attitude towards refugees, SOM-institute*

Introduction

In 2015–2016 the Centre for Critical Heritage Studies at the University of Gothenburg carried out an interdisciplinary pilot study in collaboration with the SOM institute, which is also based at the university. The study was based on a selection of collected data from the large nationwide SOM-surveys, which are representative samples of the Swedish population. The annual SOM surveys, which have been conducted since 1986, compile extensive statistics on activities, opinions, and attitudes regarding politics, society, and media, and demographic data.

The aim of the pilot study was to present an original approach to Swedish statistical data on cultural heritage activities in the form of a report. Contrary to more traditional reports by the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis (2016), and the Swedish Arts Council (1997), the study tried to demonstrate the usefulness of combining an analysis of national statistics with an approach rooted in critical heritage studies. Drawing on a critical definition of cultural heritage, the report, '*Cultural Heritage in Transformation: Patterns and Widened Perspectives*' (Brodén 2017), examined how different demographics are related to various forms of cultural heritage activities.

The use of nationwide surveys is rare in the field of cultural heritage studies. The aim of

this paper is to present significant patterns in the SOM data from the 2015 survey. The focus will be on demographic and attitude differences regarding cultural activities traditionally associated with national heritage. Drawing on contemporary discussions of the concept of cultural heritage, it will highlight gender and class differences, but also what could be seen as a less known paradox: people who are negative to ‘other’ cultures, to a lesser degree participate in activities that are associated with their ‘own’ national cultural heritage.

For clarity, it should be pointed out that I will use concepts, such as ‘identity’ and ‘memory’, cautiously, and only in a general sense to give context to the statistics. I do this to avoid the conflicting issues that might arise when combining complex analytic concepts that have intrapersonal connotations with an analysis of survey data.

About the SOM Surveys

The nationwide SOM-survey is addressed to randomly selected persons between the ages of 16 and 86 living in Sweden, and it consists of several sub-surveys. In 2015 there were four such sub-surveys, making the total sample size of the survey approximately 17 000 persons (for methodological comments, see Vernersdotter 2016). The report ‘*Cultural Heritage in Transformation*’ highlights various socio-demographic, and attitude variables. This paper will focus on four variables which proved to be especially interesting: sex, class, education and attitude towards refugees.

The report highlights a range of activities that can be related to a pluralistic conception of cultural heritage, including visits to public institutions (e.g. museums and libraries), cultural habits (e.g. bookreading and gaming), memberships in associations (e.g. folklore societies and sports associations), and participation in national rituals and festivities (e.g. national day celebration and watching the Eurovising Song Contest on television). To establish a clear focus, this paper will concentrate on a selection of activities and institutions that are traditionally associated with national cultural heritage: visits to ancient monuments, historical attractions or buildings, museums, national parks, libraries and theatres.

The study was partly based on existing SOM-questionnaires, which set limits for how the pluralistic conception of cultural heritage could be represented. The questions posed in the SOM-surveys are also broad (for example, ‘theatre attendance’ covers everything from experimental theatre to revues and childrens theatre). Nevertheless, the categories are well-established, and included to capture basic tendencies; most respondents are likely familiar with the terms used (for example, associating ancient monuments with rock carvings, stone formations, etcetera, and historical attractions or buildings with castles, towers, etcetera).

Brief Comments on the Concept of Cultural Heritage

The word ‘culture’, rooted in the Latin word *cultura* (approximately ‘cultivation’), generally refers to something that is distinguished from nature. This opens up a wide range of meanings, and one may ask if there is any human activity or phenomenon that could not be discussed as culture (Fornäs 2012: 12–14). ‘Heritage’, in turn, is associated with things that are passed on by ancestors, both in a legal and metaphorical sense. In the late nineteenth century, the concept of heritage came to imply the spiritual culture of peoples and nations, and in Sweden, there arose a passion for rural folk culture and the ‘genuinely Swedish’. Although this unabashed cultural nationalism faded when the modern welfare state took shape in the 1930s, the idea of a unified people and a national heritage lived on (Löfgren 1990: 34–45, 90).

To get a sense of the complexity of the concept of cultural heritage, we can briefly turn to the issue of cultural heritage to the modern nation state. It is common that scholars of modern society describe national identity as an ‘imagined community’, which is an abstract collective identity that is socially constructed but, nevertheless, unites people across the nation. Those who govern society has, as historian Tobias Harding (2012) notes, a significant influence over how the past is shaped into collective memory; the historical royalty, aristocracy, and church have all been made into axiomatic points of reference through monuments, sculptures, and street names. At the same time that history is preserved, new monuments that influence conceptions of national cultural heritage are continuously erected in the form of libraries, theatres, and other institutional buildings (Harding 2012: 48–55).

As sociologist Masoud Kamali (2012) points out, the concept of cultural heritage is double-edged. On the one hand, it has a distinguishing function. The countries of Europe have shaped their national identities through demarcations against ‘other’ cultures. On the other hand, colonial demarcations can be challenged through more pluralistic conceptions, which include ‘everyone’, regardless of skin color, ethnicity, or religion. Today, institutions such as the National Museum, which were once founded to preserve the ‘Swedish’ cultural heritage, seek to include various groups that historically have been excluded from the national community (Kamali 2012: 92).

It should also be stressed that the field of cultural heritage has grown out of early critiques of the past in nation-building. As Rodney Harrison (2013) notes: ‘the way in which heritage has been driven largely by compliance with municipal, state and national legislation [...] means that we have tended not to look across national borders to explore areas of common

concern' (2013: 8). Another major contemporary issue in the field of cultural heritage is what Harrison terms 'a profusion of memorialisation' that risks devaluing all heritage. However, in late-modern Swedish society, in which the global and the local intertwine, and memories of many different pasts pile up, traditional cultural institutions nonetheless still serve as interfaces between individuals and the past (2013: 166).

Significant Patterns

Prior research has already shown that women in Sweden participate more than men in various cultural activities (Antoni 2008). If one looks at visits to libraries, a public institution associated with democratic ideals of self education and cultural experiences (Gustavsson 1996), the number of annual visits are significantly higher for women than men (Table 1).

Table 1. Visited library sometime during the year, 2015 (percentages)

All	58
Women	65
Men	51

Source: The nationwide SOM survey 2015.

Another important variable in the context of activities related to cultural heritage is class. People who identify themselves as white-collar have more active cultural habits than those with a blue-collar identification. Although the usefulness of the concept of class has been questioned, it is still a statistically valid variable (Oskarson et al 2010), and the SOM data shows a constant difference between classes over the years when it comes to various cultural activities (Weibull et al 2008: 260). Closely tied to the issue of class is education, and the statistical patterns of cultural activities and education are similar, with those with higher education being more active in a range of activities. In the case of visits to historical attractions or buildings, twice as many higher educated individuals make such visits (Table 2).

Table 2. Visited historical attraction or building sometime during the year, 2015 (percentages)

All	69
Class	
Blue-collar	56

White-collar	78
Higher white-collar	84
<i>Education</i>	
Low	39
Average	60
High	77

Source: The nationwide SOM survey 2015.

The variable attitude towards refugees could be considered in the context of pluralistic conceptions of cultural heritage. Although people with a positive attitude towards refugees are not by default advocates for a more multicultural Sweden, studies nevertheless indicate that there is such a connection (Sandberg & Demker 2013). The SOM data show that people with a negative attitude are generally less engaged than others in activities that are associated with national cultural heritage; they visit ancient monuments, historical attractions or buildings, national parks, museums, libraries or theatres, to a lesser degree (Table 3).

Table 3. *Visited various public institutions sometimes during the year, attitude towards refugees, 2015 (percentages)*

	Ancient monument	Historical attraction/buildning	National park	Museum	Library	Theatre
All	47	69	60	59	58	41
Negative	41	61	51	50	54	33
Neutral	50	71	58	58	61	39
Positive	53	79	69	71	73	51

Source: The nationwide SOM survey 2015.

The phenomenon should be understood against the background of the strong connection between a negative attitude towards refugees and education (Demker 2015). A plausible explanation seems to be that lower educated people are less likely in general to have active cultural habits. Nevertheless, it seems paradoxical that those who have a negative attitude towards increased influences from ‘other cultures’ are themselves generally more negligent of their ‘own’ national cultural heritage institutions than others.

Conclusions

An analysis of the data from the nationwide SOM survey 2015 indicates that: 1) women in

Sweden are more active than men when it comes to taking part in cultural activities that can be related to national cultural heritage; 2) class and education are also important factors for the degree of activity. Although it has been shown in prior studies, it is worth repeating that the well-educated, white-collar woman could be regarded as a key carrier of various forms of cultural heritage.

Perhaps the most original finding of the study is that, 3) people who are negative to immigration to a lesser extent participate in activities that are associated with their 'own' national cultural heritage. This is interesting in the light of how national identities have been shaped through demarcations against 'other' cultures, as well as in relation to the current turn towards right-wing politics, and anti-immigration rhetoric across Europe, which emphasize the importance of national cultural heritage. Although the findings in the study need to be further analysed, and followed up, the data challenge the simplistic idea of nationalism as a force for the cultivation and memorialization of national heritage. Additionally, the report raises the need for comparative studies of other countries and, to paraphrase Rodney Harrison, to look across national borders to explore areas of common concern.

References

- Antoni, Rudolf (2008): 'De mångas kultur', L Nilsson & R Antoni (eds): *Regionen, medborgarna och flernivådemokratin*, Gothenburg: The SOM-institute.
- Brodén, Daniel (2017): *Kulturarv i förändring: Mönster och vidgade perspektiv*, Gothenburg: The SOM-institute.
- Demker, Marie (2015): 'Mobilisering kring migration förändrar det svenska partisystemet', A Bergström et al (eds): *Fragment*, Gothenburg: The SOM-institute.
- Fornäs, Johan 2012. *Kultur*. Malmö: Liber.
- Gustavsson, Bengt (1996): *Bildning i vår tid*, Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.
- Harding, Tobias (2012): 'Vilka är nationen?', C Fredengren et al (eds): *I valet och kvalet: Grundläggande frågor kring värdering och urval av kulturarv*, Stockholm: Riksantikvarieämbetet.
- Harrison, Rodney (2013): *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, London: Routledge.
- Löfgren, Orvar (1990): 'Medierna i nationsbygget: Hur press, radio och TV gjort Sverige svenskt', U Hannertz (ed): *Medier och kulturer*, Stockholm: Carlssons.
- Kamali, Masoud (2012): 'Exkluderingar, globala utmaningar och kultursektorns ansvar', C Fredengren et al (eds): *I valet och kvalet: Grundläggande frågor kring värdering och urval av kulturarv*, Stockholm: Riksantikvarieämbetet.
- Myndigheten för kulturanalys (2016): *Kulturmiljöstatistik*, Stockholm: Myndigheten för kulturanalys.
- Oskarson, Maria et al (2010): 'En fråga om klass', M Oskarson et al (eds): *En fråga om klass: Levnadsförhållanden, livsstil, politik*, Stockholm: Liber.
- Sandberg, Linn & Marie Demker (2013): 'Ökat motstånd mot flyktingar men starkt stöd för skäl till uppehållstillstånd', L Weibull et al (eds): *Vägskäl*, Gothenburg: The SOM-institute.
- Statens kulturråd (1997): *Kulturmiljöstatistik 1995*, Stockholm: Statistiska meddelanden.

- Vernersdotter, Frida (2016): 'Den nationella SOM-undersökningen 2015', J Ohlsson et al (eds) *Ekvilibrium*, Gothenburg: The SOM-institute.
- Weibull, Lennart, et al (2008): 'Det myckna bokskrivandet tar aldrig slut ...', S Holmberg & L Weibull (eds): *Skilda världar*, Gothenburg: The SOM-institute.