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**UDK 069.271(497.521.2):39**  
**069.42(497.521.1):39**  
Professional paper  
Received: 18 December 2017  
Accepted: 20 December 2017

# How Can a Dream Become a Reality?

## REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTED RE-ORG PROJECT IN THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM IN ZAGREB

- The museum storage reorganization project “RE-ORG”, developed by ICCROM and UNESCO in 2011, was held for the second time in South East Europe.<sup>1</sup> The project’s host from 6<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017 was the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. The two-week program was organized and supported by ICCROM, ICOM, ICOM SEE, ICOM Slovenia, ICOM Croatia, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia and the Central Institute of Conservation from Belgrade. Its international character was stressed by involving museum professionals from Croatia and Slovenia as participants. The aim of this article is to present the process of planning and implementing the project which provides tools for museum storage reorganization.

Key words: Ethnographic Museum (Zagreb)  
RE-ORG project, museum storage, museum storage  
reorganization

## INTRODUCTION

There are around 55.000 museums in the world. As a result there are 55.000 storages. On average 5 to 10% of the collections are exhibited and consequently 90 to 95% of the collections are kept in storage areas.

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1 The first RE-ORG project took place in 2004 in Belgrade (Serbia).

Very few storages are so-called ‘visitable’. For others, the visitor imagines that these storages are caves of Ali Baba in which the collections are well organized, documented and ready to be studied and/or exhibited. The reality is unfortunately very different.

At the national level, some countries have reacted. The first were the Netherlands:

“In 1988, the Dutch Court of Audit published a report that made a lot of noise. Researchers from this body, whose job it is to check whether the government spending is in order, inspected the 17 national museums. They drew pessimistic conclusions about the state of the collections (...) The bulk of the Dutch cultural heritage was in danger of deterioration. If nothing were undertaken, many objects of art (...) would irreversibly deteriorate or disappear even completely in a short time. The world of museums was not surprised by the findings of the Court of Accounts (...). The active policy (initiated during the last decades) in terms of exposure had been to the detriment of another activity: the safeguarding not only of the exposed treasures but also the safeguarding of the objects stored in storages, which constitute the indispensable reservoir of any culture.”<sup>2</sup>

Following this report was launched a five-year plan, called *Delta Plan*’to, inter alia, systematically reorganize the 17 storages of national museums.”

In other countries, such as the United States, regular reports highlight the serious problem in which certain storages are found. In France in 2005 the Ministry of Culture asked to inventory the collections. Seventeen years later only 33% of the collections have been inventoried mostly because if the storage is not in order, it is difficult to do an inventory and it takes much more time (Fig. 1).

In order to have an idea on the situation in the world, ICCROM and UNESCO made an anonymous survey in 2011 on 1490 museums in 136 countries.<sup>3</sup>

How could such a situation have been created, and why is it still the case in museums? We can see three reasons:

There are those who do not know. It is the ministers, the decision-makers, the trustees who know the museum only through the inaugurations of exhibitions or during the events to which they are invited. These people are not invited to visit the storages. In good faith, they ignore a situation that is not shown to them.

There are those who do not want to know. They are the managers of the institutions. They have often inherited a disastrous situation and, faced with the

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2 Extract from Fact Sheet C-11-F 1992 of the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture

3 It is important to note that these answers are absolutely identical regardless of the geographical area, culture or GDP of the country. Sometimes the state of the storages in the same museum varies totally from one department to another.

magnitude of the tasks to be done with a staff often reduced, they give up and directed their efforts towards other concerns and activities. They often suspect that robberies have been or are being committed within their institution and fear that starting up an inventory will reveal the disappearance of objects - with all the administrative and judicial consequences that are possible to imagine.

There are those who can't. It is the conservation attachés who "turn the house" without often receiving support from their superiors and who, little by little, abandon a storage, then another, going to the hurry. In addition, they have not received the training to reorganize a storage because no university curriculum currently offers this type of training.

Faced with such a situation, the General Assembly of the 132 member states of ICCROM launched in November 2011 a special program called RE-ORG (reorganization of the storages) based on an original method. It was developed so that it can be applied either from a given training during a national course either by a professional who will follow the method found on the Internet.

The method is based on three elements:

- A) Study of the 4 essential elements for a storage: management, building, collection and equipment
- B) A self-evaluation of these 4 elements
- C) A list of 10 quality criteria defining a professionally managed storage:
  - One trained member of staff is in charge
  - The storage contains only objects from the collection
  - The storage area has dedicated support spaces (office, workroom, non-collection storage)
  - No object is placed directly on the floor
  - Every object has been assigned a specific location in the storage and every object can be physically located within three minutes
  - Every object can be physically retrieved without moving more than two other objects
  - Objects are categorized
  - Key policies and procedures exist and are applied
  - The building and storage area offer adequate protection for the collection
  - Every object is in a stable condition and ready to be used for the museum's activities

When the storage is reorganized according to the method, it is then possible to make an inventory of the collections.

To this date, over 80 museums in Algeria, Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Chile, China, Greece, India, Iraq, Italy, Nigeria, Serbia, New Caledonia, Slovenia have applied the RE-ORG method. Some of these museums had more than 60.000 objects in their storage rooms.

Admittedly, it is possible to rearrange a storage without applying the method. However, the use of RE-ORG allows a more systematic, faster, cheaper and more professional work.

An essential point of the method is undoubtedly the pride that its application lavishes on the staff, which was able to bring back to life collections which seemed very often lost. This motivation pushes the participant to lead in this way the colleagues of the surrounded museums.

It is the experience gained by ICCROM over the years that Ms. Goranka Horjan has called for the reorganization of 26 rooms in the ethnographic storage of the Ethnographic Museum of Zagreb. The unfolding of this work is narrated below.

## THE PREPARATORY MISSION

The 'RE-ORG' method is divided in four phases which led to a successful appli-  
ance of the program in storage areas of the Ethnographic Museum. However,  
the preparatory work started earlier, in June 2017, when the project leader  
Gaël de Guichen came for three days. He held a public lecture attended by 70  
professionals in the Museum Documentation Center in Zagreb under the title  
*Preventive conservation starts in storage* and presented specific elements of the  
method. The preparatory meeting with future project mentors Mihaela Grčević  
and Domagoj Kačan and curators took place in the Ethnographic Museum. They  
made a visit of the storages in order to select the ones to be reorganized in  
November 2017. With the permission of the Museum Director Goranka Horjan,  
they designated twenty-six rooms dislocated in the attic and in the basement  
of the museum.

The museum staff responsible of the selected storages filled the initial self-eval-  
uation developed by ICCROM so the results can be compared with the one  
completed at the end of the workshop. They also studied the ten quality criteria  
of a professionally managed and functional storage area.<sup>4</sup> Before implement-

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4 The quality criteria were developed by ICCROM and UNESCO and published in the RE-ORG  
workbook for ICCROM participants and trainers.

ing the project, the Ethnographic Museum met only one criteria out of ten. Main issues that were detected in the storage rooms are that the collections were dispersed all over the rooms, a great number of objects didn't have an accession number and there was non-collection objects in the storage rooms. The outcomes of this preliminary work confirmed the Museum's issues in the management of storages and the necessity of a reorganization.

During the preparation mission was evaluated and listed the type and quantity of storage furniture to be bought. It was also required to remove part of the material which has been accumulated during years and had nothing to do in the storage where only the Museum collection should be kept.

## **THE REORGANIZATION WORKSHOP**

The duration of the workshop was 2 weeks and started on November 6<sup>th</sup> 2017 and was divided in four phases. The objective of the first phase was to create a team spirit, acquires the right terminology and put in place the best possible conditions to begin with the reorganization. This phase lasted two working days and included a short visit to the storage rooms. It took place mostly in the lecture room and consisted of lectures held by the project leader and mentors. They consisted of an introduction to the method and to its specific elements (management, building and space, furniture and small equipment, collection). During this phase, the participants learned to read and draw a plan, which was helpful for the next stage of the project.

From the very first hour of this first phase, the twenty-seven participants from sixteen different museums were divided in four effective teams of six or seven, each of them having a mentor: Jana Šubic Prisljan from the Nova Gorica Museum, Veljko Džikić from the Central Institute for Conservation in Belgrade and Mihaela Grčević and Domagoj Kačan from the Ethnographic Museum. Teams were assigned one specific storage area to be reorganized: the blue and the green teams would be working in the attic and yellow and red team in the basement space. They listed their member's skills to get on efficiency during the team work. Their working space was well organized, clean and separated. All the materials and tools they needed for the work were listed and existing floor plans of each team's storage rooms were assembled.

Before doing any work in the storage, the project leader presented the common objectives of the course which contributed to the quality of the final product. All the participants agreed on the common objectives which are: doing the work in team, following the RE-ORG method developed by ICCROM, regrouping the collections which are dispersed, following a plan accepted by the Museum

Director, remaining within the allocated budget, working without damaging any object, working without injuring anyone, informing the Museum visitors about the project through an exhibition, informing the media, informing the Museum's staff, do the work in ten working days and finish by Friday November 17<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 p.m.

The second phase lasted two days and took place mostly in the respective storages they were responsible of. One of the first task was to draw a current floor plan of the storage, add fixtures and add furniture used to store the collection. They calculated the amount of space occupied by furniture and objects. The condition of the furniture was noted down as well as some major threats to the collection. This assignment was made in order to collect essential data about the spaces easier and estimate the unit fullness of the storage floor, in per cent.

In the meantime, the objects from the museum's collection were identified from non-collection objects. Some of the latter as well as rubbish which were blocking the access were removed and grouped in a specially identified place. Possible present and future aggressors were identified and noted down. Collection objects were diagnosed based on the twelve object categories: extra heavy or voluminous objects which are difficult to manipulate and require special equipment to be moved, extra-long objects which are not self-supporting (over two meters), very heavy objects which are self-supporting and requiring two people to manipulate (over thirty kilograms), long objects which are not self-supporting (under two meters), objects which are self-supporting and can be carried by one person (ten to thirty kilograms), light self-supporting objects that can be carried by one person with two hands (up to ten kilograms), small objects that can be held in one hand, "three-dimensional" textiles, objects that should be stored flat, objects that can be rolled, small two-dimensional objects (under fifty centimetres) and large two-dimensional objects (over fifty centimetres).

The collected data showed the storage areas included around 7.470 objects which belong to eight different collections dispatched in nineteen rooms, on a total surface of 633m<sup>2</sup>. These are the collection of tools for textile processing, the collection of furniture, the collection of traditional crafts, the home inventory collection, the collection of baskets, the collection of traditional agriculture tools, the collection of pottery and the collection of models. There were 4.772 objects in the attic space and 2.698 objects in the basement. From a total of 7.470 objects, 1.671 were directly on the floor. The participants wrote a condition report based on the study they made. All working phases were documented and team members distributed tasks along each other.

The third phase was aimed at proposing the reorganization. It took around two days and was mostly realized in the lecture room. The participants prepared a

storage action plan based on the storage condition report, proposed the future plan of the project and list the necessary storage furniture required for the objects which were on the floor. Their list was very similar to the one established during the preliminary mission and which has been bought since.

They defined solutions for non-standard objects like objects that require a special storage solution (heavy, voluminous, long objects), unprocessed objects and objects with special needs (special legal requirements, with health and safety concerns or similar). They also defined unit and small equipment needs for 'standard objects'. The objective was to regroup objects of the same categories (that required same or similar storage units) and regroup objects by category in the same storage rooms.

According to this they created a comprehensive project chart and revised the list of tools and materials for the implementation and all the training needs: object handling, box or mount making, documentation procedures. Each team drew a proposed storage layout plan which needed to be clear, using paper cutouts. The plan was presented to the Museum Director and the four curators in charge of the collections. After they obtained authorization by the management, the participants could start with the last and the longest phase of the project – the execution of the planned work. Their working spaces were prepared and the organizers insured that everyone was able to work safely.

Then the fourth and last phase started: the physical reorganization which took place in the storage and went on for four days. During this phase about 40m<sup>3</sup> meters of non-collections materials (i.e. packaging, scenography etc.) were expelled from the storages, the new furniture (racks, shelves) were mounted according to the plan they had drawn. Around 400 objects were not moved, 350 were moved once, 6.600 were moved twice and 250 were exceptionally moved three times (as an example some cabinets which had to be transported from the attic to the basement). An identical system of horizontal localization was painted on the walls and a vertical one glued on the storage furniture.

## RESULTS

After the successful reorganization, all the work was presented to museum staff and to guests the last day of the project through a final presentation. After ten working days, there were no more objects without an inventory number in the storage, all objects were appropriately located, collections were grouped, each object could be found within three minutes, most objects were easily accessible as a visible system of localization was created. Storage regulations were written and they contained rules about management,

responsible staff, storage space, furniture, objects and their documentation. Half of the objects have been cleaned. Some other issues were highlighted in the condition report. The final self-evaluation was completed one more time to be able to compare her with the initial one done before the workshop and the results were clearly improved.<sup>5</sup>

A PowerPoint presentation illustrating the work composed of 177 slides taken during the workshop was created. It was hand over to all participants to give them the possibility to show to colleagues from their museum the work they have done in two weeks.

As part of the visibility of the program, curators and conservators-restorers of the Ethnographic Museum, in cooperation with the pedagogical department, set up a children's exhibition entitled *Hidden Treasure of Storages*. The exhibition was presented to children of elementary school on the last day of the workshop. The exhibited objects either have never been exposed before or spent some time in the storage. The project and its activities were media covered. The news about the RE-ORG in Croatia were published on numerous web sites and social networks. A report was filmed during the project for the newscast *Culture News* on November 13<sup>th</sup> 2017. Gaël de Guichen and Goranka Horjan were on the show *Good Morning, Croatia* on November 16<sup>th</sup> 2017 on the Croatian Radio Television. The day after the official program ended, on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2017, a one-day professional excursion was organized by ICOM Slovenia to the storages of Posavina Museum in Brežice and to the Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana.

The program was beneficial for everyone, not only for the collections, but for the museum management, staff and participants who were invited to share their experience and initiate the implementation of the project in their own institution.<sup>6</sup>

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5 The reorganized storages of the Ethnographic Museum passed from a “You need a RE-ORG project” category to the “Only small improvements are needed” category.

6 To start your reorganization visit [www.re-org.info](http://www.re-org.info)



## **PARTICIPANTS OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM'S STORAGE REORGANIZATION**

### **PROJECT LEADER**

Gaël de Guichen

### **MENTORS**

Veljko Džikić, Central Institute of Conservation, Belgrade

Mihaela Grčević, Ethnographic Museum

Domagoj Kačan, Ethnographic Museum

Jana Šubic Prislán, Nova Gorica Museum

### **PARTICIPANTS**

Mislav Barić, Croatian History Museum

Ivica Brezović, The Karlovac City Museum

Luka Čorak, The Karlovac City Museum

Maja Čuka, Archaeological Museum of Istria

Anita Dugonjić, Archaeological Museum in Zagreb

Mirana Jušić, Croatian History Museum

Stojan Knežević, Velenje Museum

Bojan Knific, Tržič Museum

Matija Marić, Croatian Conservation Institute

Ana Matković, Ethnographic Museum

Boštjan Meglič, Tržič Museum

Petra Milovac, Museum of Arts and Crafts

Josip Miljak, Split City Museum

Darka Perko Kerum, Split City Museum

Ksenija Pintar, Museum of Arts and Crafts  
Andrea Sardoz, Archaeological Museum of Istria  
Andro Šimičić, Croatian Conservation Institute  
Simon Špital, Velenje Museum  
Iva Validžija, Museum Documentation Center  
Eduard Vasiljević, Museums of Hrvatsko Zagorje  
Aleš Vene, The Posavlje Museum Brežice  
Marija Vraničić, Dubrovnik Museums  
Zrinka Znidarčić, Archaeological Museum in Zagreb

### **SPECIAL THANKS**

Zvezdana Antoš, Ethnographic Museum  
Iris Biškupić-Bašić, Ethnographic Museum  
Estelle de Bruyn, ICCROM  
Ivan Drobina, Ethnographic Museum  
Mirjana Drobina, Ethnographic Museum  
Marko Gašparić, Ethnographic Museum  
Goranka Horjan, Ethnographic Museum  
Nina Koydl, Ethnographic Museum  
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Željka Petrović Osmak, Ethnographic Museum  
Snježana Pintarić, Museum of Contemporary Art  
Gordana Viljetić, Ethnographic Museum  
Silvia Vrsalović, Ethnographic Museum  
Juraj Zoričić, Ethnographic Museum