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**COLLECTIONS MOBILITY****— STEPPING FORWARD**

Our collections are meant to be displayed, researched, interpreted, and kept for the audiences of today and generations to come. Museum collections flourish at their best when they are used and researched properly. In order to strengthen the use of collections, the museum community needs tools and practical guidance. Professional networks, such as the International Group of Organizers of Large-scale Exhibitions (known as the Bizot Group) and Registrars Group, already provide platforms for developing the practices. Developing the collections can also be initiated from the political level: the European Commission and the impact of the European Agenda for Culture have their say in harmonising the practices and creating innovative ways to respond to the growing need for co-operation between museums.

When museums were founded and private collectors contributed to nation building by donating their lifetime achievements to the public institutions, the driving force was to enforce the aims of enlightenment. Then, the public museums were a tool to educate the nation. Two hundred years later, the field is different. Museums form a great part of the culture industry and the number of museums is still growing. New museums and collections are being introduced and the number of objects is reaching new records. From billions of museum objects, only a fraction is displayed or used. Still, museums are making more purchases year after year. The accumulation of material is one of the great concerns for the museums of today.

The essential question is what are the museums preserving, to whom and why, and according to which strategy? Are the museums doing the right things? If yes, are they doing them right? On the other hand, are we just repeating a pattern of collecting that once created is never questioned again?

Therefore, we should be ready to ask questions such as has collecting, hoarding, piling, and preserving as an activity come to a turning point? Museums are sustainable by nature but at a certain point, when storages are filled with B- or C-category objects, they are in danger of becoming huge wastelands of

forgotten and unused objects – or cemeteries as was suggested in the famous *Manifesto of Futurism* by Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, published on the front page of the *Le Figaro* in 1909:

Museums: public dormitories where one lies forever beside hated or unknown beings.  
Museums; absurd abattoirs of painters and sculptors ferociously macerating each other with color-blows and line-blows, the length of the fought-over walls! (Marinetti 1909).

Whereas museums are collecting and storing more, as if trying to master the Hegelian narrative, they are also competing with each other on the market. The more funds one has and the better networks, the more prominent collection one can build. Instead of trying to buy more items or missing links of the great master narrative to the collection, museums should seek alternative routes to strengthen the collection profiles.

Artist Robert Motherwell had already criticised American art museums in the 1960s for building similar collections for every city. You encountered the same selection of artists everywhere as if they were only one story to be told.

But as the general situation is, everywhere in America one sees the same Main Street, same Woolworth's, same Coca-Cola, same chain drugstore, same movie, same motel, same fried shrimps, and the same local museum reflecting in the same lesser way the same big museum. O sameness! (Motherwell 1961).

In order to understand the origins and character of the collections, the museums should put some more effort into collection research thereby enabling us to use the collections better and more effectively. The museums should encourage our staff to move around, study more, exchange experiences with other professionals, and strengthen the links to universities.

The academic world has reacted to this need by such initiatives as the *Making National Museums* – network governed by universities in Linköping (SE), Oslo (NO), and Leicester (UK) and resulting in a publication in 2010. Another initiative, a project called *Eunamus*, is mapping the collection history of the European national museums 1750–2010 and analysing the roles of the museums in contemporary society from various points of departures. The project aims to conduct a comparative study of the formation of national museums in Europe and deliver a rich picture of national museums in all their social, political, and intellectual complicity ([www.eunamus.eu](http://www.eunamus.eu)). Comprehensive museum and collection histories covering the development of the national museum field or individual institutions support these aims and objectives. In-depth research increases the general understanding concerning the value of the collections, and the use and existence of the museums (see the bibliography).

Whereas research creates the context and provides argumentation for the better use of the collections, the museum community needs practical tools for that to be realised. There are several steps that have already been taken on a national and European Union level, the most ambitious initiative being Collections Mobility – project.

## **MOBILITY CONFERENCES AND PUBLICATIONS**

Museum collections and their use became an issue within the European Union in the early 2000s. One of the key actors to promote the paradigm change was the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. In preparing for its presidency of the European Union in 2004, the ministry became aware of the potential of culture heritage and European added value. After several twists and turns, including questions addressed to the European Commission, and answers provided by the Commissioner, the topic was taken to the European agenda. It was discussed for the first time in 2003 in Athens and Delphi where the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Receipts Fund organised a conference *Enhancement and Promotion of Cultural Heritage of European Significance* (see the CM timeline).

After the conference in Greece, debates have taken place in various conferences and seminars in Italy, the Netherlands, Finland, Germany, and Spain, just to mention a few. The overall themes of the conferences have covered the promotion of cultural heritage, management standards and models, increasing and encouraging the mobility of collections, as well as trust and networking. The central message has been very clear: all time and effort should be given to lower the threshold for co-operation between museums. The overall aim is to produce practical advice and guidance benchmarking of the good ideas that already being used.

The first key document, *Lending to Europe. Recommendations on Collection Mobility for European Museums* was published in 2005. Subject areas and recommendations have pointed out the general principles and museum expertise connected to lending and borrowing practices between museums. Separate issues were highlighted, such as valuation, different options for insurances, indemnity, immunity from seizure, long-term loans and loan fees, publication and copyright, as well as digitisation and trust. Substantial appendices covered the reasons to lend or not to lend, Work Plan for Culture 2005/2006, ICOM Code of Ethics for museums, general principles on loans and exchange of cultural goods between institutions, UKRG standard facilities report and value, non-insurance, as well as indemnity and insurance (*Lending to Europe 2005*).

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The present set of recommendations aims to encourage collection mobility, both by stimulating a larger number of European institutions to share in cultural exchanges within Europe and by redressing the imbalance vis-à-vis financially stronger and better equipped partners outside Europe (*Lending to Europe* 2005, 1).

Recommendations were written by an individual expert group chaired by Ronald de Leeuw, director of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Members of the group represented different fields of expertise ranging from cultural history to art and from small organisations to large ones.

A year later, *Action Plan for the EU Promotion of Museum Collections' Mobility and Loan Standards* saw daylight. The general objectives were listed as well as the key areas that needed extra care and attention. The Action Plan aims to facilitate access to Europe's cultural heritage, make it available for all citi-

zens, and find new ways to improve co-operation, trust, and good practice for lending between museums. In practise, this means harmonising practices where it can be done easily or at least with reasonable effort, and offering tools for museums to use – special attention being placed on smaller stakeholders and new member states that might lack the basic set of agreements, facilities, conditions reports, etc.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing the *Action Plan* required gathering the basic information concerning the collection practices in the member states. The work started in working groups that concentrated on loan administration and loan standards, state indemnity schemes, valuation, self-insurance and non-insurance of cultural objects, immunity from seizure, loan fees and long-term loans, building up trust/networking, and digitisation. Several inquiries were sent to the member states and results analysed. These groups worked in 2006–2007 and came out with a set of guidelines, recommendations, surveys, declarations, definitions, and model agreements. Examples include Loan Fees and Loan Costs Recommendations, Long-Term Loans Definition, Long-Term Loan Conditions, and *Bremen Declaration* on networking and trust between museums ([www.lending-for-europe.eu](http://www.lending-for-europe.eu)).

As it was stated in the *Bremen Declaration*, at the Collections Mobility Conference in Bremen in May 2007,

It is a key task in each European member state to recognize at the political level that the larger European museums have already developed extensive co-operation in a number of activities. These large museums are now called upon to increase their co-operation with smaller institutions within the museum community. Small and medium sized museums should also now be strongly encouraged to participate in the important activity of sharing collections between member states and making them available to all European citizens.

Implementing the *Action Plan 2006* formed a basis for the second phase of the Collections Mobility work. The Commission Communication on a *European Agenda for Culture in a globalizing world* in 2007 launched a wider reflection on the role of culture as a key element of the European integration process. The Agenda listed three objectives: the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; the promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs; and the promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations.

In order to implement these objectives, the European Agenda for Culture introduced a new method for co-operation, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) that was supposed to respond to the need for a more structured system of co-operation between member states and EU Institutions. Four Expert Groups were formed, and then they started working with themes such as the links between culture and education, the mobility of artists and other cultural professionals, the potential of cultural and creative industries and museum activities, and the mobility of collections.

These working groups are intended to feed into the political reflections at the EU level and make concrete contributions through identifying, sharing, and validating best practices, preparing recommendations for specific measures for their implementation, making proposals for co-operation initiatives between member states or at the EC level and for elements of methodology to evaluate progress, as well as formulating policy recommendations (*Final Report and Recommendations to the Cultural Affairs Committee on Improving the Means of Increasing the Mobility of Collections 2010*).

OMC Expert Group on Collections Mobility, chaired by Hillary Bauer (UK) and Rosanna Binacchi (Italy), started its work in 2008. The Group aimed to continue promoting Collections Mobility by deepening the key themes and collecting more data concerning the better use of the collections.

Sub-working groups have covered themes such as state indemnity and insurances, immunity from seizure/illicit traffic, long-term loans, prevention of theft and illicit traffic, and exchange of expertise. The groups have produced new data concerning the use of the collections, outlined best practices, and written guidelines that provided an essential set of recommendations for the final report handed over to the Commission in June 2010. Some of the key documents and reports were made available at the NEMO (Network of European Museums Associations) website already during the process.

The OMC Expert Group on Collections Mobility Report covers a number of major themes that will help to increase the mobility of collections. Such themes include the value of co-operation and reciprocity, the need to reduce the costs of lending and borrowing, the need to explore new (non-traditional) modalities of mobility, and the importance of assessing the essential requirements for due diligence in researching the provenance of cultural objects. In addition, issues such as communication, raising awareness, and education through sharing the heritage and collections are being highlighted. A summary of the key recommendations from all the groups concentrates on promoting due diligence/prevention of illicit traffic, exploring possibilities of facing problems tied to immunity from seizure, promoting the use of state indemnity schemes on a reciprocal basis, promoting long-term loans, and promoting the mobility of professionals as an essential activity for the

mobility of collections by creating shared trust and knowledge between museums (*Final Report 2010*).

More detailed recommendations were addressed at different levels (commission, member states, museum community, professional groups, and networks). The recommendations are based on the reports and key findings of the sub-groups. For example, on the grounds of the experiences gathered from the member states, the potentially high cost for insurance against risk of loss or damage can be substantially reduced or even eliminated. Therefore, according to one of the suggested recommendations, the member states should eliminate all the obstacles for accepting state indemnities as an alternative to commercial insurance against risk of loss or damage to an object.

The OMC work has been strongly supported by the Collections Mobility 2.0 – project that obtained funding from the Cultural Programme in 2009. Whereas the OMC work concentrates on collecting data and harmonising practices on a political level, CM2.0 provides practical elements for promoting collections mobility through a training programme, collections mobility platform at [www.lending-for-europe.eu](http://www.lending-for-europe.eu) and this book. The overall aim is to help the museum professionals in their daily practices.

As stated in the fund application,

The Collections Mobility project is designed to ensure a change in thinking and in ways of acting by workers and others involved in European museums and other organisations that keep collections. The actions proposed under the project have enormous potential to support museum professionals in their daily work with collections both on a very practical and conceptual level. The instruments developed will provide a reliable framework for decision making and offer practical tools such as: standard forms for contracts and recommendations which will be recognised throughout the EU and can be used by all member states. The training material will be the basis of a permanent increase in the levels of expertise of the staff involved in the lending and borrowing of cultural objects (CM 2.0 application).

All collections mobility forums speak for the strong need to focus on collections and provide both information and tools for museums to use. They represent a new kind of support for developing museum practices. Whereas traditionally it has been the responsibility of the museum community, professional networks and organisations such as museums associations or ICOM, collections mobility has brought together museum professionals, policy makers and representatives of governmental agencies, ministries, and the like.

## VISION

European collection resources form a fundamental basis for understanding our culture and the history of past generations. Collections of natural sciences and culture history, visual and fine arts, architecture, archaeology, as well as many specialist fields establish a great platform for cultural adventures. The responsibility of the museum community is to work as hard as possible to ensure that the collections can deliver the message that they are intended to and for the widest possible audiences.

The better the museums know the collections, the better they can use them and the better they can work together. When there is a genuine professional and content driven reason and motivation to strengthen the collections by lending and borrowing, the obstacles should be removed. In addition, this is for what collections mobility is intended. It is a great facilitator when it comes to information, recommendations, and ways to lower the threshold of lending and borrowing.

Collections Mobility has grown into a key issue for any future work. It is fundamentally important that the ideas and practices developed will obtain back-up support from the Commission, member states, ministries, museum organisations, professional networks such as NEMO, the Registrars Group, and individual museum professionals.

At the very end of the day, it really is up to the museums to make the change. For the benefit of the public.

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