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LONG-TERM LOANS: A PROPOSAL WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

The term 'long-term loan' refers to the lending of objects by one museum to another in the same country or abroad for a period of time beyond the usual one to six months, which is standard practice for short-term loans. This article will look at long-term loans as one arm of collections management. All the possible advantages or disadvantages, obstacles and benefits, will be examined based on selected examples. Finally, I shall attempt to show that, if more and more museums were to adopt this practice, it could provide solutions to many issues related to the display, promotion and accessibility of museum collections in accordance with the third principle of the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* (ICOM 2006: 6).¹ In my opinion, this practice opens up new horizons for the knowledge society not just for the benefit of the academic community, but for anyone interested in art and culture. Moreover, as Aristotle said, 'all men by nature desire knowledge'.

LONG-TERM LOANS AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

The practice of making long-term loans is widespread and can be traced back more than half a century to 1958 when the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam initiated a series of reciprocal loans with the National Gallery in London (Jyrkkiö 2009: 25). As far as I know, this is the first example of lending on a long-term basis. Nevertheless, there was still a lengthy process of discussions ahead over the complex issue of collections management before these matters were sufficiently clarified to be emphatically stated at every opportunity in international meetings and committees. Thus, collections mobility emerged as a priority for European countries, with the first seed perhaps being planted at the conference that took place in 2003 at Delphi.² Other conferences and seminars followed: in Naples,³ The Hague,⁴ Manchester,⁵ Helsinki,⁶ and Munich⁷ as did the publications *Lending to Europe, Recommendations on Collection Mobility for European Museums* (Lending 2005) and *Action Plan for the EU Promotion of Museums Collections' Mobility and Loan Standards* (Action Plan 2006).

Consequently, the process of working out the issues involved in collections mobility is nearly complete in spring 2010. This process can be split into two phases. The first, during the Austrian presidency of the European Union, involved the creation of six working groups that were responsible for resolving particular issues regarding collections mobility. In the second phase, the mobility of collections was made a priority in the European Commission's Action Plan for Culture (2008–2010). Long-term loans have been the subject of a study by a sub-group of the OMC Mobility of Collections. This sub-group applied itself assiduously to the job in hand until it came up with the final text of the *Long-Term Loans Best Practices Report* in 2009 (Jyrkkiö 2009).

ADVANTAGES

A legal framework is a useful way of ensuring more widespread acceptance and the implementation of long-term loans. In Greece, for example, the new law for the 'Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in general', which was passed in 2002, allows for the long-term loan of antiquities for up to five years with the possibility of renewal. Similar legislation, allowing for loans of between three and five years, is also in force in some other member states.

We can sum up the advantages of adopting the practice of long-term loans and rank them in order of importance with reference to actual examples as follows:

1. The first and perhaps most important advantage is the contribution that long-term loans make to enriching museums' permanent collections. Loans can further develop, supplement, clarify and reinforce the museological thinking behind a permanent exhibition or even some themed exhibit and can help increase familiarity with a particular period of art.

This tactic, of enriching collections for the purposes mentioned above, seems to be the most widespread. Let us take the example of the reciprocal loans between three Flemish museums, the Groeninge Museum in Bruges, the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent, which have made some hitherto rarely exhibited works more accessible (Jyrkkiö 2009: 18) or, alternatively, the loans from the Ateneum Art Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki to the Art Museum of South Karelia, which helped create a more comprehensive presentation in a themed exhibit on the subject of war (Jyrkkiö 2009: 19). Two examples from the Greek experience may also be useful. The first concerns the creation of a monothematic museum on the Olympic Games in Antiquity in the context of the Athens Olympics of

2004. In order to develop the subject as fully as possible, it was decided to borrow antiquities from 22 public archaeological museums throughout Greece, which, displayed alongside works from the collections of the Museum of Olympia, were a significant help in explaining the Olympic experience in antiquity. Since the works belonged to public collections, there was no need for contracts to be signed, but the loans were initially approved for five years by a ministerial decision. The second example concerns two long-term loans made to the new Acropolis Museum. They involved two fragments from the Parthenon marbles, one from the Vatican Museum and the other from the Antonio Salinas Archaeological Museum in Palermo, Sicily.

2. Long-term loans can also be granted in return for the restitution of a work to its country of origin by another museum, which had hitherto possessed it legally. A typical example is the agreement between the Antikensammlung in Pergamon Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture for the return of architectural sculpture from the Philippeion at Olympia, which had been excavated by the German Archaeological Institute in the late nineteenth century (Jyrkkiö 2009: 22). The agreements between the Italian state and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu (Jyrkkiö 2009: 23) and with the Staatliche Museen in Berlin (Jyrkkiö 2009: 21) are also considered extremely important. These examples show the usefulness of long-term loans in developing relations of trust between states to the benefit of scholarly knowledge and collaboration.
3. Another aspect of the museum world that may have benefited from the practice of long-term loans – and that should definitely not be overlooked – is the conservation of antiquities and works of art. A museum, lacking a fully equipped conservation laboratory for specialist projects, can come to an agreement with another museum, which will carry out the job and undertake to meet the expenses involved and will subsequently exhibit the works in the context of a long-term loan. One such example is that of the Svishtov Museum of History in Bulgaria, which lent artefacts to the Poznan National Museum in Poland, which undertook their conservation (Jyrkkiö 2009: 21).
4. An equally important reason for encouraging long-term loans – and that combines scholarly aims with practical ones – is the overcrowding in museum storage space. For example, the Historical Museum in Amsterdam loaned the Staatliche Museen in Berlin a painting from its overflowing reserve collection. Apart from the fact that it was taking up a lot of room in storage, there was next to no possibility of it being displayed in the museum to which it belonged (Jyrkkiö 2009: 25).

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From the above examples, it is clear that:

- without the agreement between the three Flemish museums, the public would never have become acquainted with these loaned works that had not previously been displayed;
- without the loans from two Finnish museums to a third, or the loans from 22 Greek museums to a newly established one in Olympia, some specially themed exhibits would have been presented in an incomplete fashion;
- without the agreement between Germany and Greece, the partial reconstruction of an important monument would have been impossible;

- without the agreement between Italy and museums in the United States, important examples of cultural heritage would not have been definitively restored to the country in which they originated;
- without the agreement between Bulgaria and Poland important art works would not have been conserved;
- finally, thanks to the agreement between a Dutch and a German Museum, on the one hand, storage space was freed up and, on the other hand, a work was exhibited that, in all probability, would never otherwise have been put on display.

SOME MISGIVINGS

It has become evident from the foregoing that there are many advantages in implementing the practice of long-term loans, even when they are for restricted periods of time. Nevertheless, many countries have expressed reservations about adopting this practice. However, just by using the *Long-Term Loans Best Practices Report* it is not difficult to show that no obstacle is insuperable. For example, the complicated texts of the loan agreements can be simplified.

The preliminary negotiations that are required to reach an agreement between the two interested parties usually require some time. However, this should not be construed as an obstacle, as the final version of the loan agreement must be approached with exceptional care. Anxiety about the security of the works, and in some cases the high cost of insuring them as well, should not be an inhibiting factor now that many European countries have legislated for a system of state indemnity, while others are currently debating adopting similar legislation.

Moreover, we should not forget that prolonging the term of loans, i.e. choosing longer-term loans over short-term ones, results in an actual reduction of the expenses required to complete the setting up of exhibitions. There are also some other obstacles concerning the implementation of the practice of long-term loans as mentioned in the *Long-Term Loans Best Practices Report*, such as confidentiality or the superiority of one museum over another, but, in my opinion, these are fears rather than obstacles.

In other words, any misgivings or anxieties that have been expressed are less significant than the benefits that result from the use of long-term loans. All issues could be overcome with good intentions and mutual understanding and confidence.

CONCLUSION

Because they seem to sum up the benefits arising from the widespread use of long-term loans in the best possible way, I will end by quoting two crucial statements from the relevant literature: ‘Museums are a link between Europe’s heritage and the citizens of today and tomorrow’ (*Lending* 2005: 6) and ‘The long-term loans offer new possibilities for study, restoration, exchange of experience and training’ (*Action Plan* 2006: 7). Some countries, such as Spain and the United Kingdom have already launched initiatives to promote the practice (Jyrkkö 2009: 10–11 and 20).

To sum up, long-term loans, with all their important advantages, presuppose and promote the development of relations between museums and their personnel, the establishment of trust between peoples – with mutual respect for the differences between them – and the awareness of a common European heritage. These are the goals on which we should be focusing all of our efforts.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 ‘Museums have particular responsibilities to all for the care, accessibility and interpretation of primary evidence collected and held in their collections’.
- 2 *Enhancement and Promotion of Cultural Heritage* (Athens–Delphi, 17–19 March 2003).
- 3 *What Standards and Management Models for the European Museums?* (Naples, 9–10 October 2003).
- 4 *Museum Collections on the Move* (The Hague, 28–29 October 2004).
- 5 *Increasing the Mobility of Collections* (Manchester, 27–28 November 2005).
- 6 *Encouraging the Mobility of Collections* (Helsinki, 19–21 July 2006).
- 7 *Mobility of Collections in Europe: Crossing Borders* (Munich, 15–17 April 2007).

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