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Redesigning the museum studies programme at the University of Helsinki: towards collaborative teaching and learning

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ABSTRACT
The University of Helsinki has made significant changes to its educational frameworks and degree programmes. For museum studies the changes have been particularly far-reaching. From autumn 2017 onwards there has been a reduction in the total number of study credits available, but also a move from bachelors- to masters-level teaching. This upheaval presented an opportunity to redesign the course in an inclusive way, consulting both with museum professionals and museum studies graduates in Finland and further afield. The resulting courses aim to implement collaboratively the preferences of these consultees, while staying true to the university’s own requirements. In this article, we reflect upon the evaluation process and offer insights that we hope are useful both to museum professionals that have (or wish to have) a relationship with a university museum studies programme, and also for the teachers and researchers involved in devising and delivering these programmes.

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Museum studies; museology; consultation; evaluation; collaborative teaching; University pedagogy

Introduction

In 2015, the University of Helsinki, Finland, began a process of reform across its degree programmes, in order to complete implementation of the European Bologna model for higher education. The influence of Bologna on the diversification and expansion of museological studies has been noted elsewhere (Lorente 2012, 238). The realisation of this process – known within the University of Helsinki’s organisational structures as iso pyörä (en: ‘big wheel’) – involved an overhaul of many of the university’s degree programmes and has had an unprecedented impact on the delivery and even the level at which museum studies is taught. The changes, including moving the courses from a bachelor’s-level to a master’s-level optional programme, have presented an opportunity to redesign and reconsider both the structure and the purpose of this subject within the context of the wider education offered in our university and within the global context of the nature and status of museum studies in higher education. It is rare to get an opportunity to redesign a whole subject programme on this scale (although for example see Tišlar 2017 for...
analysis and critique of the development, from scratch, of museum studies courses in Slovakian universities). We wanted to evaluate the whole discipline and also get instant feedback from a broad group of people close to the museum studies discipline in order to make this transition relevant. To do this, we employed several approaches to consulting the wider museum and cultural heritage community and students. Although the results of this study were to influence the delivery of museum studies at the University of Helsinki and to evaluate the discipline within Finland, we also drew upon international feedback and experience and believe that our process is instructive to the global development of museum studies at university level. Given that many people do lead transnational lives, including studying abroad or creating careers and settling in countries other than the ones they were born in (see Levitt 2015 for an in-depth discussion of this phenomenon and its impact on museum missions), the teaching of museum studies in Helsinki is and should be relevant to its teaching elsewhere in the world and vice versa.

There have been definitional debates concerning the use of the related terms of museology, museography, and museum studies (Teather 1991). Shelton (2013, 14) has expressed that distinguishing between theoretical museology and practical museography is ‘fundamentally incompatible’ with what he and others have called critical museology (a critical approach to scrutinising the accepted norms of museum professional and scholarly practices not unlike the critical heritage studies movement), due to the seemingly artificial line that the terms draw between ‘applied and intellectual knowledge’. Lorente (2012, 240) has perhaps rather cynically suggested that ‘the label ‘museum studies’ became fashionable in the English-speaking world’, while Dubuc (2011) seems to use ‘museology’ and ‘museum studies’ as equivalent of each other in her analysis of the discipline’s development as a university subject. MacLeod (2001, 51) has also noted that “museum studies” and “museology” are often used interchangeably, although she posits a holistic view of museum studies ‘as training, education, research and practice made manifest through the actions of those who comprise the museums profession’ (MacLeod 2001, 53). A major factor in renaming museology in 2017 at the University of Helsinki to ‘museum studies’ was this concept of theory and practice being interconnected (despite debates that museological studies may in some cases be becoming more separate from museums themselves, see Dubuc 2011, 500), with our belief that museum theories are as relevant to working life as they are to academic research.

There is likely to be increasing demand in the future for courses in which both theoretical and practical knowledge are implemented together that bring in experience of working life and experience from beyond the university. Theory is unfortunately often perceived as both boring and difficult by students, claims which might be supported by the rather poor quality of answers in theory exams in recent years and in the low numbers of participants in the optional theory courses at the University of Helsinki. If the link between theory and practice is made more explicit, this would perhaps help the students to understand why theory matters and encourage a closer engagement. The absence of practice within museum theory has also been noted elsewhere (McCarthy 2016), indicating further the need to rethink the relationship between theory and practice. In museum studies, this could mean enabling students to use creative thinking and build their own understanding of complex issues related to the museum field, as well as discussing and identifying aspects of theory within the ‘real life’ settings of museums themselves. In the University of Helsinki, museum studies
as a discipline needs to engage educational and professional collaborations in order to maintain and develop its position. It is also the case, in our view, that ‘museum’ should be considered more as a part of the larger environment and sector of cultural heritage, rather than as a separate silo. This tendency to move into more collaborative models of education is as extensively apparent in the University of Helsinki as it is elsewhere. This viewpoint was also largely supported by the responses we received from museum professionals and students.

**Museum studies in Finland**

The responsibility to teach future museum professionals within Finland has been with the universities, and museum studies has always been a popular minor subject option. The early years of museum studies in Finland is unfortunately rather poorly documented and hence we have very little knowledge of the content of these courses. It is probable that the very first courses were more in line with museography and thus focused on more practical issues.

The Finnish Museum Association (fi: Suomen Museoliitto) had a significant role in developing museum studies. It was the association who started the first lecture courses in museology for European ethnology students at the University of Helsinki in 1964 with the Secretary General Jorma Heinonen acting as the teacher. He had become inspired while taking part in various ICOM (International Council of Museums) meetings. Heinonen often pointed out in his early works the significance of theory and methodology in museology and the closeness between museology and philosophy as academic subjects. Heinonen also stressed the interdisciplinarity in early Finnish museology (Vilkuna 2007, 60; Heinonen and Lahti 2001, 17–18). At around this time internationally, academic positions for museology were beginning to appear for example in countries such as Germany and what were then Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia in the 1950s, as well as in Italy and in the UK in the 1960s, with the founding of the Museum Studies department in the University of Leicester in 1966 (Lorente 2012, 239–241). In the early 1970s, the still-modest by comparison teaching in Finland was expanded to include students in art history and archaeology (Vilkuna 2007, 58–59, 2010, 334–335).


The first permanent teaching position in museology was established in 1989 at the University of Jyväskylä, which extended to a full professorship in 1999. Since 2002, the University of Jyväskylä has been the only university in Finland where museology has had the status of a ‘major’ subject, while a minor subject in other universities. The first PhD in museology was defended in Jyväskylä in 2006 (Valtonen 2006). In Helsinki, the first lectureship in museology opened in 2003 (Vilkuna 2007, 60–61, 2010, 341–342), and currently holds one full time lecturer. In addition to the university-run courses, the Finnish Museums Association has organised web-based teaching in museology (Verso 1–2) since 2005 in order to ensure that people already working in museums have the same opportunity to study basic and intermediate studies (Vilkuna 2010, 346).
According to the Museums Decree of 2005 ([1192/2005] 2015), museums in Finland must have at least a director and one other employee, and both of these two personnel must have completed the basic studies in museology or have experience in museum work (Museums Decree [1192/2005] 2015; Palviainen 2010, 328–329). When the law came to effect on 1 January 2006, Finland henceforth became the first country to give museum studies an official status in its legislation (Vilkuna 2007, 63, 2010, 346). In practice this has often been interpreted as suggesting that the basic level of studies is a minimum requirement for anyone wanting a career in Finnish museums. As a result, the subject has proven popular with students of various ‘major’ disciplines, especially humanities subjects. It has effectively become a valued addition to a student’s CV in case they decide to apply to work in a museum in the future.

At Helsinki, until recently the basic studies have been offered as a 25 ECTS credit ‘package’ of courses framed as a ‘minor’ subject option within a larger degree programme. The basic studies consisted of two taught courses with twice-weekly lectures, one course as a set book examination, and one course as an essay that the student researched and wrote independently. A further option, open to a smaller group of students, was the intermediate studies consisting of a further 35 ECTS study credits, in which there is more contact time with the teacher through a range of taught courses, group project work, and optional set book examinations or essays. The students also undertook a three-month praktikum (internship) at a museum, although this part could be waived if the student already had experience of working in a museum other than selling tickets or guiding visitors.

The basic studies course has proven popular due to the Museum Statute specifications. Previously taught courses could take up to 90 students and commonly had more than 70 students registered. On the one hand, this allowed for a lot of students to take the course, but on the other hand the courses gained some negative feedback in student evaluations due to the sizes of the classes and because, at times, all students who wanted to take the classes could not fit the class because it was already full. In addition, as they have been the responsibility of one lecturer alone, the programmes have run alternately over a period of 18 months (one semester of the basic studies programme, followed by two semesters of the intermediate studies programme). This has also caused frustration to students wishing to start the basic studies taught courses, as they have had to wait for more than a year for the basic taught courses to run again if they failed to register the first time.

Following the iso pyörä changes, a decision was taken within the Faculty of Arts, with the support of the authors, to move museology from being an undergraduate-level minor subject to being a graduate-level minor subject. This meant that the subject still has ‘minor’ status as an optional supplementary set of studies alongside a ‘major’ subject as part of the larger multidisciplinary suite of courses available through the new master’s programme in Cultural Heritage. We welcomed this decision, as we felt it elevated the subject to the academic level at which it is most commonly taught at universities internationally, and because it allowed to take smaller groups and go into museum studies-related topics more deeply than is possible with large groups. This transition also impacted the number of study credits available, with a new ‘package’ of 30 ECTS credits available. While this could potentially affect the range of options for both topics and study approaches, it allows for the programme to be repeated on an annual basis rather than over 18 months as previously. As students in Finland have a large degree of
flexibility concerning when they take their courses, they can select museum studies courses at different stages of their studies, completing the requirements in only one year, or taking longer if they wish. They are also able to select from related minor subjects such as cultural heritage studies and digital humanities and even interchange individual optional courses to tailor their own study needs and interests. Since September 2017, it has now become possible to research for a PhD in museum studies in Helsinki, whereas previously this was only possible in Finland at the University of Jyväskylä.

**Collecting input for the new course plans**

Since there were to be major changes related to museum studies at the University of Helsinki, we wanted to take account of the opinions and views of both museum professionals and students while planning the new courses. We were keen to know how museum professionals and students view the prospects of museum studies and gather their feedback regarding how they would like to see the discipline evolve. Collaborative and inclusive planning is an efficient way to ensure that both museum professionals and students find museum studies adequate and preferable in the future as well as today, and to ensure that the programme has the best chance of gaining support from important partners within the museum and heritage sector.

Due to the limited time available to gather information (from October 2016 to March 2017), and limited time within our work schedules to devote to such a study, we relied upon three main approaches. We describe those approaches in this section, before moving on to discuss the results.

Firstly, a general email went out to ‘museoposti’ – a Finland-wide email list for museum and heritage professionals and students. This email was sent by Thomas on 13 October 2016 and was a general announcement of our intention to update the programme contents and a request for comments and opinions from the Finnish museum community concerning current and possible future teaching approaches and themes in museum studies at the University of Helsinki. People on the museoposti list were asked to reply with their views by 31st October 2016. This approach produced 16 separate responses, mostly from people working in museums but also from related organisations such as cultural foundations or from freelancers working in the cultural sector.

A second round of data collection took place in the form of a questionnaire survey (see Appendix 1), through multiple choice and open answer questions on a range of issues from what topics should be taught, to student assessment, and to willingness of respondents to contribute to the new courses. This might, for example, be in the form of offering an opportunity for students to visit their museum, giving a guest lecture at the university, or providing chances for students to carry out a project with their organisation. We created the online questionnaire using SurveyMonkey and promoted it through museoposti and our social media accounts. We first devised the questions in English, which were informed by our own experiences of teaching museology at the University of Helsinki and knowing what changes were likely to be applied due to iso pyörä. Wessman then translated the questions into Finnish in order to encourage both domestic and international responses. We distributed the links to the questionnaires – English and Finnish language versions – on 9 December 2016 with a deadline of 8 January 2017 for responses.
The questionnaire survey gained 182 responses mostly from Finland (161), but also from the UK (11), Sweden (2), Canada (2), Tunisia (1), New Zealand (1), Armenia (1), Greece (1), Japan (1), and the USA (1). Of these, the majority (160) responded in Finnish, while the remaining 22 responded in English. Interestingly, the US and Swedish responses were among those to reply in Finnish, suggesting it likely that the respondents were originally from Finland.

The third approach was face-to-face consultation, essentially in the form of focus group meetings chaired by Thomas and Wessman. We informed via museoposti of two consultation afternoons that we arranged at the University of Helsinki. The first of the two afternoons was intended to discuss the potential content of the ‘core’ museum studies courses, which due to internal deadlines at the university already had to have been named by that time. These were Museological Theory (5 ECTS), Museum Collections (5 ECTS), and Museum Project Management (10 ECTS). We pre-selected these ‘core’ course topics based on our reasoning that theory is a fundamental aspect of museum studies, that museums as memory institutions have an important responsibility as stewards of collections, and that project management would provide a bridge to practical experience and skills needed for work-based tasks. The second afternoon was for discussing possible ‘optional’ courses that could be offered in order to give students some decision-making opportunities in selecting the areas of museum studies that interest them.

We asked participants to pre-book their place through the free online booking system Eventbrite. Although there was no charge for attending, we decided to encourage pre-booking so as to know beforehand who (and how many) were coming, and also, we hoped, to encourage participants to make a definite commitment to attending by making an online booking. All participants were informed that we would be using the findings from the discussions for this article as well as revising the museum studies programme.

The consultation days took place on the afternoons of 14 and 16 February 2017. Due to an acceleration in the deadline by which it was necessary to have devised the course descriptions for the faculty, we had to hold the consultations relatively quickly, meaning we were only able to announce the dates a couple of weeks before the sessions took place. We learned from some of the attendees and via a few direct emails that more people would have attended these meetings, if they had been given more notice in which to arrange their schedules. Although we only had a total of 14 attendees across both meetings, we found that the small groups allowed for detailed and deep discussion.

Our findings

Email responses

The responses to the first general email were varied. However, many pointed to practical training issues they felt were necessary in order to equip students for future museum work. Most respondents, many of whom had themselves studied museology at a Finnish university, felt that the courses had previously been too theoretical, and several expressed a concern that graduates would be entering the museum working world with little or no practical experience (see also Dubuc 2011 for debates around the disconnect between museum studies as a subject and professional museum training needs). Areas where
respondents felt more practical knowledge would be a benefit included the role of documenting objects and understanding how to plan exhibitions. The next most flagged theme was that of finance and marketing, for example skills in budgeting, social media marketing, and fundraising. Other emerging themes included a greater emphasis on digital applications in museum work, museum pedagogy, and audience development and inclusion.

**Questionnaire survey**

The questionnaire survey yielded a combination of quantitative and qualitative responses. Personal information such as name, job title, place of work, and contact details are not discussed in this article. We have rather focused on the most relevant questions with regard to course content and development.

The quantitative sections consisted of multiple choice questions concerning teaching delivery and assessment forms, as well as practical questions to canvass how many museums and museum professionals, particularly in the Greater Helsinki area, would be willing to contribute to the new courses, for example by providing work-based assignments for students, allowing group and individual visits to their premises, or giving guest lectures or other learning sessions either at the university or in their museums. Contribution to courses from museum professionals has always been an aspect of museological teaching at the University of Helsinki. However, it was hoped that we could use the questionnaire also as a way of updating our organisational memory to gain a clearer picture of which museums and professionals may be available for particular kinds of teaching collaboration and perhaps to discover new partners. These questions, including a request for general feedback at the end of the survey, also evoked positive qualitative feedback from the Finnish respondents, many of whom were working in the museum sector:

This questionnaire is an excellent opening. I and my museum are of course very positive towards co-operation with the university. Schedules are, however, limiting but the sooner we sit down and plan our collaboration, the easier it is to fit it into the calendar. (Finnish Survey Respondent 75)

It’s extremely nice to see that museum studies is being developed and taken this seriously – good luck with the important work! (Finnish Survey Respondent 98)

For us museum professionals the idea to teach at the university is great because it would sharpen our professional identities. We hope to be given a certificate from this because this could perhaps aid us when our museums are looking for financial support. (Finnish Survey Respondent 107)

In a preamble above the question shown in Figure 1, respondents were informed that for expediency, three core courses had already been decided upon. Then, respondents were presented with several possible options based upon our own notions of what were likely to be appealing optional courses, but also based upon the research of the teaching staff expertise to some extent. One feature of the flexible learning in the University of Helsinki is that students can complete their study credits in museum studies by supplementing with a course from a related subject.

The most popular optional course by far was Museums and Education (69.51% of responses), also reflecting several of the email responses concerning the importance of
museum pedagogy to the activities of museums. One email respondent, for example, noted that probably most museum professionals were likely at some point in their career to engage with or work in museum education. Museums and Ethics and Museums and Marketing were the next most preferred choices. This is shown also in the qualitative questionnaire responses:

Museum education is in the present museum studies programme vague, and a more practical perspective could be useful for the students and their future employment. Many museums are struggling to get more visitors and to teach marketing and communications, especially social media skills, would also be good. (Finnish Survey Respondent 6)

In my previous museology basic studies, pedagogy was not taught at all and neither was how to use your voice or how to perform in front of the public, even though these are the most important skills you need to have when entering the museum sector. All kinds of communications, but social media especially, is emphasised in museum work. A course in social media communication would be useful. (Finnish Survey Respondent 75)

During my past 30 years’ museum experience I have learned that people no longer understand anything about museum ethics or museum safety. (Finnish Survey Respondent 19)

We also deemed it important to understand the perception among museum professionals and students of different approaches to teaching, giving options such as lectures given by different people, site visits, group works, and so forth. Lectures from museum professionals were seen as the most valuable approach (Figure 2). This connection to the professional museum domain is not a surprise and reflects common practices of

![Figure 1. Results concerning possible optional courses for the museum studies curriculum. Constructed by Eino Heikkilä](image-url)
museum studies courses worldwide of maintaining good links with the working environment, where many graduates will find themselves pursuing careers in the future (Dubuc 2011). Lectures led by the university lecturer, and then seminars and smaller group activities were the next most popular options, perhaps also reflecting expectations concerning how ‘typical’ and ‘traditional’ university education should look (Phillips 2005).

Curiously, given emphasis in recent years on digitising learning in order to make courses as flexible and manageable as possible (Henderson, Selwin, and Ashton 2017), online teaching had the lowest ranking. This possibly reflects a continued tendency to value in-person and face-to-face learning experiences over those conducted more remotely, despite the fact that it also means a commitment to attend all or most lectures, which previously some students have found challenging. This was despite studies that show that students may favour either online or face-to-face learning depending on the type of learning taking place such as favouring online learning for structured learning materials but face-to-face for communication purposes (Paechter and Maier 2010; Zhan and Mei 2013), and perhaps also reflects persisting preconceptions concerning what kind of teaching is both effective and appropriate for university-level education (Figure 3).

Responses suggested strongly that the new courses should focus on preparing students for professional museum work. The two most highly ranked responses were ‘project work resulting in a museum-related ‘product’, and ‘individual coursework resembling documents needed in museum work’. The latter option could include assignments in which students produce documents and other materials such as policies, marketing plans, and educational resources, learning written and other communication styles relevant for professional life. This was trialled in autumn 2017 with the Museum Collections students.
writing a collections policy document as one of their assignments, referring to existing documents in order to understand this particular style of writing.

When it came to assessment, the least preferred assessment options included examination at the end or part-way through courses. This possibly reflects observations that examinations may only encourage ‘surface’ learning rather than a deeper understanding (Airey et al. 2017), as well as remembered anxieties brought about by examination days. Similarly, the other two most unpopular assessment options were group and individual presentations, which may also reflect students’ reluctance to ‘perform’ in what could be perceived as a high pressure setting, especially for the more timid students. However, with such approaches, it may be possible to improve student engagement by introducing peer assessment and other innovations, although introducing such techniques also requires spending time training the students in how to do peer and self assessment (Suñol et al. 2016).

The results in Figure 4 were significant in that they demonstrated the extent to which respondents – primarily museum professionals – would be willing to contribute to the teaching. A majority of the people (70%) who responded to this question were willing to contribute in some ways. Despite the question’s targeting of workers in the Greater Helsinki area, a few museums outside the Helsinki area invited the museum studies courses to visit their museum or offered to give other assistance. It is important for us to be aware of which respondents would be willing to contribute, given that an earlier question (Figure 2) revealed that contributions from museum professionals were seen as the most important aspect of museum studies teaching.
The question represented in Figure 5 also targeted museum workers from the Greater Helsinki area. It elicited fewer replies (only 59), but a slightly higher positive response rate of 88%. Given that museum visits ranked fourth in Figure 2, the positive level of responses

Figure 4. Respondents indicating if they would be willing to contribute to the new courses in the form of a guest lecture, seminar or other form of teaching. Constructed by Eino Heikkilä.

Figure 5. Respondents indicating whether they would be willing to host a student visit to their museum as part of one of the museum studies courses. Constructed by Eino Heikkilä.
was also encouraging, indicating that the wider museum community in the region were mostly open to participating in and contributing to the university courses in this way. The significance of visiting museums and especially being able to make ‘work visits’ to see museum practice and hear from museum professionals about their experiences – relevant also to Figures 6 and 7 – has been noted as a key component of museological education (Halbertsma 2005, 5).

Figures 6 and 7 were again directed particularly at museum personnel working in museums in and around Helsinki. We decided that it was important to establish the extent to which museums would not only welcome student visits as part of the courses, but what added ‘value’ they could contribute in the form of input from museum staff themselves, and/or access to ‘behind the scenes’ areas not normally accessible. As well as gauging the willingness of museums to participate in this way (overwhelmingly positive in both cases), the questions formed a practical reference point for future course planning; since the questionnaire was not anonymous, it was possible to trace the museums and individuals that had offered particular visit experiences.

It should also be noted that negative replies to both of these questions do not necessarily indicate a lack of willingness to participate in the courses. Barriers to providing a speaker or ‘special’ access could include a number of operational considerations, such as pressures on staff time and availability and – in the case of access to non-public areas – issues relating to security and controlled access (Grove and Thomas 2016, 7).

In general, open text responses in Finnish varied. Several respondents asked for more collaboration between the university and the museum sector, but also for specific practical training within museums as part of the programme. Many respondents stressed that

Figure 6. Respondents indicating whether they or their colleagues would be willing to talk to students during a visit to their museum. Constructed by Eino Heikkilä.
students learn better when they do practical work. Also specific skills, such as learning how to catalogue museum objects and how to use digital cataloguing tools, were on the wish-list:

Especially useful would be to teach the students how to use digital systems, such as Finna⁶, Musketti⁷, Muusa⁸, etc. (Finnish Survey Respondent 67)

Collections and collection work should be involved in museum studies, because they are the core of museum work. The questions and problems around collections seem to be completely unfamiliar to students. They assume that the collections are in order and that they only need to be digitised. Museums have difficulties in finding qualified staff because students do not understand anything about e.g., artefacts or their three-dimensional character and they have no interest in studying them. (Finnish Survey Respondent 30)

When I look back on my studies, the most useful for my current museum profession has been the courses where we trained through practical work in a museum. The best thing so far (in my studies) has been the lectures from those who work in museums and also the group work. The latter, especially because there are people who do not know each other from before have to push themselves to co-operate – just like in the real world. (Finnish Survey Respondent 83)

The feedback regarding cataloguing goes beyond knowing how to use digital cataloguing tools. It has become evident in the past ten years that other disciplines do not offer courses on object studies anymore, which naturally effects the quality of the cataloguing process within the museum sector when museum professionals lack knowledge of objects.
Therefore, this critique is probably not solely addressed towards museum studies but is a problem more broadly at the Faculty of Arts.

**Additional comments from the English language survey**

The responses in English, while a smaller total and inevitably responding to fewer of the questions, offered interesting insights from other countries concerning viewpoints and experiences of how museum studies could be taught. Several of the responses referred again to the issue of practical training and the involvement of museum environments as locations for learning. For example, a respondent from the UK said:

Museum placement – when completing my Master’s degree, this was one of the most valuable components. It provided me with hands-on job experience required for employment, as well as feed into my self-directed academic research. While a placement programme takes numerous years, cultural partners, and organisation to develop, featured ‘workshops’ at institutions may be something to consider incorporating. Collections management, exhibit label writing – practical skills in an authentic environment over the classroom. (English Survey Respondent 5)

The only four respondents from the English language survey that offered further suggestions for topics for courses all focused on the theme of work experience and opportunities to network with current museum professionals. In some programmes, practical work experience with museums has even been a way to enlighten students about different needs and museologically ‘appropriate’ practices depending on national, cultural, and social settings, as well as for training in professional skills (Kreps 2008).

The free text responses also indicated that individual opinions did not always agree. For example, in contrast to an email respondent from Finland who had suggested that museum studies must become more distinct as a subject, and not overlap with other related disciplines such as cultural heritage studies, a UK respondent to the survey suggested that the course should ‘[E]ngage with theory beyond museums stuff’ (English Survey Respondent 21).

**Consultation meetings**

In the consultation meetings, although with small numbers of attendees (less than 10 in each meeting), there were lively discussions and a general atmosphere of enthusiasm concerning the upcoming changes, which could also be read from the questionnaire survey. Attendees were mostly staff from museums in Helsinki and the surrounding area, but also included an international scholar who had studied museology in Turkey, a lecturer from one of the Applied Science Universities in Helsinki, and one museum worker who was also a student at the University of Helsinki, who had recently taken courses in museology. The discussions were structured around the specific course titles.

Several of the museum professionals pointed out that the students should have a strong basic understanding of museums when they enter the museum sector, but also that they ought to have specific skills, such as cataloguing techniques. In their view, the universities should thus provide the students with hands-on exposure to practical museum work, which of course means a strong collaboration with the museum sector. This wish is understandable because museums want to employ ‘ready-made museum
professionals’, but at the same time it is a great challenge and puts strains on universities, especially in situations where there is only one or a very few teaching staff for a subject.

The discussion on how to incorporate theory into practical museum work was a topic that evoked long discussions. Many museum professionals stated that even though theory is important, it is also difficult to implement in their daily work. This is an important reminder, and we perhaps need to stress the significance of theory as the basis of museum work even more in the future courses (compare Welsh 2013).

Although most participants were supportive of bringing in new forms of assessment as well as teaching models, others noted that the more ‘traditional’ forms of assessment perhaps still could find a place in the new courses. For example, examinations, although criticised by some researchers for encouraging only surface learning (Scouller 1998, Jessop, and Maleckar 2016), were flagged in our focus group meetings as the kind of activity that is integral to experiencing university life.

**Challenges and opportunities**

Reflecting on the emerging themes from our data gathering exercises, it was clear that some people were worried about the similarity of course contents between cultural heritage studies and museum studies, as one survey respondent remarked:

CHS and museum studies are at present partly overlapping, e.g., ethics could be taught as a joint course. Also tourism could be a joint course or serve as an optional course. We are frustrated, as students, with the fact that the content in all these courses is so similar. We would rather go into depth with our studies. Please plan your courses together with CHS! This could have a lot of potential. (Finnish Survey Respondent 100)

Other survey respondents were worried about practicalities, such as mandatory presence on lectures or that the teaching language had been switched into English. As two respondents commented:

I would like the possibility to study the intermediate studies through Moodle.¹⁰ I live very far from the University but I would still like to study. (Finnish Survey Respondent 153)

In my opinion teaching should be offered also in Finnish because we need to develop the Finnish terminology within the museum field. (Finnish Survey Respondent 94)

There were of course some challenges to incorporating all of the feedback and suggestions into the new courses, and to accommodate every single suggestion would have been impossible. However, the exercise was invaluable, not only in planning content but also in understanding how best to manage the relationship between museum studies at the university and the wider museum community.

**Discussion**

Our collaborative efforts, in the time we had available, were significant for two main reasons. The involvement of museum professionals both in the delivery of museum studies courses and their design enables the current generation of ‘museum people’ (Hakamies 2017) to help develop the next. Approaching museum professionals for input and collaboration also acknowledges the potential limitations with university researchers
and teachers (especially when this responsibility falls to just one person), whose role is to provide museum studies and museology courses in a university setting.

These scholars can seldom combine their university work with a post at museums, a handicap which has repercussions for the degree of specialisation and experimentation with their contributions. This can often be alleviated by recruiting external professionals as guest lecturers at universities, and thus universities are becoming genuine forums where professionals from museums and from universities interact and work. (Lorente 2012, 246)

This was clearly reflected in both the questionnaire survey and in the consultation sessions where many participants were keen to offer their own input to course delivery. However, when using guest lecturers, it is important that the communication and goals of the teaching between the university and the museum professionals are done properly, noted in one survey response, which also reflected a dislike for a particular assessment tool common in Finland – the learning diary11:

I have unfortunate personal experience from my time as a student, when guest lecturers were poorly briefed before their lectures and thus they lacked a common thread. This shifts the responsibility of the overall content of the course to the students who have to write a learning diary about the lectures. (Finnish Survey Respondent 98)

Many museum professionals may have important experiences and practical skills from the museum sector but at the same time they might have lost touch with university teaching approaches. They might have only limited teaching skills and know very little about what the students expect from them. The issue of the teaching language is a challenge across the whole university, and indeed for universities across Europe generally, many of whom are dealing with the possibility of English as a common teaching language (Coleman 2006; Airey et al. 2017). On the other hand, English language courses are immediately open to international and exchange students, who likely do not have a sufficient (or any) grasp of Finnish language for courses offered only in Finnish.

The high preference indicated for student assignments that involve group project work and essays, as compared to examinations, points to learner-centred approaches of teaching, which are recognised as a beneficial approach encouraging active learning (McCabe and O’Connor 2014).

The transition of the museum studies courses in Helsinki from undergraduate ‘basic’ and ‘intermediate’ studies to a smaller number of credits at masters-level, has both advantages and disadvantages. Redeveloping the courses offered the opportunity to carry out the current research and allowed for the courses to run more frequently and in smaller groups. This was also acknowledged by one respondent: ‘Fabulous, that the museum studies teaching shifts from Bachelor’s-level to Master’s-level!’ (Finnish survey respondent 125).

On the other hand, certain aspects that were formerly available, such as the praktikum (work experience over two to three months in a museum for study credits) has disappeared. This may cause concern to some, especially given the positive feedback towards such experiences indicated in many responses. The praktikum period was also perceived as a possibility to help secure employment in the museum in the future and was thus probably considered both important and possibly lucrative. Studies elsewhere have emphasised the value of work experience and internships both to students and memory institutions, in terms of helping gain future employment and bridging the gap.
between theoretical and practical spheres (Hoy 2011). However, the work placement option still exists in the ‘major’ subjects of the master’s programme. It is entirely possible for a student to elect to do work experience in a museum as part of a related discipline’s praktikum, such as archaeology or art history. Thus, rather than ‘disappearing’ as an option, students will need to think in a more targeted way, ideally with support from the academic staff within and beyond museum studies, about how they use the options presented in other subject areas to augment their museum learning and experience.

Regarding the state of museum studies as a taught discipline, Suzanne MacLeod noted that:

A recognition of museum studies as training and education, research and practice, and as an area of enquiry made meaningful through participation and collaboration, enables us to recognise museum studies as an integral aspect of the current museum scene, one which can make a valuable contribution to the shaping and placing of the museum in contemporary society. (Macleod 2001, 59)

This observation strongly reflects the findings of our own study in Finland, in which there is clear indication that not only should the new courses integrate input from museum practitioners as well as researchers, but that they should also teach applicable skills for museum work.

In some ways this could challenge the theoretical standing of museology; iterations of the ‘new museology’ prize ‘intellectual or political or social or educational aspirations’ (Vergo 1997, 3) over the practical and technical aspects of museum work. Similarly ‘critical museology’ is seen as exploring power relations within museums and other heritage organisations, and examining the narratives, discourses, agencies, and other intangible forces that influence museum operations (Shelton 2013). On the other hand, as a field, museum studies ‘represents a shared community of discourse’ between both academics and practitioners (Rounds 2001, 196). It is important, in our view, that this discourse affects teaching as well as research.

**Conclusion**

To our knowledge this was the first time a survey about the development of a museum studies programme was done on this scale, certainly within the Nordic region. We gained valuable new information and feedback from both the museum sector and the past and present students. We have taken this information into use when planning the new study programme. At the same time this has been a valuable reminder of the fact that the evaluation process must be constant, repeating periodically. A very positive outcome of our survey, besides the large amount of responses, was the fact that many museum professionals were keen to offer their services as contributors to course contents. This proves, in our opinion, that museum studies has an important role not only within the university but also in the outside world. It also suggests that some consideration is needed for managing and maintaining these relationships, for example through a steering group for the courses, repeated evaluation, and through regular updates and communication with our museum professional partners.

At the time of writing, the new courses are just beginning. Student feedback from the first Museological Theory and Museum Collections courses indicate largely positive
reception, with students especially valuing ‘special access’ to particular museum professionals (e.g., through an interview assignment as well as guest lecturers) or to usually inaccessible places such as collection stores. Their generally good performance in the assessments also indicates a high level of engagement. The main area where students have been critical in their feedback thus far has indicated some anxiety at being challenged to write in different ways than usually expected within universities, for example in writing their collection policy documents. In practice most students performed well in this task, however, suggesting that although they felt uncomfortable at having to do something that was new to them, they actually managed to complete the assignment very well. We anticipate that there will be a period of readjustment – for the students to adjust to the new course options and how these courses fit into their overall degree programme and for those responsible for teaching the courses. It will take time and trial-and-error to fine-tune the delivery and interaction with museums.

The new courses are designed in a flexible way. In addition to ‘core’ courses on Museological Theory, Museum Collections, and Museum Project Management, students can choose additional courses from a range of optional courses. Many of these optional courses can be adjusted or even completely changed from year to year, based on demand, success of the course deliveries, and opportunities that may present themselves to collaborate with museums and other organisations in mutually beneficial ways. For example, a special option course will run in autumn 2018, taught by Wessman, in which students will develop a temporary exhibition on the Indian festival Durga Puja, working with two museums to tie in with a project led by the University of Helsinki’s South Asian Studies.

We have a longer-term ambition of expanding the museum studies courses further, offering a larger course package and perhaps even developing the discipline into a major-status subject at the University of Helsinki, or developing a dedicated degree programme much more closely focused on museum studies as a core element, rather than as an elective. Ultimately, we hope that our experiences with this exploration of wider museum sector perceptions of museum studies teaching can benefit museum studies curriculum beyond Finland, and perhaps point to a potential opportunity to carry out this kind of research in the future on a transnational scale.

Notes

1. The Bologna process ‘is a collective effort of public authorities, universities, teachers, and students, together with stakeholder associations, employers, quality assurance agencies, international organisations, and institutions, including the European Commission’ (see http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process_en).

2. ECTS stands for European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, and is a European Commission means of measuring study credits in different countries, helping with transparency and also for understanding how different studies and qualifications relate to each other for credit accumulation and transfer. See http://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/index_en.htm for further information.

3. In previous years, students wishing to take the intermediate studies have had to apply as the places are more limited than for the basic level studies. In practice this often means that the students who have achieved the highest grades at the basic level are more likely to be accepted to the intermediate studies.
4. In this new programme, students can elect to major in archaeology, art history, European ethnology, folklore, or religious studies. Minor study packages available to students in this programme include museum studies, cultural heritage studies, and digital humanities.

5. All translations to English from Finnish in this article are by [Wessman]

9. Additionally, one of the museum professionals had carried out their museological studies in Sweden.

10. Moodle is a web-based learning platform

11. A learning diary is a written assignment in which the student should go beyond simply describing the lessons in the course and critically reflect upon their own learning and development in relation to the course.

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