

Celebrating Patents: the Swedish Patent Office’s Jubilee Exhibition of 1941

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During the summer of 1941, the Swedish National Museum of Science and Technology presented an exhibition called *Idé – Patent – Produkt* (Idea – Patent - Product). To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Swedish Patent Office, the state and the Swedish Association of Swedish Patent Agents (SPOF) funded this exhibition displaying Swedish inventions and the journey from idea, to patent, to a marketable industrial product. Presented in the press as a representation of the innovative spirit of Sweden, the exhibition featured uniforms worn by patent office employees, over 100 000 patent specifications and patented innovations such as the Primus stove, a harvester, and a multi-barreled machine gun.

This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of how techniques of visualization and popularization were used inside a museum space in order to legitimize the patent system as a whole but also the institutional expertise offered by the patent office. It will answer questions such as; How did the exhibition stage the various steps in the trajectory from idea to product? How were visitors educated on the role of the patent office? How was the design and conceptualization of patents and the patent office discussed during the phase leading up to the exhibition? What visual techniques were used to promote the patent office? The “visual turn” in law provides an opportunity to explore the management of the visualization of law and the perception of the legal system from citizens “outside” the IP system.

Recognizing how the IP system was exhibited and promoted to the general public represents an important dimension in understanding how intellectual property came to occupy its current position within knowledge infrastructures. In order to contextualize the exhibit, it will be compared to a similar exhibition, the “Hall of Inventions” that took place at the New York World’s Fair in 1940. By situating *Idé – Patent – Produkt* within the theoretical framework of exhibition studies and visual legal studies, my paper will focus on how the patent office presented itself as an essential player in the innovation process.

By studying administrative documents from the archive of the Swedish National Museum of Science and Technology together with magazines and newspapers, information about the preparation and the exhibition’s visual format can be attained. It is interesting to study how the patent office was displayed as a key actor in the representation of “Swedish entrepreneurial spirit.” In contrast to its UK and U.S. counterparts, the history of the Swedish Patent Office is basically unexplored. The patent office as an exhibitor is uncharted territory in both legal- and cultural studies and offers the possibility to understand more of how patents are presented as a carrier of knowledge, the visual representation and display of law inside a museum and how this representation was motivated by officials at the Patent Office.