

## ***Collecting Norden in brief***

What is “Norden”? What efforts have been made to collect, define and communicate it within and outside of the Nordic countries? How have such perspectives changed through time, including those from a humanistic and scientific perspective? *Collecting Norden* investigates objects – including nature, man-made, physical and sensory – that were collected on touristic tours and scientific expeditions in the North of the Nordic countries with a focus on the 19th and the first decades of the 20th centuries. Many of these objects came into museums, were labelled “Northern” and would shape knowledge of the Nordic countries in politics and culture in the decades to come. Other objects never made it into those collections, but were crucial for understanding Norden at the time of their collection. *Collecting Norden* focuses on the Nordic North, here referring to both a geopolitical unity and a cultural concept that goes beyond geographical borders, which has had significant influence on the ideas and concepts of the Nordic countries and in extension, the so-called Nordic Model. It is based on the hypotheses that 1) there is a need to investigate the early stages of collecting Nordic objects in order to understand what constitutes “Norden”, 2) since the North played a particular important role in Nordic nation building since at least the late 19th century, it is vital to investigate images and narratives of the Nordic North created during this time, and 3) an investigation of objects that never made it into collections or are lost today will potentially disclose alternative Nordic narratives.

The **main objective of the project group** is to explore important historical, cultural and material preconditions for the discourse of the North and Norden from a crossdisciplinary perspective, and thus seek to make known alternative histories of the contemporary Nordic Model.

*Collecting Norden* focuses (but is not limited to) on objects gathered on travels to the Nordic North in the period between ca. the 1870s and the 1920s, more specifically on those objects that still exist in collections, and those that have vanished or never have been included in collections, and only are accessible to us through travel reports and illustrations. The overall ambition of the project is to examine the role of the North to the discourse of Norden by demonstrating the connections between travels in the Nordic North, the objects and collections retrieved from these travels, and the mobility and mediation of knowledge about Norden. “Objects” refers to tangible things collected in nature, such as rocks, insects, lichen and fur, to human made things such as utility articles, artefacts and art work (especially from the Sámi and Inuit communities), but also to uncollectable objects such as the Northern lights. In many cases notions of Norden manifest themselves only in the form of ideas, and we will therefore also include travel narratives, themselves objects that are important sources about other objects.

*Collecting Norden* focuses on the North of what in geopolitics today is called Norden, encompassing Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands. Its primary focus of research is on objects collected in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and the so-called European Arctic North of the Nordic countries.

The indigenous populations of the North have been, and in many cases continue to be, silenced in the discourses on the North and the Nordic. Likewise, the representation of objects and collections have largely been from actors *not* living in the North, meaning that the ideas of the Nordic North mainly have been generated from the Nordic South and beyond. However, there has been extensive contact with the northern indigenous peoples, through trade, tourism and scientific expeditions. Often, these journeys north and the collecting of objects had severe political, social and ecological implications, with the trophy hunting of reindeer as one of many examples. Recent debates and processes of repatriation of museum objects have re-contextualized and re-interpreted objects, and made visible the power structures behind collecting strategies and practices. *Collecting Norden* aims to contribute to this discussion by bringing forth silenced knowledge about objects from the Nordic North.

**Key concepts:** *Global Norden*: the objects, their history, their mediation and their use, have to be understood within a comparative and global context. A “glocal” (intersecting the local and global) perspective on Norden, through transnational and crossdisciplinary perspectives, is vital in this project. *Discourse of the North (and Norden)*: given that the different approaches in the project may all be understood as forms of discourse analysis. *Materiality*: By turning our attention to the materiality of the discourse of the North and the objects themselves, *Collecting Norden* aims to recognize the dynamics, mobility and networks of this discourse, and its implications for the notions of “the Nordic”.