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TRUST AND NETWORKING

‘Europe is a rich and colourful tapestry which is unique on a global scale.’ These words by the British historian Timothy Garton Ash perfectly apply to both the European museums’ comprehensive and diverse collections as well as to their high potential in a globalised world. Manifold museum collections not only keep record of a cultural heritage and cultural identity but also a record of the united Europe’s plurality. To ensure that this heritage is being highly benefited, it has to be ensured that European citizens have access to these cultural treasures. In this respect, the mobility of museum collections is a fundamental contribution on the way to a common European identity.

As already stated in the *Lending to Europe Report*, the mobility of museum collections is ideally based on the principle of reciprocity. Nevertheless, there may be good reasons for preventing a specific object or a group of objects from travelling. However, common standards, trust, and professional networks can help encourage institutions to share cultural exchanges and to encourage the transnational circulation of museum objects. Establishing a common European cultural area should not only be based on legal guidelines or directives but also on a change of practice that is conducted by all the parties involved. On the one hand, a trustworthy framework and common standards are needed and, on the other hand, mutual trust is an essential tool for the mobility of collections. The German proverb ‘Trust is good, control is better’ seems to be simple and true. However, what if control, as a reliable instrument, fails?

Practical recommendations, guidelines, and common standards are tools that help institutions to share cultural objects. However, those tools can only serve their needs when they are published on the national and international levels. In addition, sharing cultural heritage means more than just following guidelines and standards: it is based on mutual trust, which again is based on cooperative and loyal teamwork. In this respect, professional networks play a significant role while discussing the mobility of museum collections.

During the German EU Presidency in 2007, the conference ‘Mobility of Collections – Building up Trust and Networking’ focused on this topic and served as an international discussion forum. The conference was concluded with the *Bremen Declaration on the Mobility of Museum Collections*. It stated that it is a key task in each European member state to recognise at the political level that the larger European museums have already developed extensive co-operation in a number of activities. The *Bremen Declaration on the Mobility of Museum Collections* also called upon these large museums to increase their co-operation with smaller institutions within the museum community: small and medium-sized museums were strongly encouraged to participate in the important activity of sharing collections between member states and making them available to all European citizens.

TRUST AND STANDARDS

First of all, it has to be defined as to whether general and basic principles of trust exist – and, if yes, which principles these are. Do museum professionals in more than 30,000 institutions throughout Europe follow similar values? Since the educational background of museum professionals varies from institution to institution and from country to country, a general principle of trust has to be questioned. However, a framework for professional behaviour is the different ethical codes. The first one was published in 1918 by the German Museums Association (Deutscher Museumsbund 1918), followed by the first code of ethics by the American Association of Museums in 1925. It took until the 1970s, however, until many professional networks started to work on their own ethical codes and guidelines. ICOM, the International Council of Museums issued its *Ethics of Acquisition* in 1970 and a full *Code of Professional Ethics* in 1986. Like its precursors, the present *Code of Professional Ethics* that is available in 20 different languages, provides a global minimum standard on which national and specialist groups can build in order to meet their particular requirements.

A keyword within the discussion on the mobility of collections is communication. None of the classical museum tasks – from collecting, keeping, and researching to educating – can be fulfilled without successful communication. It is a prerequisite for co-operation, not only on a local or regional level but also especially with teamwork on an international scale. Communication has to be ensured between the staff members of large museums, which are already operating in international networks, as well as between small and middle-sized institutions that are partly run by volunteers but also eager to participate in sharing a common European heritage. As everywhere, communication has to happen at eye level, combined with information about proceedings and actions on an international scale. Projects that run in col-

laboration with other museums are a good opportunity to meet colleagues, build good personal relationships, and establish trust for the future. In addition, positive communication is also an indispensable condition for the understanding of different European mentalities and approaches. Trust within the museum sector may also be established by training courses as well as an exchange between staff members. This not only improves knowledge and communication but also helps to work on common standards – museologically and technically.

Nevertheless, human trust does not agree with mere logic: the museum world meets legal conditions with reluctance and scepticism, and lawyers in a museum are a rather rare species. However, dealing informally with the exchange of cultural assets, mainly based on trust, carries legal risks. This would be manageable and avoidable given proper legal consultation. Law can provide a reliable working basis for the mobility of collections. The trustful co-operation of the participating institutions and persons can profit from this if the legal framework is familiar, and if confidence in legal instruments is strengthened. In this context, the development of common European standards may be helpful.

NETWORKING AND STANDARDS

As mentioned hereinabove, common museum projects encourage communication and trust between museum professionals and thereby serve as small networks. Even when the project has ended, personal contact between colleagues may persist and – encouraged by mutual trust – may be used as a starting point for future collaboration.

There is also a huge number of organised museum networks, operating on the regional and international levels. As associations or councils, they give advice, and are responsible for funding programmes, organising professional training courses and conferences, or developing standards and thereby encouraging the mobility of European museum collections.

In all actions related to the EU initiative of the mobility of collections NEMO, the Network of European Museum Organisations, was strongly involved. The network was founded in 1992, and comprises museum organisations within the EU as well as representatives from countries associated with the EU. It is supported by the European Union budget ‘Bodies Active at the European Level in the Field of Culture’.

Regarding the mobility of collections, NEMO contributed to the development of the Action Plan and to the different international working groups

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that were supporting the implementation of the paper. As lending and borrowing for exhibitions are core activities of museums, the *Lending to Europe Report* already recommended that NEMO should develop European guidelines to increase the mobility of collections.

In the summer of 2005, NEMO, therefore, carried out a survey within the EU member countries. Approximately 360 different loan contracts and best practice examples were collected, examined, and in turn resulted in the NEMO Standard Loan Agreement that was launched in November 2007. This document is applicable to all kinds of museums and seeks to encourage them to increase their activities regarding the lending and borrowing of works of arts throughout Europe. It covers information about the lender, borrower, as well as the objects being lent. Furthermore, it provides details about the exhibition as well as data on the insurance and cost figures. In order to make the handling of information easier for the lender and borrower, the Loan Agreement is accompanied by separate Loan Conditions. These are an integral part of the Loan Agreement and state the lender's stipulations for the loan(s) listed in the Loan Agreement. To facilitate the use of the document by every museum in Europe, NEMO has developed an online-toolkit that enables museums – both as lenders and borrowers – to create their individual loan document online, in accordance with the specific conditions and requirements of each museum and object (www.ne-mo.org).

ICOM, the International Council of Museums, is the largest network of the professional museum sector. Members in more than 130 countries participate in the national, regional, and international activities of the organisation. Regional alliances such as ICOM-Europe provide a forum for the exchange of information and co-operation among national committees, museums, and professional museum workers in the region for which they are established. The cornerstone of ICOM is its *Code of Ethics for Museums*. It sets the minimum standards of professional practice and performance for museums and their staff. In joining the organisation, ICOM members undertake to abide by the *Code of Ethics for Museums* (<http://icom.museum/ethics.html>).

Consisting of international members from museums and institutions, the Large Exhibition Organisers BIZOT Group is named after Irène Bizot, the former director general of the French Réunion des Musées Nationaux. This exhibitors' group was founded in 1992 and has continued to meet regularly since then. The group acts as an informal authority that deals with the every-

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day problems surrounding exhibitions and strives for the harmonisation of processes and fosters co-operation on the international level. Until recently, discussions only comprised of questions concerning exhibition politics. Today, however, topics concerning museum politics such as new acquisitions, illegal purchasing of pieces of art, returning, long-term loans, etc. are also discussed. The co-operation of the group has strengthened the personal contacts amongst the directors. Due to the resulting trust, exhibition projects that were inconceivable in the past are now feasible.

Another international network is EMAC, the European Museum Advisors Conference. The volunteer and informal network started in 1992 on the initiative of the Area Museum Councils in the UK and of the Provincial Museum Advisors in the Netherlands. A first conference was organised with the objective to create a forum for the discussion and exchange of ideas for museum advisors and museum support organisations in Europe. Since then, other conferences have taken place, every two or three years, depending on the goodwill and finances of the organising institution. In between the meetings, the members of the network keep in touch on an ad hoc basis and cooperate on specific projects. Regardless of the fact that it is informal and cannot rely on funding, EMAC has achieved some significant goals and has proven to be an important arena where topics that are fundamental to the issue of trust are explored and discussed, such as quality in museum work, the development and application of standards, a broad strategic approach to the care, documentation, and conservation of collections, legislation, and organisational frameworks in the different European countries.

An important contribution to the mobility of European museum collections are the assets of the European Registrars Group, which provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and expertise between registrars, collection managers, and other museum professionals. The group emerged from the UK Registrars Group, which was founded in 1979. This strives to establish and promote standards of good professional practice through publications and seminars and to support the national and international standards in the relevant fields of work. Particular emphasis is placed on documentation and records, physical care, loans and exhibition logistics, and cultural sector legislation. The most valuable documents and widespread standards from the UK Registrars Group are the facilities report (accompanied by a display case supplement and a security supplement) and the courier guidelines. The facilities report enables lenders to assess the practicalities involved in making loans. It is intended to help both borrowers and lenders identify potential problems and reach agreement on how these can be resolved. The courier guidelines aim at all people who either organise or carry out courier duties primarily, but are also intended to be widely relevant to the care and transit of a range of objects for any purpose, whether they are loans or acquisitions (www.ukregistrarsgroup.org/publications).

Networking is carried out on a mutual, loose, or close relationship basis between a number of stakeholders on the principle of co-operation. The objectives are the exchange of ideas, capabilities, resources, or working methods. Co-operation between museum networks operates on different scales – on the regional and international levels. The different regional museum organisations (e.g. in the U.K., the Netherlands, Germany, or Austria) not only closely work together with each other but also with their respective national organisations. In addition, cross-border activities between regional museum associations are to be mentioned. National museum organisations are also members of NEMO and frequently cooperate with their national ICOM committees. Similar cooperation exists between national registrars or museum advisors' groups. In addition to networks, which are organised in structured bodies, the museum sector also has a large number of personal or social networks: groups of museum professionals that share common topics or objectives – often dealt with later on by organised bodies.

THE COMMON OBJECTIVE

Standards, trust, and networking are key elements in sharing museum collections. Moreover, since common interests far outweigh the formal differences, there is a great opportunity for the development of European standards to be followed by small, medium, and large museum institutions. European-wide codes of practice, employment of specialist museum staff, transport arrangements, standard documentation procedures and forms, and indemnity/insurance and customs arrangements are all needed. In addition, what already has been developed has to be widely communicated on a national scale. This, together with a continual increase of trust, understanding, and networking, will be the challenge faced for the future.

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