

COLLECTINGNET

An international museum network for collecting issues

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NORDISKA MUSEET 
Samdok

Collectingnet is an international museum network for collecting issues created at the conference *Connecting Collecting* at Nordiska Museet, Stockholm in November 2007. Collectingnet invites museum professionals and scholars to take part in developing the network to a vital association and mouthpiece of international cooperation. The Newsletter will be published four times a year. We welcome contributions with reflections, conference/seminar reports, project presentations, specific questions you wish to raise, literature tips, invitations to cooperation or other themes. Please send your contribution to the next issue by **1 October** to collectingnet@nordiskamuseet.se. You can also contact the editors personally: catherine.marshall@artscouncil.ie, eva.fagerborg@nordiskamuseet.se, lotta.hyllen-cavallius@mkc.botkyrka.se

Disposal – The Declaration of Amsterdam

Arjen Kok

As Elin von Unge and Britta Söderqvist mentioned in their article 'In search of common grounds' (*Collectingnet Newsletter* No 1), the concluding discussion of the conference *Connecting Collecting* focused on general collection issues, rather than the act of collecting itself. Among these issues, one in particular caused a lively debate: disposal or de-accessioning.

Disposal has always been a difficult topic. In the Netherlands a few notorious disposal cases around 1990 were the reason that the Dutch Museum Association decided to translate the ICOM code of ethics and adopt it as the professional code. In 1987 the City of Hilversum decided to sell their Mondrian because they needed money to restore a monument. In 1989 Rudi Fuchs, director of the municipal museum in The Hague, asked the city council permission to sell two Picasso's and a Monet to raise the budget for contemporary art acquisitions.

The Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN) has been working on practical guidelines for museums to enable them to dispose of museum objects in accordance with the basic principles of the Code of Ethics. The most recent version was published on November 30 2006.

The English translation of the guidelines seemed a good occasion to make a survey of disposal policies in other EU countries. As one can imagine, the differences were large, varying from an absolute disapproval of disposal to a full acknowledgement of the necessity of this for museums.

On 28 March 2008, museum experts from twelve EU countries gathered in Amsterdam to discuss the differences and similarities in their approaches to deaccessioning and to explore possible common grounds. It turned out to be a lively discussion and a fruitful debate. The UK, the Netherlands, some Scandinavian countries and Germany have developed guidelines, rules and tools for disposal. Portugal, Spain, Greece and Romania seem less willing to accept disposal as part of collection management.

At the end of the day all experts worked on a report or conclusion, which is now being edited into a 'Declaration of Amsterdam'. The Declaration will be published later this year on the ICN website www.deaccessioning.eu.

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Deaccessioning on an international level

Dieuwertje Wijsmuller

As has been mentioned in the article by Arjen Kok above, deaccessioning, or disposal, is a much debated and difficult part of collections management. During the international experts meeting on deaccessioning, organised by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage on the 28th of March of this year, it became clear that states of mind still differ widely within the European Union.

This expert meeting informed my research on the possibilities and the needs for an international guideline on the deaccessioning of museum objects, as part of my Masters degree in Museology. Due to some cases where deaccessioning to foreign countries was a preferred option, but proved impossible, I wanted to get to know the positions of the countries within the European Union.

One of the conclusions of the research is that there is still too little consensus on the different aspects of deaccessioning to create an international policy on the subject. Opinions on, for instance, the use of sale as an accepted form of deaccessioning vary a lot. Where Great Britain is busy searching for more approaches to the use of sale as a means of disposal, Denmark points out that items that enter the national collection lose their monetary value, making it impossible to sell them again.

Where most of those interviewed did agree, was that there is a great need to share knowledge, communicating different ideas, and information. At the moment there is too little international dialogue. This fits exactly with the reasons why Collectingnet has been created. The Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage decided to open an online portal on deaccessioning, where all possible information is gathered on deaccessioning in the Member States of the European Union. Different case studies on deaccessioning will be published, giving the space for registered users to share their opinions, questions or information.

Please do visit www.deaccessioning.eu and subscribe yourself. It is then, that we together can keep the discussion on deaccessioning alive, for shared knowledge leads to mutual understanding, which in itself can lead to consensus on this difficult subject.

If you have any questions or remarks, please do contact me.

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The daring dreams are coming true: the general catalogue of the collection of the Latvia museum

Ilze Knoka

This year Latvia museum society is celebrating the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the first Law on Museums. To look back at these years and to compare the initial goals with the current situation, three conferences have been planned for this year by the State Authority for Museums. The first conference took place on April 9 and was devoted to the core of museum work – collections – under the title *National Museum Collections – a resource for education, science and social development*.

The most interesting ideas expressed in this conference and the most consistent within the framework of the Collectingnet were those connected with the accessibility of the collection. As for accessibility, the big celebratory day for National Collections of the Museums of Latvia was

the same day, April 9, as this was also the first day when the general catalogue of the collections of the Latvia museums became available online. Of course, there is still a long way to go to import information from the numerous separate and differently organised card indexes used and processed in museums to the new joint catalogue, but the pilot project for this has been completed now and part of our national collection can be seen there (www.nmkk.lv).

After the applause greeting this momentous event ended (it was one of the most daring goals set during the last ten years when the lack of resources made it seem impossible), the next task was immediately initiated by the leader of the project Una Balode. Certainly, a big advantage arising from the existence of the catalogue is easily

accessible information about the material stored in the museums, which is of the highest importance for museum people in their every day practise and for those involved in all kinds of research or publishing. However, there is a much wider audience to be targeted – museums visitors, frequent visitors and those who have not yet started to come into the museum.

Thinking about these audiences and the users of the catalogue, the next task of the project was set out: to ensure that the information and its presentation in the catalogue is interesting, attractive, and encouraging, with easy cross-references etc. What ever the future may bring, whether it be interactive opportunities like games or individual online collections and exhibitions or something not yet imagined, a strong and lasting bridge between the treasures of the museum and the user is to be built via this online product. To put it in other words, we must ensure that the content of the catalogue can bring contentment to its users and escape the fate of some rich but less attractive museums.

Accessibility to the material amassed by museums was the central theme of a presentation by the

outstanding museum director of Rundale Castle, the art historian Imants Lancmanis. Words such as 'generous' or even 'magnanimous' and 'collegiate' were employed when talking about cooperation and long-term loans of objects to other museums. However emotional or somewhat metaphorical these adjectives might seem in the context of universal or global museums, lending is still not the most accepted approach. It is not the ownership of the object so much as the most appropriate, fruitful and inspiring exhibition environment and context for the objects in museum collections that matters when we talk about accessibility of the national heritage. Whether the display is of a historical ensemble or an aggressively modern juxtaposition of the old objects and their contemporary setting, the important thing is that the objects and the activities arranged around and through the material should be planned so that the distance between the collection and the owner (i.e. society) shrinks from day to day. In a world where the numbers of items in the collection are prioritised over the numbers of users this is a very promising approach.

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Photography as a tool in contemporary studies

Ingrid M Nilsson & Anna Ulfstrand

Photography is a medium widely used at most museums. In our daily work at Malmö Museums and Stockholm County Museum respectively, we are focusing on collecting older and contemporary photographic materials as well as collecting photographic materials as an independent means of studying the present day. It was after the *Connecting Collecting* conference held at Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, in the autumn of 2007 that we decided to see if our colleagues within Collectingnet are interested in discussing issues concerning photography from a museum's perspective. We have identified a number of different areas that need to be discussed and improved.

It is the interaction between text and image in contemporary studies that we are interested in. How are images being used, as illustrations, or as an independent medium? It is our experience that ethnological fieldwork and photographic documentation rarely walk hand in hand. How does this affect the result?

It is our view that a continuous method development needs to be deployed when it comes to both photographic documentation and interviewing, each

documentation leading to an in-depth analysis of the material gathered. How can it be used today, and is it reasonable to think that the material will be relevant to scholars in the future?

Another important question worth discussing is how we should best review and improve methods to relate the images generated by our museums to the stream of images generated elsewhere in society. How do we tackle the enormous flux of images that people use when communicating with each other via e-mail and SMS? This is a question that has become increasingly important in a globalised world where a great many people keep in touch with friends and relatives through different mediums. And, last but not least, what is the responsibility of museums for collecting the multitude of photos being spread across the "public space" today?

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During November and December 2007, an ethnologist and a photographer documented church life in Kista, Stockholm. In this church many congregations share the space. Here the Eritrean priest gives his blessing to a small child. The image is now part of the exhibition *For God's sake – the holy room of Church*.

Photo: Mattias Ek, Stockholm County Museum



From the project *In the same city*, Marcelo describes his room: "This place is like a dream to me. A fantasy I have built by stages, of gifts from different countries, impulse buying, trash from the streets of Malmö – but above all with love for life." Photo: Jenny Thornell, Malmö Museums.