

Collection Management in 21st Century: Questioning in the Croatian Context

- This paper promotes a concept of a museum collection management and the related policy by which it is expressed. Collecting and deaccessioning (as essential activities of collections development), loans and accessibility - in international and Croatian museum practice - are also analyzed. In the end, the paper advocates the establishment of a national association of museums that could serve, together with other support points, a purpose of a professional gathering around topics on collection management.

Keywords: museum collections management, museum collections management policy, deaccessioning, collections development

MOTIVATIONAL STRONGHOLDS IN CREATING THIS PAPER

This paper was created upon several motivational strongholds. First, there are many years of personal effort on spreading knowledge and skills related to the concept of the museum collection management, mostly evident in creating the Museum Collections¹ University course and in writing professional papers; nevertheless there is an impression that the concept of the collection management still has not been accepted in our heritage community.

This is evidenced by results of a survey conducted among museum professionals taking part at the project “Harmonization of study programs in the field of social sciences

1 The course and the responsibility for it was taken over by the author in 1993. She has continued with this tasks till nowadays.

and humanities with the needs of the labor market”. This project were realized in the 2015 – 2016² period in order to determine the knowledge necessary for a quality work of a curator as one of occupations at the mentioned sector.³ Numerous quotes are grouped into six major thematic areas, three of which cover the museum collections management, i.e. the knowledge on processing, collecting and protecting the museum material. Concerning the thematic area of processing the term collection management appeared several times, and concerning the topic of collecting terms like knowledge necessary for field research, collecting in the strict sense and purchasing appeared also. To this list quotes concerning cooperation with restorers taking part in protection procedures should be added. Unfortunately, internationally and professionally established terms for management activities are missing.⁴

We were motivated to the same extent by a perception of conducting activities of deaccessioning from the museum holdings in the Republic of Croatia, presented in the D. Wijsmuller study “Deaccessioning and disposal in Europe 2008. – 2017”.⁵ Although the number of participants that responded to an online survey (33 participants from 9 European countries) and the number of workshops participants in six countries⁶ is by no means a representative sample of the European museum professionals, the survey was conducted, the methodology was not questionable and conclusions were very serious. Among other things the situation in Croatia was symbolically represented by a discussion at the workshop in Zagreb that revealed “a lack of knowledge and communication between various institutions such as administrative bodies and museums” (Wijsmuller 2017: 57). The lack of clear rules and legal provisions related to deaccessioning was also revealed, but it could have been done, according to the author, upon the existing examples on Internet (Wijsmuller 2017: 57).

We still have the possibility to draft a new and better legislation. Of course, what we have on mind is adoption of an Ordinance on technical and professional standards being under construction. It should include elaborated activities encompassed by the general term collection management that represents the minimum of standardized professional museum activity.⁷

2 More about this project can be found at the following link: <https://profitiraj.hr/filozofski-fakultet-u-zagreb-uskladio-je-dio-svojih-programa-s-potrebama-trzista-rada/> (visited on 25th May 2021).

3 The proposed qualification standard for a curator is available at: http://esfhko.ffzg.unizg.hr/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Obrazac-standard-zanimanja_kustos.pdf (visited on 25th May 2021).

4 Results of surveying forty-four professionals you can request from the project coordinator at the Department of Information and Communication Sciences, assistant professor, Ph.D S. Kišiček.

5 <https://www.museumsanddeaccessioning.com/wp-content/uploads/Deaccessioning-disposal-Europe-2008-2017-D.-Wijsmuller.pdf> (visited on 25th May 2021).

6 Two workshops took place in Croatia: one at the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb on 25th May 2017 and the second at the Natural History Museum in Rijeka on 26th May 2017.

7 It also refers to the Ordinance on content and manner of keeping museum documentation about museum holdings and to the Ordinance on conditions and manner of gaining insight into museum holdings and museum documentation. We expect their adoption in accordance with the Museums Act of 2018 and modern professional settings.

The last motivational stronghold was found in social circumstances we were working here in the Republic of Croatia in the period 2020 and 2021. We are talking about pandemic lockdown and closed to visitors' museums, some of which were, in addition, endangered (and physically damaged) by three strong earthquakes resulting in financial inflow reduction. This has been is our extremely fragile environment⁸ that requires not only a re-thinking of all major phenomena and concepts related to museology and heritage studies, but also a review of the practical segments of activities the museum collection management is the part of.

CONCEPT OF MUSEUM COLLECTION MANAGEMENT AND ITS PROFESSIONAL DESIGN

The term management, repeated from time to time in our professional circles undoubtedly came from the field of economics. It was first adopted in the Anglophone, and associated museum communities in 1980s. It refers to all activities related to the planned, responsible and coordinated management of the museum holdings that for purposes of easier management can be classified/divided, according to various criteria, into smaller units, i.e. collections. It includes collecting and deaccessioning, loans, physical protection, insurance as well as risk management, documenting and providing access to collection items; it already has been simply presented in the following graphical way (Vujić 2017: 272). (Fig. 1)

On the other hand, the interrelation of collecting and deaccessioning, nowadays understood as a process of collections' development should be emphasized, as well as the dual documenting function that should be understood as a separate activity, but also as the activity that should accompany each of the above listed activities of the museum collection management.

Insurance and risk management of collections can indeed be a part of the museums general policy as well as a part of the loans principle. Concerning the general policy, i.e. the risk management of the entire museums' business, it should be present. In Croatian conditions, with the experience of war, earthquakes and floods, it should be present in each museum as an elaborated and separate document.

A museum's written statement about rules of implementing the listed collection management's activities, should include introductory elements such as a mission and a vision of the institution, history of collections' creation and description, the legal and ethical environment description, within which management takes place. The statement will be finally realized in a form of the International community document titled Collection Management Policy. Existence of such a document is recommended by the ICOM code of Ethics for Museums (s.n. 2007: 3).

8 The English term is VUCA environment, which is the acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity.

According to the Collection Trust, one of few supporting British heritage organizations that works with the Arts Council of England⁹ and according to its museums evaluation in the accreditation process, it should be worth having a general document. This document could be the Statement on museum collection management policy, containing general elements and four separate policies describing the treatment in the following four areas: collections development (accessioning and deaccessioning), collections information (documentation), access to collections and to physical care or conservation.¹⁰ Some other communities choose a complete document, but only particular segments of the document are presented to the public. Collections Management Policies are often posted on museum websites to prove the professional work and to create a good public image of the institution.¹¹

After so many years of work in the field of heritage care, we are aware that good documents do not provide responsible action, it is people applying them responsibly and as consistently as possible; indirectly it is indicated in the Code itself, item 2.18 (s.n. 2007: 6). To provide this, it is necessary not only to invest into various forms of museum professionals' education; they should be also included into the process of creating the document. The document adoption process can and should contribute to understanding and establishing the standard action and to employees interconnecting. The Museum Collection Management Policy, probably imperfect, but shaped by the particular museum's experts knowledge has a better practical effect than the perfect one, created by hired external experts.¹²

REEXAMINING CONCEPTS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT COLLECTING ACTIVITIES

WHAT IS INTERNAL COLLECTING NEVER MENTIONED IN LITERATURE?

Over decades, sometimes even over centuries of museums existence in Croatia, rather extensive holdings have been created, mainly due to the fact collecting used to be considered the most important and most specific function of museums as public institutions. Well known reasons for the growth of our (national) collections include the following: quite understandable collecting in the initial years of institutions establishment, enhanced acquisition in times of social changes (for example movable tangible heritage rescue by relocating it into museums during both world wars, the Homeland War documenting, objects purchase from refugees, etc.), heritage rescue during natural

9 More about this organization can be found at the following link: <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/what-we-do/> (visited on 25th May 2021).

10 <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Collections-Management-Policies.pdf> (visited on 27th May 2021).

11 The only museum in Croatia having the published Collection Management Policy is the Typhological Museum in Zagreb: <http://www.tifoloskimuzej.hr/hr/o-nama/politika-upravljanja-muzejskim-zbirkama/> (visited on 27th May 2021).

12 The process of adopting the museum's strategic plan can be similarly evaluated.

disasters, more or less critical acceptance of gifts and donations (in cases where only a small part of such objects belongs to the mission of a particular museum), intervent favorable purchases on the chaotic market of works of art and antiques, etc. However, there is one reason we have not become aware of, at the national level and at the international one as well. The reason in question is the internal collecting we pointed out in 2017 (Vujić 2017: 290).

Museums and galleries are social environments at which processes of assigning (and evaluating the already assigned) meaning to objects and units that happened to get there. Sometimes it happens that fully functional objects also undergo this process, even the once intended for protection and conservation. Such an example are boxes in which an entomologist F. Koščec kept insects', and which the Entomology Department of the Varaždin City Museum nowadays exhibits not only as a memorial heritage related to him but also as examples of packaging from the first half of the 20th century. (Fig. 2). A model of Zagreb made for an exhibition section of cultural history, displayed in the Art Pavilion in Zagreb as a part of the Millennium Celebration of the Croatian Kingdom in 1925, as well as exhibition showcases designed by Ljubo Babić are nowadays parts of the Zagreb City Museum holdings and have the character of both, museographic tools and the museum objects. There are similar examples in all of our museums, e.g. the objects that over time obtained a particular meaning or became the object of protection as well as of communication (especially during exhibitions presenting the history of a museum), without being part of the collecting policy.¹³ Moreover, this kind of collecting, the one not based upon criteria should be finally be recognized and taken into account in the process of a collections management.

IS THE PARTICIPATORY PARADIGM APPLICABLE TO COLLECTING ACTIVITIES IN CROATIA?

The participation of museum users (in broader sense of stakeholders too) concerning all its activities became relevant in the 1990s, influenced by the development of information technology and Web 2.0, that enabled erasing boundaries between content creators and their users. Did turning point of museum and heritage environment take place at that period of time and in those particular circumstances is to be answered (Meijer-van Mensch and van Mensch 2010: 53).

We, professionals, also engaged in researches within the framework of the historical museology have already noticed participatory practices in the field of collecting. We have in mind participatory practices that were noticeable in processes of creating national museums during the first half of the 19th century, particularly those related to the National Museum in Zagreb. This Museum started to establish its collections due to participation of many citizens and some members of the nobility as well as the peasantry. Community was able to read regularly in newspapers of the time about

13 This also happens to those who declare collecting is not their foreground activity, for example, ex eco-museums and nowadays the so-called non-collecting museums.

their donations (Ljubljanić 1998: 54-63). Similar process happened in the first years of the Ethnographic Museum and during implementation of the so-called acquisition campaigns (Brenko 2020: 20). Finally, in the 19th century, the institution of a museum commissioner in the field¹⁴ was established and they all together represented a network for collecting museum holdings' material, as well as materials for exhibiting during major exhibition projects.

Kok cites three forms of a new collecting processes. The first relates to developing the relationship between heritage professionals and private collectors and owners of specialized collections; it also relates to giving a services support such as providing a museum depository and conservation and restoration departments in order to ensure usage of these additional holdings at their new exhibition programs (Kok according to Meijer-van Mensch and van Mensch 2010: 53). The second form relates to museums operating within networked private and institutional collectors; objects' owners are still important, they are a part of the mentioned heritage communities and represent networks and have the right to evaluate their specific and desired aspects of heritage and by means of common actions keep the holdings preserved for future generations. The third form refers to processes of connecting with the authentic communities by means of collecting, including their stories and experiences accompanied by assigning the meaning (to objects) (Meijer-van Mensch and van Mensch 2010: 53).

In fact, the first form of participation has been a part of our practice. It often happens at exhibition representation of their collections; for example, the Modern Gallery and the Art Pavilion in Zagreb have recently practiced it with their art collections. Sometimes collectors of specific types of material also get a support, as was experienced by Josip Štimac from Karlovac, the collector of railway heritage (Vujić 2017: 288). However, supporting quite numerous collectors of ethnographic collections¹⁵ seemed to show elements of a more systematic approach. It is evidenced in A. Mlinar and Z. Antoš "Guidelines for Preserving Ethnographic Collections" publication as well as in the proposal that "at the Ethnographic Museum ... or at regional museums a team of at least 2 experts should be formed: a curator and a preparator who would take care only of objects in private collections outside museums and perform at least the most necessary preparatory procedures on them." (Mlinar 2002: 266). Such team has not been formed (Kremenčić 2020: 70) and therefore the participatory collecting of this kind of material takes place by its own dynamics, which we can partly reconstruct by following the "field research" section at the Report of Croatian museums.

The relationship between private collectors and professionals referring to archaeological material is probably the most complex in our country, and the trust, as the basis of every participatory relationship, being fragile and permanently re-examined, is burdened by the existence of associations engaged in an amateur detection of metal

14 The network of collectors of fish on our side of the Adriatic was already established by the Italian scientist and collector Ulyse Aldrovandi in the 16th century!

15 In some regions, like Podravina, private ethnographic collections can be considered as significant element of cultural identity.

findings etc. Scientific implementation of either systematic or rescue archeological excavations like litmus paper differentiate heritage professionals from amateurs that can be antiques lovers, treasure hunters, earners, etc. Sites' irreversible destruction also hinders cooperation.¹⁶

An example of what Kok defines as the third form in a frame of the new collecting process is the history and identity research of urban microenvironments, i.e. of Zagreb city districts, conducted by the Zagreb City Museum. It results only in very interesting exhibitions but also in creating self-confident members of small heritage communities that together with lent objects provide the Museum with stories about objects and memories of particular events and their participants. A part of the material remains at the Museum, and a part is returned to the original owners; this is the way how the Museum depository is filled in a more controlled way.

Maritime and History Museum of the Croatian Littoral in Rijeka has formally achieved the best development concerning the process of participatory collecting. What we have on mind is the project of the Civic Museum Collection created by the establishment and activity of the Civic Museum Council in 2020,¹⁷ and certainly in an atmosphere of activating the cultural potential of Rijeka as the European Capital of Culture. The process of selecting objects was based on a public invitation to citizens (who were) motivated in a form of the question - "How do we want future generations to remember us?"; citizens were invited by various media to document an element of a heritage from their environment and select a particular object as symbol that deserves to be musealized. According to Kreps "by identifying and naming tangible and intangible elements the environment consists of, people begin to understand their right to the world and taking control over it" (Meijer-van Mensch and van Mensch 2010: 54). In the city of Rijeka, citizens selected eleven items that got different levels of support (given through digital platforms) and five of them that got the largest number of votes represented the very beginning of the above-mentioned Civic Collection (Fig. 3). It has been planned to repeat the process every year. The joint creative collecting process, as well as sharing responsibilities related to selection are more important than the collection creation which will be slightly separated from the rest of the holdings (objects of which will be, as we hope, exhibited not only at exhibitions – representing evidence of participatory activities - but also at more complex exhibition projects). Co-creators will have to face the fact that collecting is not the only activity of collections management and their knowledge of objects' museum life should be expanded by raising awareness of the preservation process, processing and developing the applicable programs.¹⁸

16 Information about private collections related to natural science materials would be useful, because that is the weakest point of our knowledge. In 2018 the Croatian Natural History Museum started a campaign of promoting donating collections to the Museum by organizing the Mikula exhibition Mollusc Collection. <https://zg-magazin.com.hr/hrvatski-prirodoslovni-muzej-zeli-potaknuti-sve-da-im-doniraju-privatne-kolekcije/> (visited on 27th May 2021).

17 The program was realized within the European Social Fund project "Museum of the Future - Civic Museum Council as a Model of Participatory Management."

18 Data on the Civic Collection are downloaded from the following link <https://ppmhp.hr/predstavljena-civilna-muzejska-zbirka/> (visited on 27th May 2021).

Each of our museum institutions should have the possibility to make its own decision about the form of a (new) modern approach to the collecting process that would suit it best: documenting and borrowing if needed, the potential private objects and collections, participatory collecting process with community members, shared partnership collecting process in cooperation with particular similar institutions (the international community was familiar with common purchase of materials, that raised the question to whom it belonged in the particular case, i.e. who can use it) or networked with them (as the Swedish organization SAMDOK did). Of course, museums can also choose proactive and thoughtful sustainable independent collecting process. They should communicate their decisions and commitments clearly and repeatedly to the public, either by the way of the described policies or by the way of communication and promotion actions.

In addition, museums should have a legitimate right to introduce a slowdown of collecting processes, and even to impose a temporary moratorium on certain types of material collecting processes. With this practice, we have (already) become acquainted at the exchange of experiences in the international professional community.¹⁹ In this particular case, we deal with a particularly interesting topic, the topic of de-growth and its implications to the museum philosophy and activity.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO APPLY DE-GROWTH THEORY TO COLLECTING PROCESSES?

Thinking about museums development from the perspective of de-growth based, among other things, on criticism and abandoning the economic growth imperative at any cost and social paradigms based on achieving faster, higher and further achievements, already has its supporters in the museum community in Croatia and this is good.²⁰ Of course, the term de-growth had, due to the nature of its meaning, to be understood by those who deal with the topic of museum collections management. The most widely distributed article on the web is “De-growing museum collections for new heritage futures” of 2018. (Morgan and Sh. Macdonald 2020: 56-70) In the article, authors presented their observations obtained during the ethnographic research about collecting objects of everyday life (Future of Heritage Project of 2016). In the article, they also offered an introduction into a possible application of ideas of the economic anthropologist Serge Latouche (expressed in the book “Farewell to Growth” of 2009) and related to the field of collection development.

According to Latouche, the term “de-growth” is not the complete opposition to the term “growth”, it implies exploitation of the existing and of the lesser in order to make the bigger and the better (Morgan and Macdonald 2020: 60); it actually means

19 In 2018 T. von Stockhausen, the director of the Freiburg Museums, explicitly confirmed that in this group a moratorium on collecting within the Furniture Collection had been introduced.

20 In 2019, at Kyoto, the director of the Nikola Tesla Museum, Mrs. M. Franulić at the General Assembly of ICOM presented the paradigm of the de-growth and hinted at possibilities of applying it to the Museum management. I thank her for the opportunity to see the text of the presentation!

reconsideration of existing resources and practices as well as developing a different view in relation to them. In addition, the Latouch cycle of virtues has been taken out as a series of conceptual and practical changes that can be used to shape de-growth society. It consists of eight elements (8 R): reassess, reframe, restructure, redistribute, relocate, reduce, reuse and recycle. Reassess, reduce and relocate have a strategic role in a successful change, while other activities belong to specific possible actions and initiatives (Morgan and Macdonald 2020: 60).

The mentioned authors suggest the museum objects should be perceived as natural entities undergoing their natural cycle from birth to death and there should be an attempt to estimate their time and interpretative lifespan (Morgan and Macdonald 2020: 61). On the other hand, we are convinced that creative museologists and their collaborative community members can by interpretations significantly extend the objects' lifespan.

No matter how long the objects' lifespan in the museum is, they are always submitted to the process of (re)assessment and in this sense the fundamental activity of change stemming from the de-growth theory is important for collections development, too. Reassessment of the material involves a reassessment of significance or importance, preceded by a review of the existing meaning or an assignment of the new one. The procedure is carried out by museum professionals, but also by stakeholders, i.e. community members around institutions, if being included. An example of the museum collection reassessment is described in the case of the Collection of Fragments of the Ethnographic Museum (Fig. 4). Initially highly valued independent Collection of Embroidery documented by textile fragments, has nowadays become, according to some museum staff members, a problematic collection that should be included into the Collections of Folk Costumes (Brenko 2020: 54). However, due to documenting practice, especially documenting entirety at the level of the collection, the topic we wrote about (Zlodi and Vujić 2004: 69-78), this historical unity would still exist in a virtual form and witness the beginnings of the Ethnographic Museum holdings.

Both, stakeholders and members of community in the narrower and broader sense can also contribute to collections relocation, i.e. to stronger connections between collections and context of spaces and people from which collections were relocated to the museum. This includes cases of returning particular museum objects, even the most sensitive museum material (e.g. human remains) to native communities in the United States (the decisive moment was passing the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in 1990!) and recently more frequent returns of materials from European museums to African countries, etc. Of course, the museums practicing such relocations are actually engaged in the deaccessioning activity and that, with no doubt, leads to the third strategic change – the reduction.

WHY IS DEACCESSIONING ACTIVITY AVOIDED IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA?

Exactly a quarter of a century has passed since the publication of the article “To eliminate or not to eliminate objects from a collection?” in *Informatica museologica* (Vujić 1996: 5-11), in which we relatively early, provided the domestic museum community with a comprehensive overview of the deaccessioning activity consideration, in the national language. The paper offered a presentation of basic documents about this activity, analyzed deaccessioning reasons at the level of museum management as well as a description of deaccessioning methods and analysis of all procedure sections etc. at the level of everyday museum practice. Of course, all quotes were linked to our current heritage practice. There was no reaction of professionals, not even after the presentation “Accession vs. Deaccession: Guidelines for Acquisition/Collecting and Deaccessioning of Museum Material in Museum Institutions” held at the 1st Congress of Croatian Museologists (Bošković 2011: 135-139). The Congress was encouraged by the meeting under the title “Selling and Deaccessioning” that in 2008 took place in Ljubljana (organized by NEMO and the German Museum Association). Understandably, deaccessioning in such environment was complementary to collecting, and besides proposing guidelines for both activities, the following preconditions to be met were emphasized: to reconsider the mission and the so-called theme (direction) of the museum, to analyse in details holdings concerning lack and redundancy of exhibits and to analyse users to which employees and holdings should serve. Although our professional community was not engaged on this important topic, available data and experiences show that deaccessioning in our museums takes place slowly and quietly (noticeable donations to other institutions as a result of military actions' cessation, forced write-off in case of materials destruction during the war, decay, etc.), but it seems there is a lot of open practical questions and ethical doubts upon which we have to meet and start to communicate.

However, the international community has already experienced a serious of confrontations related to this topic, as well as a creation of different public atmosphere in certain environments. For example, the Canadian Glenbow Museum in Calgary, which in the late 1990s presented itself as a successful example of eliminating a large number of objects – 3,000 of them - has almost disappeared from the museum scene (Ainslie 1999: 173-179). Although the deaccessioning in that museum was carefully planned upon established criteria and the procedure sections that were communicated with the public, later newspaper data showed that communities did not accept the process very well (especially the native communities), and that the emphasized practical manual for deaccessioning did not receive a significant response of museum professionals.

In Europe, more active approach to deaccessioning started at the beginning of the 21st century. In the UK it started after the 2003 Conference of Directors of British National Museums and their report “Too much stuff: Disposal from Museums”,²¹ in the light of

21 Can be seen at the following link: https://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/media/documents/publications/too_much_stuff.pdf (visited on 27th May 2021).

neoliberal economics. The report opened the Pandora's box of questions from the point of view of those financing the museums and galleries sector about how museums justify financing of collections not used enough, whether the expropriation, even for financial reasons, is really unethical, whether some objects can serve to provoke pleasure in public programs outside the depot, etc. For us, familiar with the theoretical level, the greatest value of the Report was a series of examples of positive as well as of negative actions of deaccessioning from the holdings. Even nowadays we can stand behind the final statement that “Museums should therefore be willing to dispose of objects when this will better ensure their preservation, ensure that they are more widely used and enjoyed, or place them in a context where they are more valued and better understood. Disposal should be regarded as a proper part of collection management, but if it is to be successful it must be properly resourced and carefully conducted.” (s.n. 2003: 14).

The British Museums Code of Ethics²² deals with deaccessioning as a part of the long-term collections development and begins with curators' report; it should for sure be accompanied by the procedure transparency and openness (Article 2.9). However, their collective professional path started with the first Code of 1977 and the rejection of this activity and lasted until its active acceptance followed by the MA Disposal toolkit of 2014.²³ The Dutch experience has been very similar. It started in the late 1980s, has been represented by the “Guidelines for the deaccessioning of museum objects” (Leidraad voor het afstoten van Museale Objecten), the so-called LAMO of 2016.²⁴ Both examples show that best way of solving ethically sensitive activities is to act at the level of museum professionals, rather than imposing solutions from levels of the political power and running relatively long process that requires constant dedication and a permanent reconsideration too.

Has the social situation matured enough to allow deepening of the sensitive topic of deaccessioning? We have in mind the participatory paradigm application and this activity. Namely, the detail of the exhibition with the significant title - “Deaccessioning”, held in 2009 at University College London, led us to a project based, among other things, on participatory deaccessioning. The project started in 2007 and in two years all 18 collections of the mentioned university's Museum were reviewed (380,000 objects); as a result an insight into the collections meaning, preservation and usage was gained. In addition, a research related to attitudes of students and university staff, as the most frequent users of the Museum collections, was conducted on the purpose and values of collections, as well as on attitudes about acquisition and deaccessioning.

The research was conducted by an online survey on a sample of 1,600 participants and some of them took the time for comments in open-ended questions. Regarding the collecting policy participants gave support to the already existing policy, in order

22 Available at: <https://ma-production.ams3.digitaloceanspaces.com/app/uploads/2020/06/18145449/20012016-code-of-ethics-single-page-8.pdf> (visited on 26th May 2021).

23 Available at: <https://ma-production.ams3.digitaloceanspaces.com/app/uploads/2020/06/18145447/31032014-disposal-toolkit-8.pdf> (visited on 27th May 2021).

24 Available at: https://museumvereniging.nl/media/lamo_2016_guidelines_for_the_deaccessioning_of_museum_objects_1.pdf (visited on 27th May 2021).

to keep collections relevant for teaching and research and they took into consideration ethics, etc. Regarding deaccessioning, attitudes were more ambiguous, although respondents understood the complexity of questions. Participants were asked in a part of the survey to consider certain scenarios and to answer whether deaccessioning in a particular scenario would be appropriate or not, i.e. to give the answer, using the grading method, whether it is advisable to do it “always”, “most of the time”, “sometimes”, “rarely” or “never”. Deaccessioning was considered most appropriate in cases when it was not possible to take care about object and when the professional ethics required returning to the native community. To the same extent, respondents stressed the need to keep, where possible, deaccessioned objects publicly available. In case of the scenario involving sales, majority was against the sale and the use of finances for individual projects, while in cases where the sale was made to improve the protection of other materials and to support new acquisitions, “sometimes” was the most common response. To users a permanent relocation to other similar institutions was the most acceptable form of deaccessioning, while museum staff was surprised by users' point of view that in most cases sales were also potentially acceptable. The research results gave them an incentive to start with holdings revision, the protection assessment, as well as with using individual collections and identifying areas for acquisitions and deaccessioning.²⁵ (Fig. 5)

Later, a museologically conceived exhibition was organized,²⁶ i.e. it was divided into sections, and each section dealt with an issue in the field of collection management, including the issue of deciding on the permanent objects' deaccessioning. Concerning the latter, visitors were shown five selected objects and had a possibility to vote should objects be deaccessioned or not. Those who chose to participate voted twice, right at the beginning of the exhibition and a second time at the end, when they became better acquainted with the museum context and activities as well as dilemmas of the museum staff regarding the management and development of collections. Besides voting, visitors could make comments related to the possible fate of these objects, among which the media attention was most attracted by the so-called Agatha Christie's picnic basket.

Comments were summarized in three groups: at voting the focus was on objects' usefulness and the role they had in teaching process and researches; the UCL museums' collecting policy should, in addition to these needs, take into account the history of UCL and the fact that curators are experts in this field and that they should make decisions on objects that would be accessed and deaccessioned (the latter caused a particular satisfaction among museum professionals). From the point of view of outcomes, the project enabled creation of Guidelines for the objects' deaccessioning and the beginning of their active implementation. The deaccessioned objects were handed over to other museums, as well as to private collectors and even to some interested artists.

25 Data on the project are mainly taken from S. Dasa articles. "Disposal?: A Democratic Exhibition at UCL Museums and Collections". *OnCurating*, No 12. 2011. p. 5-7.

26 We remind that in 1998 and 1999 Ž. Laszlo and B. Šeper organized exhibitions at the Mimara Museum entitled "Zbrda - zdola" (Upside down), by which they tried to point out problems of material not fitting into the mission of the museum.

A similar example is that of sewing machines restoration and relocation from Scottish museums to art workshops in Sierra Leone and Tanzania where school uniforms and adults' clothing as well as curtains and bedspreads were sewn. The City of London Museum did something similar with selected identical and some redundant objects, making an extra effort to find the necessary public institutions that could use them (Morgan and MacDonald 2020: 62). The latter testifies how really creative redistribution and reuse, two important activities from the de-growth spectrum, can be carried out in a museum environment. What could we learn from the described project? First, it was evident that in London preconditions for carrying out the deaccessioning procedure were also determined first. The UCL Museum mission was not disputable nor particularly addressed, but an analysis of the existing holdings was conducted as well as survey of users, even during the exhibition. However, it seems that in Croatia first should be conducted a comprehensive survey among museum professionals on the attitudes towards deaccessioning. In that survey, the issue of the participatory paradigm and its applicability in the domain of deaccessioning could also be placed. Not all museums have such type of users as university museums do - students and researchers, who are expected to understand more easily the mission and vision of the museum and activities of the museum collection management. According to our point of view, a proper understanding of these activities is a prerequisite for participatory action.

As a participant of the London survey said, "It's important to be open to the community you serve to. It's not an easy job, but it worths."²⁷ The female museologists from the Maritime and Historical Museum of the Croatian Littoral in Rijeka, who work with citizens' representatives to establish the Civic Collections, know it the best. Participation is based on a mutual respect and equal level of a dialogue, and on permanent negotiation, that in particular situations requires additional communication skills. Our mutual agreement on the guidelines related to deaccessioning should be based on the same grounds and should be adopted by consensus of the profession.

Regarding the deaccessioning practice at the level of daily museum activities, it should be legally prescribed that each museum adopts its own policy on museum collection management that would include collecting and deaccessioning guidelines; on the other hand institutions should have possibility to independently make decisions with applying experiences of participatory action relating to management activities and choice of representatives (stakeholders, representatives of their local community, etc.). Each museum environment is specific.

SUDDEN INTERRUPTION OF OBJECTS MOBILITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, as a part of the "Collections Mobility 2.0 Lending for Europe 21st Century" project, a comprehensive publication "Encour-

27 The UCL Museums and Collections' survey of students and staff on views about disposal has proved liberating <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/opinion/2009/11/16150-2/> (visited on 27th May 2021).

aging Collections Mobility - A Way Forward for Museums in Europe” was created in collaboration with several European professional centers. On the one hand, the presentation represented a theoretical approach to reflection on collecting and new strategies for collection management (with the main question: is it possible to stop the museum material accumulation and concentrate on better use of existing collections through digitization, loans and public programs). On the other hand, a practical manual for loans and mobility of the museum material, was supposed to remove doubts about insurance issues, long-term loans, gaining financial benefits of it, writing a good loans policy, etc. This moment for promoting loans (at the world level it began in the mid-1990s with the now defunct Museum Loan Network in America) had a social foothold. Here we have in mind the beginning of the financial crisis, reducing finances to many museums and the pressure of founders and stakeholders on museums in order to confirm through their active work to which extent they are relevant and needed in a society. In this context, the joint effort on standardizing inter-museum loans and collection mobility should be understood and mentioned.

Of course, loans activities have also a dark side, evident from public articles, especially those dedicated to a critical view of museum work. Lending of valuable materials is often in a service of diplomacy, but also in a service of expressing political power. In the article written by Daley and M. Salvege on the so-called blockbuster exhibitions, the authors unhesitatingly indicated the reverse side of loans, power games, and also presented data on the destruction of material during large-scale international mobility (Daley and Salvege 2007: 4-16).

Of course, museums in Croatia were also (rightly) encouraged to joint exhibition projects, equal exhibition exchanges (reciprocity) with foreign institutions (by supporting the payment of large insurance fees for important visiting exhibitions, but insisting on our return exhibitions as much as possible) or only travelling exhibition, as, for example, in the case of Apoxyomenos.²⁸

Then, at the beginning of the pandemic such museum activities and the mobility of material and accompanying staff (along with the movement of tourists) were stopped almost overnight. The title of the project and the publication “Lending in Europe”, by which the flow of museum material in European museums was promoted,²⁹ came to life in a real world, not at a symbolic level. In addition, our museums and heritage sites in the north of the country have faced several devastating earthquakes and a series of accompanying weaker ones. In such circumstances, activities of protection and materials documentation overcame other activities in the field of management, and articles about the loans policy, the joint European Loan Agreement in the museum sector and lists of (self) evaluating conditions to be met by the borrower suddenly disappeared from heritage web portals and reports on saving of workplaces during the pandemic, webinars dedicated to digitized museum content, etc., replaced them.

28 The exhibition with an extremely valuable sculpture after exhibits at Croatian larger cities traveled to Florence, Paris and Ljubljana and was finally settled in the Museum of Apoxyomenos in Mali Lošinj.

29 Publication can be found at the following link: https://www.muziejai.lt/ImagesNew/LENDINGTOEUROPE_PDF_051105.pdf (visited on 27th May 2021).

ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS AND THEIR USAGE FOR PURPOSES OF SOCIAL RELEVANCE AND USEFULNESS OF MUSEUMS

A precise statement on providing access to physical and intellectual parts of the collection, i.e. to museum objects and visual, textual and even auditory information (associated, for example, with musical instruments) about objects obtained during the research processes has been from the very beginning a part of the museum collection management policy. This is especially true in the 21st century when the social relevance of the museum has been subjected to further examination. The fact of necessity to make available as much material and information as possible is supported by the real situation that museums with permanent exhibitions often show much less, and never more than 10% of their holdings. Also, we should not forget that the attitude and position towards original objects of permanent and occasional exhibitions has been changing, i.e. they have been increasingly suppressed and pushed into the background by various forms of communication that uses sophisticated information technologies (unfortunately, we lack research to substantiate this).

The same as with all other activities under the aegis of the management, the access activities must first and foremost be established in balance with preservation, i.e. on a basis of the consensus that “as free as possible access to collections and all relevant information about them does not endanger the material, its confidentiality and security of information by any of its principles or practical activities”.³⁰ None of our ordinances in a role of the accompanying bylaw of the Law on Museums does not indicate what data are confidential, but the Right to Access to Information Act of 2015, referring also to access to information at museums and galleries sector list in Article 15 a row of constraints³¹ (31). On the other hand, from the empirical experience is known that confidential information is the one concerning conditions, acquisition price and later economic values (assessments) of material and accommodation (especially in museums with poorer depository conditions); according to A. Roberts this is the first essential usage of information particularly in case of the collections internal management and the preservation and professional responsibility (Roberts 2004: 10).

Of course, preservation can be prescribed in a red tape manner, in its own way and rigidly just like our bylaw - Ordinance on Conditions and Manner of Insight into Museum Holdings and Museum Documentation of 2001 does. Related to users it defines provisions very restrictively i.e. ways and conditions of gaining insight into the intellectual and physical part of the collections; partly it also prescribes behavior and responsibilities during the loans and storage process. This is why museums are allowed a more free expression in the collection management policy, which results in a motivating character concerning real and virtual users and their needs. Areas this segment should cover differ from one museum community to another, and consequently, at a practical level they differ from one real institution to another.

30 This information originates from Article 3.3 of the ICOM Code of Ethics.

31 Available at: <https://www.zakon.hr/z/126/Zakon-o-pravu-na-pristup-informacijama> (visited on 27th May 2021).

For example, the British community is advised to publicly provide information about the access, by making it clear how people can see, use and rely on collections, i.e. how they can have physical access the building and its collection spaces, and how the museum shares collections' information with users.³² Besides the mentioned division into physical and intellectual approaches, based on understanding the collection as a dual concept - holdings consist not only of objects but also of holdings' documentation; of course one can come across more elaborated attitudes of access not defined as an activity but as accessibility through the achieved level of access. Among them, one stands out due to the fact of distinguishing even five forms of accessibility:

- **physical** – refers to the physical barriers at entrance into a building and moving through it, especially of persons with disabilities, the elderly and those accompanied by small children,
- **sensory** – refers to barriers people with disabilities (with reduced or completely impaired vision and hearing) can experience during orientation in a museum building or during understanding exhibition setup and collections access,
- **intellectual** – refers to a possibility of using museum contents by people with reduced intellectual abilities,
- **cultural accessibility** – refers to needs of foreigners and visitors, to whom the main museum communication language is not the first one, and to whom a social culture in which the museum operates, is equally foreign,
- and the **emotional** one, arising from the attitudes and behavior of employees towards users; it questions whether the museum itself is arranged as a friendly environment to visitors coming from all society layers.³³

Therefore, each museum can in a written form determine its relation to the whole range of possible barriers and in the real and virtual space of its activities can do everything to remove or at least reduce or overcome them. The approach to Zagreb art museums as well as to other museums has been researched on several occasions and there are indeed obtained data regarding physical and intellectual access.³⁴

It is interesting, but not inexplicable, how the intellectual form of accessibility, based on a good information system of museum documentation managing and on all forms of communication that can be shaped from information collected in this way by using information and communication technologies, has developed and made collections more accessible to users in the Republic of Croatia. In fact, recently, during the pandemic, additional pressure appeared related to the appearance of museum content on the

32 <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/accreditation/users-and-their-experiences/public-access/access-policy/> (visited on 27th May 2021).

33 Museum of London. Access Policy. <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/accreditation/users-and-their-experiences/public-access/access-policy/> (visited on 25th May 2021).

34 Compare Vujić and Zlodi 2000: 25-31; Sušić 2014: 167-184.

web and social networks (here we have in mind the adopted concept of digital accessibility!) covered also by the The Law on Accessibility of Web Site and Programming Solutions for Mobile Devices of Public Sector Bodies of 2019.

Concerning Zagreb museums, the physical access remained unchanged, but unfortunately, after three earthquakes it for sure got worse. Ensuring physical access and unhindered movement for all segments of audience requires far more finances and support from founders than that of the intellectual one and therefore one should not be surprised by such situation. However, on the other hand, we witness a positive consensus of the museum community around the topic of museum depository and the realization or the beginning of the realization of real projects of the latter.

It is important to remember that museum depositories have become collection centers and all activities in the field of museum collection management take place in these depositories. (Fig. 6)

About the Collection Center of the Swiss National Museum in rural Affoltern on Albis has already been written about (Stublić 2018: 64-75). The Paris Louvre in 2019 got the Conservation Center in the north of France, the Dutch Collection Center for four national museum houses was completed in Amersfoort near Amsterdam, the great National Museums Collection Center (Scotland) grew up in Granton near Edinburgh, etc. Accessibility for users in these centers is different: those open only to researchers, than those that have organized visits for a wider audience, those that are based on a great openness. An example of the latter is the Public Art Depot of the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in the Netherlands, dedicated to collecting and exhibiting old masters. The six-store depot is designed identical to the museum and its functions. Visitors are allowed a free short tour from the terrace of an impressive building in a form of an inverted dome (MVRDV group); visitors who pay the ticket are provided with free movement through half of the rooms where various museum activities take place; the other half of rooms that are the depository of the most valuable works of art can be seen through window openings or visited during organized guided tours. Exhibition spaces are planned on each floor. In the building private collectors will be able to rent space to store their collections and participate in exhibition programs. Of course, the Museum will charge for its services, so the Public Art Depository will only be publicly available by name, because its activities will be focused on wealthier visitors and users. As such, it will make the statement about a museum democratization by opening a depot questionable.

We do not expect similar investment projects in our environment, but we do expect to continue working on digital accessibility to museum collections, as well as to continue designing various programs - workshops, events, informal classes (the recognized method of learning by means of objects!) - in which the collections objects that are not items of permanent or temporary o exhibitions will be used.

CONCLUDING REMARK

The concluding remarks of this paper have to return to the start point, i.e. to promotion of the concept of museum collection management and related policies as a publicly available museum document. We are not talking about an administrative act, but about a document whose adoption should gather all museum professionals of a particular institution to discuss important activities, such as collections development and the accessibility to collections to as many different groups of users as possible.

Of course, the statement from the ICOM Code of Ethics, warning that museum “politics ... should not be conducted only under the influence of current intellectual trends or current use in museums.” (s.n. 2007: 8) should not be forgotten. There is the Croatian version of this warning: “By changing political systems and directors mandates objects cannot be simply rejected or changed, but the ways of exhibiting, interpreting and categorizing can ...” (Brenko 2020: 61). Nevertheless endless museum holdings growth is not possible and (in that sense) a careful consideration of its development, including careful collecting and thoughtful deaccessioning, providing new use and remaining of the objects in a publicly accessible environment, is the only solution.

Museum professionals in Croatia cannot act without support points. One of them should be Ministry of Culture as a representative of the legislator, as well as the Museum Documentation Center (with the best insight into the condition of our collections and the conditions of their depository) and the academic community members, with the task to investigate phenomena at the theoretical level, monitor and communicate to the professional community examples of a good (as well as a bad) practice. The missing point is the existence of a stronger national museum association.

For the purpose of this paper, we analyzed the work of the British Association in the period of last two decades since the research of 2002 – 2004 and the “Collections for the Future” publication (recommendations and ideas on how museums can improve the use of their collections) until the contemporary project “Empowering Collections”. This project was aiming, by uniting professionals, founders and legislators, to continue work on collections strengthening. During that analysis, it became clear that the Association was simultaneously conducting a campaign dedicated to the development, management and use of collections as an important resource of museums as well as of society.³⁵ Hence, only the synergy of all museum professionals and support points can enable change of this segment of museum activity.

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