

MASTER'S THESIS CULTURAL ECONOMICS & CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP



# STOP AMASSING CRUSTS AND STONES!

A Quantitative Enquiry on the Practice of  
Deaccessioning for Italian Public Museums

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July 2012



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## Abstract

Deaccessioning is one of the most controversial issues of museum management. Over the years, however, it has enjoyed increasing recognition. Major museum associations worldwide now acknowledge and regulate the practice, considering it an essential instrument of collections management. Nevertheless, in countries such as Italy it is still fiercely opposed on the grounds that it thwarts the vocation of museal institutions. Our study intends to determine whether this allegation is due to the sector's conservativeness or the actual perception of the public, which we argue to be of utmost importance in policy-making. In addition, we investigate specific facets of deaccessioning from a public-oriented perspective, including item-related factors that may make the practice more acceptable, terms and conditions that may be desirable for the selling process, and possible destinations for the final proceeds. Through a quantitative enquiry, we find out that the Italian public does not oppose deaccessioning in principle, although it is paramount that future visitability is ensured and sales occur through public negotiations. Furthermore, we discover that a widespread assumption of academic and professional literature, i.e. that the betterment of collections is the sole acceptable destination for deaccessioning income, does not apply to the Italian context, as several others emerge as relatively more desirable.

**Keywords:** deaccessioning, public museums, public trust, collections management, Italy

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‘Peut-être faut-il rappeler que, dans toute société, le patrimoine se reconnaît au fait que sa perte constitue un sacrifice et que sa conservation suppose des sacrifices. C'est la loi de toute sacralité.’

(Babelon & Chastel, 1994, p. 101)

[Perhaps we should remember that, in any society, heritage is recognizable by the fact that its loss constitutes a sacrifice and its conservation demands sacrifices. It is the law of all things sacred.]

# 1. Introduction

Museums are a fascinating engine of cultural heritage fruition. Their resemblance to vertically integrated firms makes them a particularly interesting subject for cultural economists (Johnson & Thomas, 1991, 1992, 1998; Johnson, 2000, 2003): Johnson (2003) defines them as mechanisms devoted to the conservation, interpretation, research and display of cultural heritage. In truth, however, there is no consensus as to what exactly constitutes a museum and what should be its purpose, functions and priorities (Weber, 2010). Referring to the American context, Merritt (2006) remarks that virtually anyone who wishes to call his establishment a museum can do so and often does. It should thus not surprise us that these institutions can assume very disparate setups. Because of this, there can hardly be cast-iron certainties: should they primarily preserve heritage for future generations? Or should they rather collect and exhibit in order to connect current generations with their past? Should they attract visitors and serve as engines of economic growth, or should they focus on fulfilling their public function, e.g. by making art available to those who cannot afford it? All of these objectives coexist and none of them can be isolated, but in a situation of chronic scarcity of resources it is easy to see how they come to conflict. More often than not, their pursuit is a delicate balancing act made of compromises and trade-offs (Weber, 2010): what is more, the 'ideal' balance changes over time, as the concept itself of museum is constantly evolving (Prato, 2001; Mossetto & Vecco, 2001; Dolák, 2004; Alexander & Alexander, 2008; Harris, 2010; Mairesse, 2010b; Pearce, 2010; Meijer-Van Mensch & Van Mensch, 2010).

At the verge of the millennium, around 40,000 institutions were censused in the world (Zils, 2000), but growth is exponential as Mairesse (2010b) estimates a 100% increase only over the last quarter of a century. Their variety is marked by changing ownership patterns, financial models, size and reputation. A particularly significant distinction exists between museums based on the Anglo-Saxon model versus the



Napoleonic: while the formers are typically visitor-oriented, with a focus on exhibition and display, the latter are more item-oriented, and the functions of care and restoration take prominence (Mossetto & Vecco, 2001). However, an interesting process has occurred in recent years whereby even museums based on the Napoleonic model are paying more attention to their visitors, which is reflected by e.g. an increased use of 'blockbuster' exhibition. This is partly due to the fact that museum growth is rarely accompanied by a proportional increase in public subsidization, which has long been a cardinal element of museum financing in the 'Napoleonic area', viz. France and Italy. On the other hand, what we witness now is instead a very consistent decrease, which sometimes forces museums to consider other potential sources of income, such as higher admission fees, ancillary commercial activities and non-government sponsorships (Johnson, 2003); as a result, more attention is devoted to enhancing the visitor experience, although sometimes even this is not enough to avoid anticipated closure (Crivellaro, 2011; Trione, 2012).

The difficulties generated by overgrowth are exacerbated in countries where museal institutions adopt the principle of inalienability. According to Hudson's Law (Šola, 2004), the continuous accumulation of objects combined with the impossibility to eventually discard them is bound to create management problems due to thinning resources (Weil, 1997; Chen, 2009; Dolák, 2010; Fayet, 2010; Mairesse, 2010a; Vilkuņa, 2010). This regularly results in museums being able to display only a fraction of their holdings at any one time – which is referred to as the 'Prado effect', from the name of the Spanish museum where such amount was found to be around 10% (Peacock, 1994). This condition now affects or will inexorably affect all museums based on the same principles, and it raises questions about the very purpose of collecting when objects cannot be used for display (Johnson, 2003). The solution to this predicament is all but straightforward: the disposal of musealized objects, technically known as 'deaccessioning', is among the most controversial topics of museum management literature. As will be reviewed later, the implementation of this practice is hindered by e.g. contractual terms of the objects' acquisition, the personal convictions of museum staff, and national laws on cultural heritage. On the other hand, scholars driven by practical and financial considerations – and sometimes ethical motives (Fayet, 2010) – consider it increasingly desirable, if not outright inevitable. What is undisputable is that

restrictions on object disposal lead to ‘ossification in the sector by impeding efficient reallocation of collections over time’ (Johnson, 2003, p. 319). The conundrum is further complicated by the legal status of the museum in question: for institutions belonging to the private sphere, the general principle stands that everything is permitted that is not forbidden or restricted. Deaccessioning is hence more readily allowed, especially when the opening of collections to public visitation is no more than a meritorious act of philanthropy and no legal restrictions are enforceable. In the past few years, however, the polarization between public and private has blurred considerably. Public museums are seldom still *entirely* public – with respect to ownership, administration and service provision – and a plethora of intermediate setups have risen in a process of pervasive hybridization (Severini, 2003). In countries such as Italy, where the American tradition of donorship is absent and ‘private’ may simply spell ‘market-driven’, very influential authors have raised the alarm as they envisioned the dismemberment of public cultural heritage and its dispersion into the private sphere (Acidini Luchinat, 1999; Settis, 2003, 2004, 2007). This uproar may be due to the fact that museums are by nature opposed to market forces (Grampp, 1989) and irreversible processes are usually approached from an extremely risk-averse position (Throsby, 2003b); however, sheer conservativeness (Towse, 2003) and the protection of elitist interests (O’Hagan, 1998) may have also played an important part. Either way, such infiltration of privates within the museum sector is absolutely crucial for the analysis of recent developments in cultural heritage policy-making and museum management trends.

The debate on deaccessioning has expanded much in recent years but we still detect a major gap in academic literature, as most studies treat deaccessioning from an ethical (e.g. Fayet, 2010), economic (e.g. Srakar, 2012) or legal (e.g. Chen, 2009) perspective. Considerably fewer move from the public’s interest instead (e.g. Whiting-Looze, 2010), and in any case none within our knowledge adopts quantitative surveying. No study was found that describes the visitors’ take on the issue of deaccessioning despite the public being rightfully considered the primary stakeholder for cultural heritage. For the most part, visitors are automatically assumed to oppose deaccessioning, but recent research suggests that deaccessioning does not necessarily harm public trust and may even be of benefit to it (Ackers Cirigliana, 2010). We are thus interested in probing the public’s opinion on the topic of deaccessioning. In addition, in

order to refine our answer, we intend to investigate whether some characteristics of the objects, such as their scarcity, make deaccessioning more or less acceptable, whether the public perceives some particular conditions to be paramount for the selling process, e.g. the preservation of public visitability, and whether some particular destinations for the new proceeds are likewise preferable over others. Indeed, if it is true that museums of the third millennium have become more visitor-oriented, the public's perception of such vital matters should become the principal compass for decision-making. The fact that these considerations are hardly reflected in current academic literature constitutes our chief reason for electing this topic.

Our purpose is to analyze deaccessioning from a cultural-economic standpoint while taking the perspective of the general public into account. Such analysis, conducted through quantitative methods, will constitute the experimental part of our thesis. The title we have chosen is intendedly provocative, and refers to a quotation from *Il Museo d'Arte Americano: Dietro le Quinte di un Mito*, by Italian art historian, ministry official and current Superintendent of Florence, Dr. Cristina Acidini Luchinat. In her book, the Superintendent elatedly commends the fact that, in Italy, the government is pressured to undertake the preservation of all the 'croste e [...] pietre ammassate nei patri depositi' [crusts and stones amassed in national depots] (Acidini Luchinat, 1999, p. 49). This reference is not fortuitous for us: in fact, it is to Italian public museums that we purposely restrict our enquiry, partly because of personal familiarity, but especially for the conviction that Italy features one of the most ancient and conservative museal environments, as we will later review. Therefore, we believe it is an interesting and challenging context to investigate.

Our research question can thus be formulated: what is the attitude of Italian citizens towards deaccessioning practices for Italian public museums? Our principal efforts will be directed towards answering this query. Since we believe a direct question would likely elicit a biased response due to e.g. social desirability, we will rather attempt an indirect approach, through means we will explain in our methodology. Furthermore, the following secondary questions will be employed for the purpose of exploration and refinement: (a) are there specific item-related factors that make deaccessioning more or less desirable for certain categories of objects? (b) Are there any conditions that are

perceived as more or less important for the selling process? (c) How should final proceeds be employed? This information will be useful for improving our response to our primary question well beyond a basic yes or no.

The literature review preparing the ground for our answering process is divided in two chapters: chapter 2 will closely examine the theory of deaccessioning referring to sources from Europe and the United States. The issues inherent to this practice will be explained, reviewing the concerns of their many opposers and the replies of their increasing supporters. Furthermore, a brief history of deaccessioning will be outlined, including the formal birth of this concept in 1972 and a small selection of noteworthy cases that helped ignite academic debate. In chapter 3, we will specifically tackle the Italian environment and explain its peculiarities vis-à-vis other countries, especially the United States. We will also review the recent developments of national heritage management policies and determine how deaccessioning fits into the picture dictated by cultural heritage legislation. We shall then move onto the experimental part of our thesis: in chapter 4, we will describe our research questions, methodology, sampling procedure and questionnaire design. In chapter 5, we will present our survey results through charts and commentary. Finally, in chapter 6, we will recap and expand our conclusions, discuss our limits and advance suggestions for further research.

For the purpose of reference throughout the unfolding of our results, an original copy of our survey is attached in the appendix along with an English translation.

## **Part I – Theory and context**

## 2. Deaccessioning in literature

### 2.1. Of definitions and undertones

As a fairly recent neologism, ‘deaccessioning’ is a term that may not be familiar to most non-specialists. In museum jargon, on the other hand, it has become something of a dirty word (Goldstein, 1997). It was first publicly used in 1972 by late New York Times art critic John Canaday (quoted in Fincham, 2011, p. 2), who addressed the Museum of Modern Art from a Sunday column of that year, accusing its board of having

‘[...] recently de-accessioned (the polite term for “sold”) one of its only four Redons, the gift of a prominent collector, rechanneling it into private hands [...] by way of a dealer.’

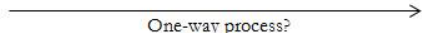
Today, the term has entered everyday use within archival professions. Nonetheless, definitions remain blurry and it is important for us to make upfront clarifications. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.a) defines the verb ‘to deaccession’ as follows: ‘to sell or otherwise dispose of an item in a collection’, while the Oxford Dictionary (n.d.) adds a key adverb: ‘to *officially* remove an item from a library, museum, or art gallery in order to sell it’. The latter definition is more specific, but also more inaccurate. First and foremost, the intent of selling may not be the only motivation for deaccessioning: objects may be transferred free of charge to other institutions, and items deemed no longer fitting for exhibition due to decay, low quality or inauthenticity may be removed from museum inventories, or destroyed (NMDC, 2003; AAMD, 2010; MGNSW, 2011). There is even a very subtle kind of deaccessioning, knowledge of which seldom spreads outside the field, where the items are removed from inventories but do not leave museum premises, being rather used as props in exhibitions, illustrative material for teaching programmes, experimental material for conservators and so forth (Maranda, 2010). Secondly, the meaning of ‘officially’ as used in the latter definition is ambiguous: if used to imply the arbitration of museum directors, then it is agreeable. However, if

used to refer to public and transparent procedures, or a clearly established praxis, e.g. including public auctioning and timely press releases, then the definition becomes far too limiting. As we will examine, history provides accounts of objects being intentionally removed from collections already in 1755, when the concept of museum intended as a public space for preservation and display was just beginning to develop (Alexander & Alexander, 2008), and long before any management praxis was ever consistently enforced. The questions of how furtively deaccessioning operations are currently conducted (Orloski, 2008) – and they are, on a regular basis (Temin, 1991; Dolák, 2010) – and whether authorities should ultimately outlaw or permit them, are to this day the core of all polemics. Temin (1991, p. 184) points out that ‘every museum deaccessions [but] museum directors implicitly acknowledge the impropriety of their sales’ since, when they are not officially permitted, sold works of art may not be recorded as such, but rather eliminated from museum records as if they had never been owned (Meyer, 1979). However, there is no doubt the term applies to overt and covert disposals alike. In this master’s thesis, we shall adopt a definition of ‘deaccessioning’ grounded in the etymology of the word. As the term refers to the undoing of *accessioning* operations, i.e. the entry of selected items into the museum register, we consider it applicable to sales and disposals, but also to involuntary losses such as thefts, misplacements and destructions (Merryman et alii, 2007; Vilkuņa, 2010), as well as repurposes (Maranda, 2010). The inadequacy of dictionary entries has often led scholars to make and adopt their own definitions, usually presenting them at the beginning of their papers. This resulted in a plethora of different claims on what is normally referred to as ‘deaccessioning’, some much more accurate than others. For example, Crivellaro (2011), defines it as the permanent disposal of artistic property to the private sector, thus excluding any sale or exchange with other public institutions as well as destructions. Byrne (2000, p. 15), instead, defines it as ‘the process of permanently removing [museum collection items] from a museum’s ownership and custody’, thus excluding disposals operated by non-museal institutions.

Beyond the basic need for a definition, we reckon the etymology of the word is important to analyze because of its profound psychological ramifications. As Mairesse (2010a) prudently detects, ‘accession’ describes the transfer of an item from one category to another. More precisely, it removes it from the mundane and places it into

the collection-worthy. Semantically, this constitutes a veritable elevation, a net gain of status. After being accessioned, museum objects – which are not simply objects in a museum (Stránský, 1996) – gain a dignity that is commonly perceived as superior. As first theorized by Panofsky (1940), they become semiophores: they are invested with symbolic meaning and believed to manifest something more than just themselves, thus becoming symbols and objects at the same time (Pomian, 1991; Santagata, 1998; Barrère & Santagata, 1999). In truth, this process is typical of artwork in general, but musealization seems to function as a mark of official semiotic acknowledgment (Carman, 2010), and is an act invested with positive undertones as it saves the items from utilitarian exploitation. Hermann Lübbe (1984, p. 237) describes museums as ‘rescue institutions for cultural remains from the process of destruction’, a definition informed by a somewhat heroic ethos (Fayet, 2010). On a practical level, the consequences of musealization are twofold: (a) items are excluded from the daily routine of exploitation, as their original use is forfeited, and (b) they are arbitrarily relocated over time in order to be observed, for the purpose of enjoying such ascribed significance (Marciniak, 2011). This is summarized in the diagram below (Fig. 1).

	Non-musealized object	Musealized object (semiophore)
Possesses	Utilitarian function	Recognized social, historical and/or cultural significance
Does not possess	Recognized social, historical and/or cultural significance	Utilitarian function


  
One-way process?

1 – THE MUSEALIZATION PROCESS, ADAPTED FROM LESHCHENKO (2010)

It is self-evident, at this point, how deaccessions can be perceived as the unceremonious revocation of such higher status. In fact, the choice to deaccession an item may suggest it is no longer worthy of display, at least in its current context, and the item is returned to daily life values, like its monetary worth. Therefore, ‘deaccessioning’ is a term tinged with undertones of degradation (Mairesse, 2010a). Through it, as Harris (2010) notes, museums implicitly assert that the dispersed artifacts did not contribute to the mission of the institution any longer, and thus undermined its identity. The word



itself is basically a positive action with a negative prefix (Fayet, 2010). These accents carry psychological implications that are hard to neutralize even in academic debate, let alone among the public of non-specialists. Modern museums have traditionally assumed that collections should be preserved in perpetuity (Merriman, 2008); therefore, when an item is deaccessioned, the community may feel a sense of betrayal leading to a loss of confidence in what they perceive as the primary trust responsibility of museal institutions. This stigma can decrease visits and leave an enduring scar in a museum's reputation (Maranda, 2010).

We also find noteworthy that 'deaccession' does not accurately translate into certain languages, such as French, Spanish and Italian, despite ancient traditions of heritage conservation and museology in these countries. Faced with a linguistic impasse, European cultural policy-makers resort to synonyms like 'cession' or 'alienation' instead (ICOM, 2004; ICOM, 2010a; ICOM, 2010b). This latter expression is particularly interesting as it is also heavy with negative undertones. Its origin lies in 13<sup>th</sup> century Latin 'alienatio', which first carried exclusively legal connotations (Mairesse, 2010a), meaning the transfer of property or interest to someone else, either at a price or free of charge (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.b). Around the 14<sup>th</sup> century, however, a second meaning emerged, referring to severe psychic damage, an 'estrangement of mind' which, albeit logically unrelated, may also contribute to today's almost instinctive bias against this practice. On the other hand, psychological disturbances have been associated with endless collecting as well: Mairesse (2010b) points out that the behavior of museum curators may sometimes deviate into deranged hoarding. Cluttered to overcapacity, the storerooms of European museums may end up resembling gargantuan cabinets of curiosities (Merritt, 2008).

It is emblematic that, in civil law countries such as France, Spain and Italy, there was no apparent need to closely translate the term 'deaccessioning'. This could be due to Catholic influences and the long-lasting cult of relics, which may have transferred over to other domains of symbolic appreciation (Mairesse, 2010b). In these countries, the preservation of musealized items, which are considered public property and thus inalienable by definition (Leshchenko, 2010), is among the paramount principles of museal institutions. While recent attempts to introduce deaccessioning as a tool of collections management in Europe have succeeded in e.g. the Netherlands (ICN, 2006)

and the United Kingdom (MA, 2007), they have all but elicited vexed responses in Southern Europe, where the Napoleonic model of museum based on collecting and preserving is more prominent (Mossetto & Vecco, 2001). This difference is possible because of the European Union's employment of the subsidiarity principle with respect to cultural policy, and the belief that heritage management is best pursued at a sub-national level by individual member-states (Barnett, 2001). In France, a bill submitted in 2007 by Lower House Representative Jean-François Mancel caused disquiet and protests and was quickly defused (Clair, 2007; Rigaud, 2008; Rykner, 2008). The same occurred in Belgium, when the preparatory work for a similar act for federal museums was recently disclosed (Mairesse, 2010a). In Italy, such attempt formally occurred in June 2002, with the introduction of Law 112/2002 on cultural goods and infrastructures (Parlamento Italiano, 2002a), causing protests in response which ultimately forced the government to make amends (Parlamento Italiano, 2002b). Echoing an inclement remark from the international press, the government was then to the Afghan Taliban, as it was accused of plotting the systematic obliteration its own cultural heritage (Tarantino, 2002; Settis, 2007) just like the iconoclast Afghan regime had then recently destroyed the Buddhas of Bamiyan (Falser, 2011). However, it is important to remark that to this day cases of alienation in Italy have only ever regarded notable buildings and never mobile goods, such as musealized items, the alienation of which depends on the legal status of the collection and the museum where they belong (Mossetto & Vecco, 2001). As will be explained in more detail later, in the case of public museums these items are to this day effectively inalienable (Parlamento Italiano, 2004a). Either way, it is beyond doubt that such indecorous comparison reinforced the ominous reputation of deaccessioning over time and contributed to exacerbating the public's aversion to it.

## **2.2. Some explanatory cases**

The pivotal event which catalyzed public attention on the topic of deaccessioning dates to 1972. As previously mentioned, the credit goes to New York Times art critic John Canaday. John Hess (2003) reports the episode in close detail: early in that year, the president of the Art Dealers Association in New York City called Canaday with news of several paintings, including a Gauguin, a Manet, a Cezanne and an early Picasso, being furtively deaccessioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The tip was passed on to a

culture news reporter. She called the museum's director Tom Hoving, who denied it, and other sources, who confirmed it but declined to be quoted. The story made the Sunday column with an article titled *Very Quiet and Very Dangerous*, where Canaday voiced his concerns for recent sales made by the Metropolitan as well as other museums (Krueger, 2008; Fincham, 2011). The following week, in the very same section, the New York Times editors published a vitriolic rebuttal by Hoving titled *Very Inaccurate and Very Dangerous*, which Hess (2003, p. 135) describes 'as violent an attack on a journalist as ever to appear in his own paper'. However, despite this bitter comeback, the Metropolitan decided to block all ongoing transactions: Canaday had thus effectively forced the museum to retain its artworks.

At any rate, these dealings were not new to the museum board. Two years earlier, it had secretly deaccessioned several other objects, including world-class Van Gogh, Rousseau, Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec, which had been sold to private dealers at bargain prices in order to finance the acquisition of major works that would make front-page headlines, such as Velázquez's *Juan de Pareja*, bought for the then record price of \$5.5 million (Chen, 2009; Fincham, 2011; Pogrebin, 2011). At that point, it was unclear whether the museum could legitimately deaccession these works, as they belonged to the de Groot collection, originally bequeathed to the Metropolitan in 1967 by a private benefactor. While not requiring the Metropolitan to retain donated artworks in perpetuity, the donor explicitly restricted their transfer to other New York or Connecticut museums (Ackers Cirigliana, 2010; Urice, 2010). Later in 1972, news of these deaccessions reached John Canaday: again, he publicly accused the museum board of mismanagement, and again he was fiercely criticized in response, this time by museum president C. Douglas Dillon. At this point, the New York Times recognized it was facing a challenge to its judgment and veracity, and thus began a thorough investigation into the many anomalies presented by museum documents with the support of anonymous insiders (Hess, 2003). The legality and prudence of the museum board's actions were subject to a seven-month judiciary inquiry dubbed Museum Gate (Gabor, 1989), resulting in the exposure of much more extensive and scandalous trades that Canaday had suspected. Put under pressure by Attorney General Louis J. Lefkowitz, the museum directorate eventually admitted its responsibilities, but no one was ultimately convicted for mismanagement because the ambiguous wording in de

Groot's testament made her bequest absolute and any further restriction unenforceable (Chen, 2009). Nevertheless, the Metropolitan Museum pledged to adopt transparent procedures for future deaccessions, agreeing to: (a) include in its annual report the total proceeds from objects netting more than \$5,000 each, (b) restrict sales to public auctions, and (c) provide advance notice of them if said items have been exhibited at all in the last 10 years (Hess, 2003; Urice, 2010; Pogrebin, 2011). After this episode, the moral and legal responsibilities of museum trustees and directors entered public scrutiny and started to ignite debate. The repercussions of this affair invested museums throughout the United States, with a spate of articles calling deaccessioning everything from disturbing to an outright cover-up, and a few art critics unsuccessfully petitioning for its total cessation (Gabor, 1989; Merryman et alii, 2007). The case also attracted the attention of economists, most notably John Michael Montias (1973), who first researched the practice in a scholarly paper for the American Association of Museums.

The Metropolitan episode is not the first documented case of deaccessioning known today. In fact, we may find an *ante litteram* example in the so-called Oxford Dodo, notoriously destroyed by the Ashmolean Museum in 1755. Despite the long-held belief, possibly initiated by denigrators of the Oxford University, that the Dodo had been carelessly burned and then thrown away by a janitor, there is no doubt the disposal was in fact a deliberate curatorial sanction (Ovenell, 1992; MacGregor, 2001; Hume, 2006). This is evident from the records kept by William Huddesford (quoted in MacGregor, 2001, p. 137), who became keeper of the Ashmolean in 1755 and re-enumerated all objects in the museum inventory, explaining the fate of some as follows:

'Illa quibus nullus in Margine assignatur Numerus e Museo subducta sunt Cimelia, annuentibus V. Can.<sup>no</sup> aliisque Curatoribus, ad ea Lustranda convocatis die Jan.<sup>no</sup> Oct.<sup>vo</sup> Convocatis [sic] An: Dni. 1755.'

[Those items for which no number is assigned in the margin are removed from the museum with the consent of the Vice Chancellor and the other curators, gathered to examine them on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, 1755.]

Yet another episode, this time from very recent history, regards late 19<sup>th</sup> century masterwork by Thomas Eakins *The Gross Clinic*, exhibited on campus at the Thomas Jefferson University of Philadelphia until it was sold and replaced by a copy in 2006

(Sugin, 2010). The object, now considered one of the greatest American canvases of the 1800s (91FM News, 2006; Friedman, n.d.), had been collectively purchased for \$200 by a group of alumni in 1878 and donated to the institution for the purpose of display. The work illustrates a lecture from local surgeon Dr. Samuel Gross; it possesses great intangible value as it is considered Philadelphia's painting, created by a Philadelphia artist and depicting a Philadelphia professor lecturing in Philadelphia, and is held as a historical symbol of the city's creative and technical excellence. In 2006, however, the University announced the painting would be sold to out-of-state museums in order to finance future campus expansions (Morris, 2007; Orloski, 2008; Sugin, 2010). By means of auction, its market price was fixed at \$68 million, the highest valuation record for an artwork made by an American artist prior to World War II (Vogel, 2006a). The notice was met with great animosity and violent polemics ensued: the local community was outraged, University employees and faculty voiced disapproval, and the national art scene was permeated with 'a general sentiment of disgust' (Orloski, 2008, p. 610).

The decision could not be prevented because the artwork was a private financial asset of the University and the board was legitimately entitled to sell it to whomever it wished – which is the reason why universities may be a wholly different case than museums (Sugin, 2010). At the time, Mayor John Street entertained the possibility of overriding the sale by declaring the painting a historic object, hence placing it under the jurisdiction of the Philadelphia Historical Commission (Fincham, 2011). The attempt was eventually dropped because it would constitute a governmental intrusion with unfair repercussions onto the market value and legal standing of an object for which a sales agreement had already been signed. Indeed, the University could and would have successfully challenged such decision on constitutional grounds (Riley, 2006). Quite fortunately, however, polemics were defused as the Thomas Jefferson board, or the veteran agent from Christie's New York who was hired to broker the sale (Orloski, 2008), had included a provision in the sale agreement that gave local cultural institutions a 45-day window, later extended by 30 days extra, to match the \$68 million hammer price (Vogel, 2006b; Vogel, 2006c). The opportunity was jointly seized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, who borrowed money from the Wachovia Bank and acquired the artwork. It is of utmost interest how these institutions managed to raise the funds for the purchase. In fact, they

resorted to deaccessioning themselves: the Philadelphia Museum sold one painting and two oil sketches to an out-of-state museum, while the Pennsylvania Academy sold a portrait to a private dealer, all works by the same Thomas Eakins (Vogel, 2008).

It is thought-provoking, at the very least, that monies gained through deaccessions ultimately brought a satisfactory solution to a predicament caused by deaccessioning itself. In our opinion, this shows it would be simplistic to consider deaccessioning policies merely an abuse of directorial power. Beyond doubt, the protection of public trust must be the primary concern, and aspects such as legal entitlements to the individual work, fiscal responsibilities, access maximization, donor intent and legitimacy of the final allocation of proceeds ought to carry considerable weight (Whiting-Looze, 2010). There is concrete risk that museum staff may resort to deaccessioning for the sake of convenience or monetary gain – including cases of corruption (Maranda, 2010; Srakar, 2012). However, there can be ways to shore up against these liabilities, and the advantages offered by deaccessioning policies warrant careful consideration. This is becoming increasingly evident, and policy-makers have at last recognized the necessity of a legal framework for deaccessioning even in the Old Continent (ICOM, 2004). We may presume such change of heart is part of a general effort of the cultural sector to become increasingly self-reliant, especially in Europe, where the reduction of public spending for culture has ubiquitously occurred to offset the economic crisis (Trione, 2012), sometimes with very short notice (Davies & Wilkinson, 2008). Indeed, in a situation of scarcity the proceeds gained from deaccessioning have become highly desirable (Goldstein, 1997; Castagneto, 2012; Srakar, 2012): they make a precious contribution to the budget of museal institutions and can help fill in the void left by governmental subsidies (White, 1996). We may find confirmation of this in the United States, where museums rarely depend on public funds and deaccessions are more readily considered an appropriate tool of collections management (Temin, 1991; O'Hagan, 1998; Shubinski, 2007; AAMD, 2010; Crivellaro, 2011). As a matter of fact, the propriety of deaccessioning policies as 'a legal, legitimate and vital concern for museums' (Gabor, 1989, p. 1005) was already considered well settled in the US more than twenty years ago. By contrast, in Europe, the availability of subsidies made the generation of own revenues a much less pressing concern. It may even have been discouraged, as future subsidies could be reduced if museums gained

extra income, and/or additional revenues could be demanded back by the Treasury (Frey & Meier, 2006).

This, however, does not prevent deaccessioning from having European precedents as well. They are especially abundant for England, where the debate is lively (Saner, 2011) and Arts Councils have been known to sell artwork at auction to compensate for budget cuts (BBC, 2011), finance new facilities (Atkinson, 2011), or simply pay for new heating in the town hall (Saner, 2011) – though it must be reported that, on occasion, the sale of artwork for unendorsed purposes has caused museums to be stripped of their governmental accreditation and funding opportunities (Spicer, 2006). In the Netherlands, deaccessioning made the news already in 1987, with a case very similar to *The Gross Clinic*. In that year, the Municipality of Hilversum announced its intention to sell a Mondrian it legally owned, which had been purchased by an association of the artist's friends in 1931 for *f* 500 and donated to the city. The artwork, however, had been since borrowed and exhibited by the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, who expressed great disapproval for the decision to deaccession. The Ministry itself stepped in to prevent the painting from being sold on the free market, and allowed the purchase by the Municipality of Amsterdam plus three sponsors for the sum of *f* 2.5 million (Vereniging Rembrandt, n.d.). Today, deaccessioning policies are more refined and the *Nederlandse Museumvereniging* formally recognizes museums' right to sell (ICN, 2006). Deaccessions have been conducted regularly by multiple institutions across the country (AD, 2006; Dagje Weg, 2009; Van De Wiel, 2011), but polemics have ignited quickly whenever they have occurred without compliance with official guidelines, viz. the 2011 cases of Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, who sold items from the African collection to replenish its operating budget (De Kok, 2011; Bockma, 2011), and Museumgouda, who deliberately sold its artwork through Christie's despite other museum's preemption rights (Bockma, 2011; Bockma & De Kok, 2011).

Although museal institutions are generally not allowed to sell for the sake of their budget, it is undeniable that budget cuts have greatly contributed to increasing awareness on this topic. Many museums, including the Metropolitan, have responded to them by dismissing employees, limiting exhibitions and narrowing operating hours. Others, too small to survive, face anticipated closure (Crivellaro, 2011; Trione, 2012). In Italy, the director of the Casoria Contemporary Art Museum, a private institution near

Naples, resorted to burning his artwork on live streaming as a protest against reduced spending (Le Monde, 2012). We may thus understand why new means of income are becoming more attractive, and deaccessioning is being proposed as a panacea (Castagneto, 2012; Srakar, 2012). In order to take away the stigma, its traditional understanding as a predatory practice is being revisited: more attention is being paid to e.g. the claim that it does not ultimately harm public trust (Ackers Cirigliana, 2010). Such upsurge in scholarly interest has transformed what John Canaday had coined as a simple, politically correct euphemism into a hot topic for museum professionals and law reviewers alike. Nonetheless, more comprehensive academic inquiry is needed, as research on this topic is frustrated by several levels of complexity. More efforts are demanded to properly cover all aspects, conditions and implications, many of which lie outside the domain of cultural economists. On top of that, dedication will be required to properly disseminate the results of these studies, because at the moment museums are often subject to extensive public condemnation even when they comply with established codes of conduct (Crivellaro, 2011). Deaccessioning remains regrettably ‘miscomprehended by museum trustees [...], baffling to most journalists, [...] and confusing to the public, which seems to believe that placing a work in a museum is tantamount to entombing it there forever’ (Urice, 2010, p. 209).

### **2.3. A matter of perspective: ethical concerns vs. practical considerations**

Opposers of deaccessioning usually appeal to a number of ethical and legal arguments related to the role of the State and the impact of this practice on the public accessibility of cultural goods (Besterman, 1991; Acidini Luchinat, 1999). From their perspective, deaccessioning is preposterous because it suggests a profit- rather than public good-orientation (Settis, 2003; Crivellaro, 2011). This stems from a generalized tendency of traditionalists to approach irreversible decisions ‘with extreme caution and from a strongly risk-averse position’ (Throsby, 2003b, p. 185). In synthesis, they are worried that deaccessioning may be a Pandora’s Box: once opened, there is no telling where it ends (Feys, n.d.). The problem is usually framed within an ethics of conviction, i.e. the sense that good behavior stems from adherence to clearly defined and absolutely valid rules (Weber, 2000). From this perspective, any deviation from the inalienability principle appears to be a non-ethical concession to economic and pragmatic demands



(Fayet, 2010). Another line of opposition moves from the theory of incomplete contracts as well as game theory. Hypotheses have been advanced that, because of principles from these two domains, museum managers called to make decisions on deaccessioning are drawn to misconduct. It is alleged that, since they are in a position of asymmetric information with respect to their principals, they are liable to moral hazard, i.e. they are insulated from risk and may thus behave differently than they would if they were exposed to it (Maranda, 2010; Srakar, 2012). In principle, the fact that non-optimal management incentives can arise from excessive discretion in the hands of managers of profit and non-profit organizations – due perhaps to a principal-agent problem of free cash flow (Grossman & Hart, 1982; Jensen, 1986; Srakar, 2012) – has been noted by several economists (Fisman & Hubbard, 2005; Core et alii, 2006). In the case of museums, it is argued that, in the presence of deaccessioning possibilities, managers may be disinclined to raise museum revenues and view their depots as a ‘cookie jar of assets’ (Krueger, 2008, p. 11) more readily available. However, this would only apply when deaccessioning funds are used to finance daily operation and not, for example, when they are employed to refine or expand the collections (Srakar, 2012).

It is true that supporters of deaccessioning are mainly driven by practical and financial considerations (Montias, 1973; Weil, 1990; Borg, 1991; Mairesse, 2010a). Some adhere to the so-called Yale Model of museum governance, which emphasizes economic viability, brand-name, marketing and financing as the primary goal of administration (Crivellaro, 2011). Among the primary arguments is the point, blatant but overlooked, that perpetual growth of museum collections is not sustainable in the long run. Generally speaking, museums tend to increase their collections continuously by 1-2% per year from the moment of their creation (Lord et alii, 1989), a rate far exceeding that of disposal (Merriman, 2008). In fact, if the material production of our society grows exponentially, so does the number of items deemed worthy of collection status. The gap between the quantity of potential museum objects and the objects that are actually musealized will continue to increase as creative human beings continue to work (Fayet, 2010). Deaccessioning thus becomes closely related to, and inseparable from, broader policies of collections optimization (Neves, 2005). As a practical example, Dolák (2010) points out that, if Czech museums continue to acquire new items at the current rate without being given the possibility to deaccession some of them, the total

amount of musealized objects would be over one billion in just 130 years. This number is far higher than what Czech depots can be realistically expected to accommodate. Although this problem, ubiquitous in Europe, may appear far away still, we are obliged to ask ourselves what the situation will be a few centuries from now, and what can we do to prevent future difficulties (Mairesse, 2010a). If we choose to disregard the unchecked growth of collections today, the issue will eventually resurface more pressing than ever. Since we have gone so far as imagining a de-growth economy, is it outlandish to consider de-growth in museums as well (Mairesse, 2010b)? There is a widespread need for strategic long-term vision. Sustainability means being able to meet the needs of the present without preventing future generations from meeting their own needs (UNDESA, 1987): while it is true that deaccessioning may make some items unavailable to future generations of museum visitors, it is likewise true that if an organization mismanages its collection it is not meeting the needs of the present. Moreover, if it collapses financially, it will be entirely unable to serve future generations and may cause the dispersion or outright loss of *all* items in its care, including those that would not be deaccessioned (Davies & Wilkinson, 2008).

Admittedly, pragmatism is the watchword for deaccessioning supporters. In tribute to the British museologist, the name of Hudson's Law is given to the relationship between the size of a collection and its management – generally poorer as the size grows (Šola, 2004). Nevertheless, it can be argued that all in all the sale of artworks it is not only practical, but ethical as well. This is rooted in the recognition that museum collections are not and should not be an all-embracing record of the past, but an account of selected items reflecting mutable judgments (Lowenthal, 2000). To begin with, the practice of deaccessioning may be justified by the purpose of overall improvement of the collection, as is effectively established by e.g. the Museums Association (2007). Secondly, if we move from an ethics of conviction to an ethics of responsibility, i.e. the sense that good behavior stems from the righteousness of consequences, regardless of rules (Weber, 2000), the disposal of collection items can be ethically sensible for deeper reasons as well. In fact, if the goal of museums is to maintain cultural goods and make them available to future generations, how can the preservation of insignificant items be more ethical than the acquisition of worthwhile objects that are otherwise passed on for lack of resources (Fayet, 2010)? Should we not

perhaps accept that the preservation of heritage is as much a sacrifice for society as its loss (Babelon & Chastel, 1994; Peacock, 1998; Mossetto & Vecco, 2001; Wilkinson, 2005)? All arguments boil down to a question of what sacrifice we can really afford to make. In the long run, the strict inalienability of heritage would make the costs of preservation virtually infinite, because ‘almost the whole material world today has the potential for musealization’ (Fayet, 2010, p. 51). The answer to the aforementioned dilemma thus becomes apparent: to be sustainable, museums should be allowed to remove as much as they take in (Weil, 1997; Chen, 2009; Dolák, 2010). This way, their resources can be dedicated to the preservation of objects directly related to their purposes and focuses – which may sharpen or even change over time – instead of being thinned to cope with impracticable ambitions (Mairesse, 2010a). From such perspective, deaccessioning can be defined as a cure for ‘object bulimia’ (Vilkuna, 2010, p. 74), which is the condition where collections are so large that the museum malfunctions according to Hudson’s Law. This mindset, already familiar for European private museums, has recently been advanced within the public sector as well, e.g. in the Netherlands (Bergevoet, 2003; Kok, 2007; Timer & Kok, 2007) and especially the United Kingdom (NMDC, 2003; Wilkinson, 2005; Wilkinson and Cross, 2007), where deaccessioning is officially permitted and is expected to increase (Davies & Wilkinson, 2008), but public trust is protected because private sales can only occur after ‘it has been established that no museum or other organization within the wider public domain is able to take the item’ (MA, 2007, p. 16). The introduction of such safeguards into official policies elsewhere in Europe is, once again, a possibility as obvious as it is ignored. Naysayers seem entrenched on the slippery slope argument that abolishing the inalienability of cultural heritage necessarily leads to its annihilation.

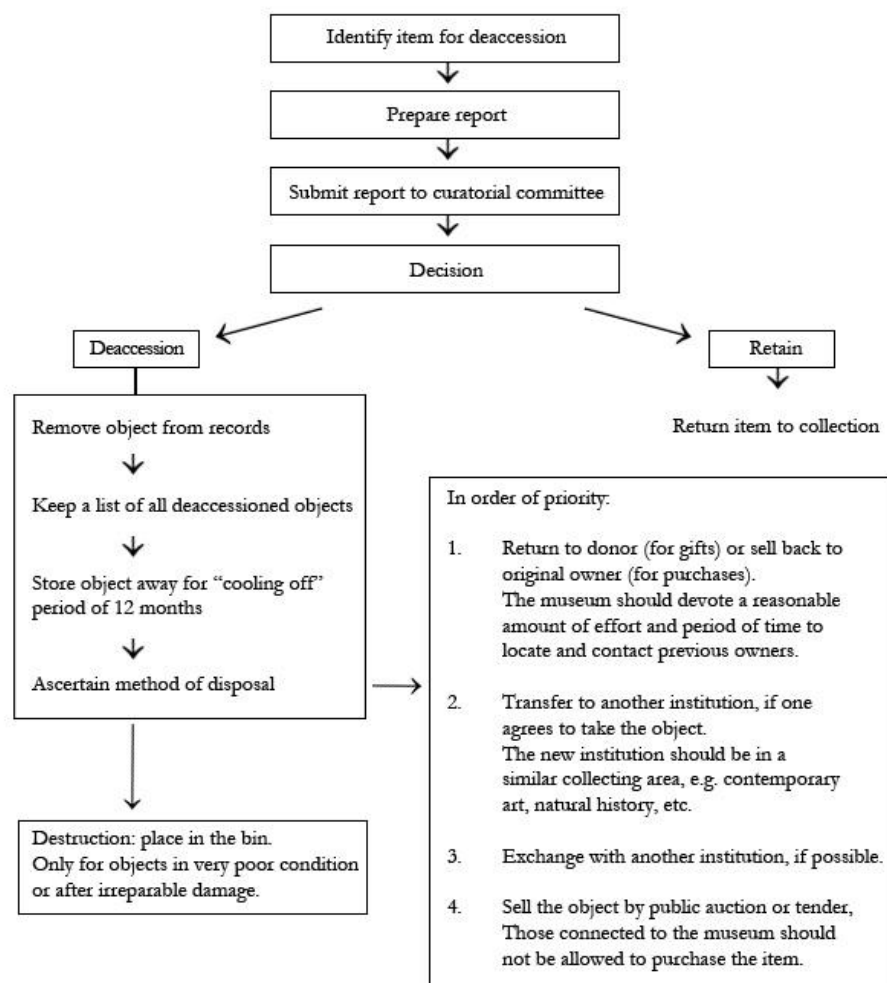
There is a final contradiction worth noting. While deaccessioning refers to the removal of items from *any* sort of collection, and can apply to any institution which maintains an accession register, not all objects seem to be considered equal from a deaccessioning standpoint. Works of art, in fact, are the main focus of discord. Specimens of natural history or historical objects, on the other hand, seem to be easier to remove from collections, at least until they become unique just by chance. Indeed, ‘there are actually few radical opponents to the disposal of cheap objects, of which several copies are known to exist’ (Mairesse, 2010b, p. 63). Building on the well

established notion that the cult of relics is at the origin of all heritage conservation (Babelon & Chastel, 1994; Pomian, 2003; Vecco, 2007), this tendency has led scholars to trace comparisons, a little risky but fairly explanatory, between opposers versus supporters of deaccessioning and iconoclasts versus worshippers of religious relics (Mairesse, 2010a, 2010b). We wholeheartedly agree that the stance towards the sale of works is hardly consistent, and may very well be influenced by individual characteristics of the item in question, like substitutability. Those who abhor the sale of a Kandinsky or a Botticelli, for example, may prove less resistant to the sale of a Roman coin, knowing the latter will never be in the same scarcity. Even among artworks, some objects may still be considered more sellable than others, e.g. because they are of minor quality or less related to the aim of the collection. In this case, the transfer to another location is far less problematic, and may even result in a net gain of significance for the item: as Matassa (2010, p. 110) puts it, ‘a portrait [...] with little aesthetic merit of a sitter unknown to the gallery, may be of relevance to the local museum in the artist’s hometown [...] where it is of intrinsic worth’. We find the presence of these distinctions extremely relevant for the broader debate on deaccessioning. In fact, the investigation of such critical factors will be among the objectives of the present research.

#### **2.4. The valuation issue**

Other important arguments concerning deaccessioning refer to the financial sphere. These grounds are treaded very carefully by policy-makers because there is a lurking temptation to employ deaccessioning proceeds to cover financial deficits. This could lead to items being needlessly sold due to inefficient administration rather than concrete necessities (Van Mensch, 2008). There is a universally accepted principle throughout the museum world that proceeds from the sale of artworks should never be used to pay for operating expenses, building upgrades or repairs, or even the improvement of materials and services, but only for the acquisition of new artworks (Hart, 2007; Merryman et alii, 2007; Kennedy, 2008; Matassa, 2010). In fact, we may easily imagine the havoc it would cause to sell e.g. a Van Gogh to pay for a roof repair (Temin, 1991) or to cover an outstanding debt (Crivellaro, 2011). Any deaccession should contribute to advancing the museum’s mission and improve the long-term public benefit. As reviewed by Sugin

(2010), this rule is enforced by major museums associations both in Europe and in the rest of the world in an effort to prevent the overall value of collections from decreasing. The Art Institute of Chicago, for instance, recently chose to double its entrance fees overnight rather than deaccession works of art, even though the sale of less than 1% of the collection would have sufficed to grant long lasting free entry (Crivellaro, 2011). While not legally binding, in fact, the associations impose significant repercussions for non-abiders, in terms of reputation, prestige and sometimes financing. It is worth mentioning that they also advance the restitution to the original donor or seller as the preferred method of deaccession (AAM, 2000; ICOM, 2004; MA, 2007; AAMD 2010) and list the sale to privates as the very last resort, with priority only over destruction (MGNSW, 2011), as shown by the flowchart below (Fig. 2).



2 – DEACCESSION AND DISPOSAL FLOWCHART, ADAPTED FROM MGNSW (2011)

While the commitment to maintain the overall value of collections is laudable, certain systemic inefficiencies within the museum world prevent it from being optimally pursued. The valuation of musealized items, for example, can only occur at the moment of the sale, by means of bidding, or through expensive and problematic contingent valuation studies (Noonan, 2002; Cuccia, 2003; Murphy & Stevens, 2004; Venkatachalam, 2004; Carson & Hanemann, 2005; Towse, 2010; Verboom, 2011). It is thus very difficult to determine the value of collections as a whole without concretely putting them on the market. In truth, most museums rarely even have a reliable account of all items in their possession, let alone an estimate of their worth (Grampp, 1996). Furthermore, these methods may ascertain the monetary value of an item, but this is only a poor indicator for the benefits that cultural goods exert on the community at large, on an economic – for example, externalities onto related industries – but also symbolic and social levels (Klamer & Zuidhof, 1999; Klamer, 2002; Throsby, 2002, 2003a; Klamer, 2003a, 2003b; Throsby, 2004a, 2004b; Rizzo & Throsby, 2006; Throsby, 2006, 2011). This argument is at the origin of a fundamental paradox suffered by museums: they are simultaneously very rich, because of the remarkable holdings they possess, and very poor, because these holdings are illiquid and do not figure in their balance sheets (White, 1996). Usually, museum registrars do not even mention that accessioned items are of any value, but the collections of most European museums are likely to be worth several million euros (Frey & Meier, 2006). Museum directors, on the other hand, are generally not allowed to consider artwork as a true financial asset despite the sharp increase in MBA-graduates hired for this position (Miller, 1997; Heal, 2006; Lévy & Jouyet, 2006; Kennedy, 2008; Mairesse, 2010a), which in the United States has even induced some museums to present artwork as guarantee against a bank loan (Van Mensch, 2008). Interestingly, they may even be resistant to the systematic valuation of their collections, as this can be perceived as a thwart to their vocation, but especially because they draw considerable benefits from the current state of ambiguity. The monetization of physical assets could, in fact, encourage interference by trustees or politicians, who may insist for specific deaccessions or set minimum or maximum limits to the sales. It would also make the performance of the directorate easier to evaluate (O'Hagan, 1998). By contrast, ambiguity favors greater scope for museum directors to manage institutions according to their own preferences or those of a professional élite: by evading measurement, they effectively avoid accountability. Their resistance towards

systematic valuation, therefore, constitutes a survival strategy that is not voluntarily given up (Frey & Meier, 2006).

The ‘magpie tendency’ (Towse, 2010, p. 249) of museum curators to acquire more and more items without being required to place a capital value on them is a topic that has been sensibly avoided by museum professionals, but it has been joyfully addressed by traditional economists. If the number of musealized objects keeps growing, as we have described, so does the cost of their upkeep. Ever since the 1980s, with the improvement of conservation techniques and the introduction of more specialized staff, e.g. museum registrars, the quality of museum care has increased but it has also become increasingly expensive. Following its 1980s expansion, the Louvre, for example, was forced to keep over a quarter of its collection closed to the public due to staffing costs (Bradburne, 2007). Overall, direct and indirect operating costs associated with collections accounts to two-thirds of the costs of museums (Lord et alii, 1989). Adding in the costs of acquisition, this sum reaches almost 70% (Davies & Wilkinson, 2008). What is more, collection management is difficult to subsidize, because public gratitude is usually weak for these invisible investments (Mairesse, 2010b). William Grampp (1996) comments that, from a rigid business perspective, museums display extreme inefficiency in the allocation of their resources, to the point that, if a commercial firm handled its affairs in the same way, it would very quickly face a bankruptcy court. He advocates the complete cessation of all subsidies to the museum sector in order to force public institutions to operate more as commercial organizations. If this occurred, according to a neoclassical view, museums would have a better idea of what artwork the public wishes to see and would thus organize better exhibitions to the benefit of all (Grampp, 1989). Admittedly, this standpoint is very extreme and today fewer economists endorse this sort of *laissez-faire*, especially since the invisible hand of the market has become less infallible in the past decade (Mairesse, 2010a). Furthermore, it is debatable whether uncritically exhibiting what the public desires actually raises the quality of museum offer. On the other hand, it may constitute an abdication of educative responsibilities museums have towards their audience. At any rate, the unchecked growth of museum stock has regularly emerged within the critiques of economists, even those who do not profess total liberalization (Mairesse, 2010a). We are

ready to admit deaccessions are ‘unromantic [...] and undemocratic’ (Goldstein, 1997, p. 246), but in all truth they seem necessary and they can be legal.

## 2.5. Museums as models in evolution

A final reflection is in order, which will also help our transition into the next chapter. This must concern the centuries-long evolution of museums as a concept and form of identity expression (Mottola Molino, 1998). Indeed, museums have changed throughout history in what can be considered an evolutionary process of adaptation to an equally changeable society (Prato, 2001), e.g. by becoming more visitor-oriented (Johnson, 2003). For however obvious, this is hardly taken into account by opposers of deaccessioning in some European countries (Settis, 2007), who rather insist that the centuries-old standard of heritage conservation and fruition, grounded on depositing-exhibiting (Korff, 2002) and inalienability (Merriman, 2008), cannot be altered. It would be irresponsible of us to modify it, it is argued, because it is the only one that effectively ensures long-term preservation. The systematic valuation of items seems to be the primary concern: the monetization of public collections will eventually cause degradation, both symbolic and physical. By virtue of a wicked Aristotelian syllogism, based on the assumption that the private sphere is *inexorably* driven by profit, the sale of objects will shamefully surrender cultural heritage to the market and strip musealized items of symbolic meaning. In brief, private collecting is perceived as disruptive in spite of the fact that the trade of artwork is the engine of artistic production and that private collections stand at the very origin of museal institutions, including some of the oldest public museums in Europe (Capitoline Museums, 2006; Vatican Museums, 2007; British Museum, n.d.).

The aversion to deaccessioning based on these arguments is questionable in more ways than one. First and foremost, it ignores that deaccessioning can favor the transfer of items even among institutions open to the public and does not necessarily entail the suspension of public enjoyment. For this reason, even when selling objects to privates is unacceptable, the practice in itself must still be considered neutral. To oppose it because of how it could be abused is logically a *non sequitur*. Secondly, it disregards that museums based on the six-fold functions of research, collection, conservation,



interpretation, education and exhibition (Alexander & Alexander, 2008) – or, as Supreo Chanda (2010) puts it, the three Cs of Collection, Care and Communication – have not always been the standard. In fact, they are mostly a modern invention, originating from 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries *cabinetti* and *Wunderkammern* and, with some notable exceptions (Mottola Molfino, 1998; Mossetto & Vecco, 2001), concretely defined no earlier than in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Dolák, 2004; Alexander & Alexander, 2008; Harris, 2010; Mairesse, 2010b; Pearce, 2010; Meijer-Van Mensch & Van Mensch, 2010). On top of this, it is necessary to recognize that the present notion of inalienability has been influenced and mainstreamed by a specific category of institutions: the museums of masterpieces, such as the Louvre or the British (Mairesse, 2010a). The weight of this category, numerically marginal, has been often discredited and relativized by museologists (Stránský, 1996), but through the international associations it remains a reference model within the museum world and was recently positioned at the basis of the concept of universal museums (Ennis & MacGregor, 2004; Geoffrey, 2006). However, does the standard of museums of masterpieces apply to all museums out there? Can we expect each of them to be comparable to the Louvre, apart from size? Evidence, in addition to sheer intuition, prompts us to think otherwise. In fact, world-class museums in the United States who are similarly configured as ‘anthologies of works of quality’ (Settis, 2007, p. 19), such as the Metropolitan, set aside the condition of absolute inalienability and regularly acquire and deaccession based on what is available on the market. On the other hand, museum collections in Italy, for example, are strictly inalienable based on articles 822-823 and 826 of the Civil Code (Governo Italiano, 1942), but their houses are far from being museums of masterpieces, and accommodate works of different sorts and quality.

Does this mean deaccessioning is out of question in countries such as Italy? Again, this depends on the archetypal model of the museums we are considering (Mossetto & Vecco, 2001). Keeping items in the territory where they belong, as Italian museums intend to do (Emiliani, 1994), is genuinely commendable. Indeed, their enjoyment by the community enormously contributes to civic sense and collective identity over time (Settis, 2007). However, when museums are revealed to ever exhibit, on average, as low as 10% of the holdings they possess (Peacock, 1994; Johnson, 2003; Davies & Wilkinson, 2008) – known as the Prado effect (Peacock, 1994) – with the

figure in some science museums dropping to less than 1% (Lord et alii, 1989), are these arguments still valid? Non-exhibited holdings are effectively cut off from the community anyway, and access to them is just as restricted as if they were part of private collections. As they are only available to a limited few, their contribution to civic sense and collective identity is minimal. Their upkeep, on the other hand, requires a great deal of resources that could otherwise be spared (Wilkinson & Cross, 2007; Dolák, 2010). Moreover, when deaccessioning can be regulated, if necessary, to restrict sales to locations that are equally or more relevant than the original, can it still be considered to violate territorial bonds? Such reflections reveal many shades of grey for a question that has too often earned a simplistic black and white answer. They require contextual expertise. In the next chapter, we will specifically address the distinctive Italian scenario.

### 3. The Italian context

#### 3.1. A giant museum

As the thesis subtitle explains, Italy is the environment elected for our research. This choice is not based only on familiarity and personal expertise, but especially on the conviction that the cultural sector in Italy is in many respects unique. With this brief overview, we will try to explain how. First and foremost, there is an indisputable density of objectified heritage. The massive amount of cultural goods on Italian territory is at the origin of the common understanding, partly flattering and partly incapacitating, that the Italian country is some sort of giant museum (Paolucci, 1996; Dell'Orso, 2002), where the cultural goods are not only the items, monuments and sites, but also the relations among them and with the landscape as a whole. In other words, Italian cultural goods are a holistic web of meanings, impressions and atmospheres spanning fluently and seamlessly from motionless cultivations around a rural aqueduct to the bustle of city squares, from the quiet simplicity of a Duecento *pieve* to the verbose grandeur of Baroque cathedrals (Emiliani, 1994; Chiarante, 2003; Iuffrida, 2003; Settis, 2007). Italian cultural goods are profoundly linked to their territory and thus, it is argued, impossible to alienate without a net loss of value. Nor would it be wise to do so, since this distinctive trait of Italian heritage is at the core of its international appeal. It constitutes, from a business perspective, its unique selling proposition (Reeves, 1961).

‘Quello che l’Italia offre non è solo la somma dei suoi monumenti, musei, bellezze naturali; ma anche e soprattutto il loro comporsi in un tutto unico [...] [L’Italia ha] valorizzato i singoli monumenti, grandi e piccoli, come parte di un insieme incardinato nel territorio, di una rete ricca di significati identitari, nella quale il valore di ogni singolo monumento od oggetto d’arte risulta non dal suo isolamento, ma dal suo innestarsi in un vitale contesto.’

[What Italy offers is not only the sum of its monuments, museums, landscapes; it is also and especially their arrangement as a coherent whole [...] [Italy has] valorized its monuments, large and small, as part of a composition nested in the territory, a rich network of identity and significance, in which the value of every single monument or artwork results not from its isolation, but from its embedment into a vital context.]

With these words, Settis (2007, pp. 9-14) explains what he believes to be the greatest difference between Italy and other countries, e.g. the United States, with respect to museal institutions. He also employs it as a major argument against the implementation of deaccessioning in Italy, as this is seen as an ‘Anglo-Saxon practice’. What is more, the awareness of such harmony between Italian cultural heritage and geography was not acquired recently – it is ancient and deep-rooted, both in Italy and abroad. It is, for instance, the reason why European élites used to embark on the Grand Tour from the late 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which included not only sojourns in major cities but extensive trips to the countryside (Redford, 1996; Bignamini & Wiltone, 1997). This peculiarity, in itself a cultural product, attracts enormous attention to Italian art, even when it is exhibited abroad, and generates a consistent flow of visitors that is key for the economy of the country thanks to its industry multiplier effects (Settis, 2007). From this perspective, the great risk-aversion featured in heritage management policies may also be imputed to a fundamental anxiety that the economy at large may be affected.

Secondly, Italian cultural heritage is unique because it is uniquely preserved, despite the preposterous allocation for culture from the national budget, as low as 0.21% this year (Le Monde, 2012). The density of goods has stimulated the development of clear conservation policies very early in our history – as early as 1276, in the case of Verona (Iuffrida, 2003) – sanctioning the subordination of private initiatives of construction to the common interest and decorum of city-states. It is because of these laws, maintained throughout the centuries, that e.g. Siena is still a medieval city and Venice was not disfigured by skyscrapers (Settis, 2007). Subsequent norms are by and large the legacy of this tradition of conservation, which has been a recurring subject of ruling and debate in modern times, especially after the unification of the country and the annexation of Rome (Emiliani, 1978; Roccella, 2011). Nor are cases of outright

privatization missing from historical reviews: an especially significant one occurred right after the conquest of the Papal States, when Quintino Sella sold properties freshly gained from the Church (De Juliis, 2011; Castagneto, 2012). A qualitative peak in policy-making was reached in 1939 with the law no. 1089 (Parlamento Italiano, 1939), comprehensive and advanced enough to be fundamentally preserved by the Constituent Assembly in 1947, after the dismantling of the Fascist regime (Branca, 1975). As a matter of fact, it remained the primary point of reference until its abrogation in 1999 with the contentious Unitary Text on Cultural Goods (Parlamento Italiano, 1999a). The Fascist law, brainchild of Minister of National Education Giuseppe Bottai and President of the Council of State Santi Romano, essentially established two points: (a) Italian cultural heritage is property of the Italian people, who inherited it from pre-unitary states, and (b) the State must preserve the integrity of cultural heritage, whether it is publicly or privately owned, particularly by preventing its exportation. These norms were innovative enough at the time that, to this day, there is no advanced country in the world where cultural heritage is not safeguarded in ways inspired by them (Settis, 2007). What is most interesting to us is that such groundbreaking act did not exclude the possibility of alienating cultural heritage at all: on the contrary, the norm explicitly allowed the sale of public cultural goods, as long as no impediments were presented to their conservation and public accessibility (Parlamento Italiano, 1939). This provision stood until the enactment of our Civil Code a few years later, which decreed the inalienability of any cultural good of artistic or historical interest (Governo Italiano, 1942). With hindsight, we may detect an uninterrupted line connecting ancient rulings of medieval city-states and national laws of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Settis (2007) rightly notes. This leading principle is that Italian cultural heritage must be protected by the State. However, what the Italian scholar does not explain is that for the most part this never implied total inalienability, even with respect to publicly-owned goods.

### **3.2. Enter the privates**

American scholar Benjamin L. Whorf, father of linguistic relativity, wrote in 1956 that linguistic categories are determinants of cognitive processes (Carrol, 1997). In other

words, language does not simply explain the world *a posteriori*, as it had long been argued (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996), but rather contributes to shaping our very thought patterns. For however provocative this theory merely enunciates what was always cautioned by popular wisdom in all cultures: words do matter. What we call things is how we see things; assonances among words can become associations of concepts and ideas, and the labels we attach for ease of reference more often than not end up influencing our opinions retroactively. We may thus understand why it is appropriate to trace the first ingress of privates into heritage management in Italy to 1974, when the Antiquities and Fine Arts department within the Ministry of Public Education was officially transformed into the Ministry of Cultural Goods (Parlamento Italiano, 1974). This designation was original because it equated items of artistic or historical interest, the ‘antiquities and fine arts’, to whatever else was generally intended as ‘goods’, from estate to commodities to sheer currency. Cultural heritage thus acquired a new official dimension, and suddenly it was not considered only for its aesthetic and intellectual value anymore but also for its pecuniary worth (Settis, 2007). Contrary to the etymology of the word (Vecco, 2007), our heritage became an asset to exploit rather than an heirloom to pass onto descendants. At the time, the intention was not to attach a price tag onto our heritage or make a menu of what could be put on the market, as it can be argued that eventually happened (Parlamento Italiano, 2000; Breidecker, 2002), but to convince the government that like any asset our heritage required investments to maintain its value (Settis, 2007). It would later turn out that these investments could be private as well as public. In the words of Daniel Thérond:

‘La conscience apparaît peu à peu que la gestion d’un patrimoine recouvrant l’ensemble de la mémoire d’une société n’implique plus exclusivement les professionnels de sa conservation, mais un ensemble de partenaires publics et privés et tous les acteurs de la vie économique et sociale. Le patrimoine devient ainsi un fait de société’ (Thérond, 1994, p. 155-156).

[The awareness gradually appears that the management of a heritage encompassing the collective memory of a society does not only pertain to the professionals of its conservation anymore, but to a number of public and private

partners and all actors of social and economic life. Heritage thus becomes a fact of society.]

Through its 1986 initiative named *Cultural Reservoirs*, which was outsourced to privates (Borioni, 2004), the Italian government revived the early 20<sup>th</sup> century metaphor of cultural heritage being the petroleum of Italy (Emiliani, 1994; Gennari Santori, 2001). Far from reassuring, this definition pictures our cultural goods as a wasted opportunity, an underused resource that the State, unlike privates (Riccobono, 2004), is too distracted or incompetent to exploit in full. With strict respect to museum management, this line was crossed in 1992 by Minister Alberto Ronchey, who first allowed the outsourcing of some auxiliary services such as restaurants and gift shops (Parlamento Italiano, 1992). These were later extended by Antonio Paolucci to encompass education, gallery guidance, exhibition organization and equipment provision (Parlamento Italiano, 1995), which is a significant step towards ultimate privatization since these functions are not auxiliary but structural. A further leap occurred in 2001, with two distinct promulgations. Firstly, the constitutional law n. 3/2001 was enacted to modify articles 117-118 of our Constitution (Assemblea Costituente, 1947). According to the modifications, the Italian law now recognized a distinction between the functions of safeguard and valorization: the first was retained by the State, whereas the second was delegated to the Regions according to the subsidiarity principle (Parlamento Italiano, 2001b). Such deregulation did not have immediate effects on the privatization process, but the discrimination between the two functions was an absolute novelty that enabled policy-makers to argue that the second could be outsourced without jeopardising the first (Settis, 2007). Subsequent norms more closely dealing with the private sphere quickly capitalized on this. In fact, 2001 also witnessed the first draft by Minister Giovanna Melandri of what would become law no. 448/2002 with her successor Giuliano Urbani. As the document allowed the delegation to privates of the *global service* of museums, i.e. the downright lease, heritage professionals and the informed public were quick to express concerns (Settis, 2007). Under the pressure of pleas, the norm was later revised as to only refer to services for valorization and the improvement of public fruition (Parlamento Italiano, 2001c); the possibility of total outsourcing, which was the primary source of discontent, was thus excluded from the final text.

This, however, was not so much an exclusion as a delay: one year later, building on a reconnaissance operation launched with the purpose of surveying dismissible buildings (Parlamento Italiano, 2001a), the notorious Tremonti decree practically demolished the juridical safeguards of cultural goods and allowed the institution of two joint-stock companies, *Patrimonio dello Stato S.p.A.* and *Infrastrutture S.p.A.*, dedicated to their valorization, management and alienation (Parlamento Italiano, 2002a). This initiative was not entirely original: a joint-stock company called *Sibec S.p.A.* had already been created in 1997 with the purpose of supporting the cultural sector financially (Parlamento Italiano, 1997; Renna, 1998), but it never became operational (Gheroni, 2003; Ortolani, 2006). There is a great difference, nonetheless, insofar as *Sibec S.p.A.* was owned for 85% by the State, whereas the two new companies had an almost entirely private configuration (Settis, 2007). Moreover, the decree allowed the securitization of cultural heritage – i.e. the sale to private investors at market prices through the intercession of banks and bonds emission – which could be transferred to said companies from public property and even third parties (Foà, 2002; Chiarante, 2003; Legambiente, 2003; Settis, 2004, 2007). This included buildings of artistic or historical interests, but also monuments, museums, archives and libraries, for a total estimated value of € 2000 billion (Legambiente, 2003; Settis, 2007). Again, remonstrations ensued, especially because the alienations by *Patrimonio dello Stato S.p.A.* seemed to have the final purpose of financing public works by its partner in crime *Infrastrutture S.p.A.* (Foà, 2002; Cammelli, 2002a; Giarda, 2002; Legambiente, 2003; Riccobono, 2004). Furthermore, it was very unclear which sorts of privates, for-profit or not-for-profit, were invited to invest, as well as the conditions and purposes of such investments (Barbati, 2001; Bruti Liberati, 2001). The government attempted to defend the decree by comparing the role of the two companies to the German *Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau*, but the executives of the German company stated in reply that KfW was radically different and the comparison was false information used to justify a deficit increase (FAZ, 2002). Pressured by protests, Giulio Tremonti, who held the Ministry of Economy and not Cultural Goods, was forced to make some changes in the final text that put the two companies under the supervision of a multi-ministerial committee and subordinated their actions to the prerogatives of cultural goods and the respect thereof (Parlamento Italiano, 2002b; MEF, 2002), thus posing limits to the securitization process (Sorace, 2003). Despite these last minute modifications, it cannot be ignored that the Tremonti



decree had nearly allowed what was joyfully considered impossible only ten years earlier (Solima & Riolo, 2004): the denationalization of all cultural goods in Italy from mosaic pieces to the Coliseum, and the possibility of using them to finance the completion of public works (Foà, 2002; Chiarante, 2003; Guermandi & Arosio, 2004). Furthermore, it subordinated such privatization to the discretion of an authority that is different from the Ministry of Cultural Goods (Cammelli, 2002a; Pastori, 2004; Settis, 2004, 2007). Favored by economic recession and the condescendence of a government lusting for a cash cow, privates had clearly gained a lot of ground since the timid opening authored by Ronchey (Cammelli, 2002b; Solima & Riolo, 2004).

A significant inversion came with the new Code on Cultural Goods released in 2004 by Minister Giuliano Urbani (Parlamento Italiano, 2004a), a collection of preexisting laws redacted for the sake of unity and intelligibility which effectively abrogated any law on cultural heritage not included therein. An accurate commentary of its directives is an extensive task that has been already undertaken (Pastori, 2004; Sciuolo, 2004; Tamiozzo, 2005; Cammelli, 2007) and is outside the scope of this review. Here we shall only make an assessment of few cardinal points we deem relevant for the topic at hand, which is deaccessioning. In this respect, the Code establishes the following:

- a) As previous laws already established (Parlamento Italiano, 1999a), cultural goods can be *demaniali*, ‘belonging to the domain’, or *patrimoniali*, ‘belonging to the patrimony’. The formers can only be immobile and are inalienable, but they can be ejected from the *demanio* if a verification of their artistic or historical interest has a negative outcome and the Ministry allows it. Cultural goods belonging to the *patrimonio*, instead, can be mobile or immobile. Furthermore, they can be *disponibili*, ‘disposable’, or *indisponibili*, ‘non-disposable’. Goods in the *patrimonio* enjoy looser regulations than those in the *demanio*, e.g. they can shift from non-disposable to disposable more easily than a good in the *demanio* can be ejected from it. However, public museum collections are considered always non-disposable, and are thus irrevocably inalienable.
- b) Cultural goods may be publicly or privately-owned. Public cultural goods are property of the State, regions or lesser public entities such as

municipalities, and are inalienable if they possess artistic or historical interest. Private goods are property of non-profit or for-profit privates. The formers are inalienable if they present artistic or historical interest. The latters are alienable.

- c) Artistic or historical interest is automatically attributed to cultural goods produced by a deceased artist and older than 50 years. This presumption stands until the Ministry concludes otherwise after issuing a verification order. This may also be issued to attribute artistic or historical interest to goods produced by a living artist or more recent than 50 years.
- d) Individual musealized items belonging to publicly-owned collections are automatically inalienable, even if they are privately-owned.
- e) In synthesis, under current regulations a musealized item is ever alienable only if it is propriety of a for-profit private entity, e.g. a collector, and the collection where it belongs is privately-owned.

Furthermore, year 2004 witnessed the joint creation by the Ministry of Cultural Goods and the Ministry of Infrastructures of *Arcus S.p.A.* This new company, which replaced *Patrimonio dello Stato S.p.A.* and *Infrastrutture S.p.A.* with respect to cultural heritage, had stocks owned by the two aforementioned offices along with the Ministry of Economy, who supplied the initial capital (Arcus, 2012). Though in time it became a receptacle of corruption and was recently shut down (Polimeni, 2012; Lopapa, 2012; Urbino, 2012), for as long as it existed it retained the old companies' purpose of valorization and improvement of fruition, but it excluded the supervision of alienation accordingly to the new Code (MIBAC, 2004; Polimeni, 2012).

Like other novelties, this Code has not escaped bitter critiques, especially because it does not address some key issues, such as the progressive incapacitation of the Superintendences due to the erosion of their domains and lack of turnover (Benini, 2004). Nevertheless, it was deemed agreeable enough to remain valid to this day, albeit with minor modifications (Parlamento Italiano, 2006, 2008). This is particularly significant if we consider the legislative frenzy endured by this sector as of late. Reportedly, the Code is inspired by the Bottai-Romano law more than any recent controversial decree, and is more solidly inscribed into our centuries-old tradition of

cultural goods administration (Cassese, 2004). This is only partially true: some directives and measures, such as the 50-years term and the discrimination between living and deceased artists, as well as most verification procedures, are closely modeled after the Bottai-Romano law. However, there is one difference that is absolutely crucial for our review: as noted before, the 1939 law concisely established that items of artistic or historical interest are alienable as long as: (a) they are privately-owned; (b) they are publicly-owned, if proper authorizations are issued by the Ministry under guarantee that public enjoyment is not hindered and the item is correctly preserved (Riccobono, 2004). The 2004 Code, instead, commands that no object is alienable if it possesses artistic or historical interest, with the exception of items owned by for-profit privates (Parlamento Italiano, 2004a). It is within this unforgiving framework, averse to the sale of artwork from museums, as shown in Fig. 3, that any campaign for deaccessioning in Italy must be contextualized.

	Of artistic or historical interest	No artistic or historical interest
Public (owned by the State or any public entity)	Inalienable	Inalienable, except authorized cases
Private (owned by for-profit or non-profit entities)	Inalienable, except items owned by for-profit	Alienable

3 – DEACCESSIONING IN ITALY, OWN ELABORATION

### 3.3. Where to start?

Before discussing what can be done in the future, we must recap a few points made until now. First, we agree that the Italian context is in many ways unique. The density of heritage and the deep-rooted tradition of conservation set clear boundaries that we are not allowed to violate. To begin with, we cannot intend our museums as anthologies of works of quality that can deaccession and acquire based on what becomes available on the market, as done in the United States (Settis, 2007). Moreover, there is no doubt that we cannot copy and paste foreign policies uncritically, e.g. from the Museums Association (2007). On the other hand, the fact that such policies have not entailed the

annihilation of cultural heritage in their relative countries is significant, and they should be looked at for reference and inspiration. At any rate, it is true that not every cultural heritage is alike, and the peculiarity of the Italian one demands a careful approach to its management that is neither better nor worse but is certainly tailored to address its necessities without betraying the ancient principles at the core of present conservation policies. This is not only a suggestion of common sense but the only practicable course of action. Italy, like other countries in Southern Europe, has long made the choice of bureaucratic organization with respect to heritage management (Aicardi, 2002; Fedeli & Santoni, 2006). Following the Napoleonic model, museum functions are strongly oriented towards conservation and restoration and pay less attention to exhibition and display, for which deaccessions are efficient (Mossetto & Vecco, 2001). Moreover, according to Italian law, an individual public museum does not have any managerial or financial independence, as it is merely an ‘office’ of the local Superintendence (Ripamonti, 2008), with the director being either the Superintendent or a civil servant (Fedeli & Santoni, 2006). Thus standing things, there is no way a campaign for deaccessioning can be successful as long as it meets the resistance of responsible bureaucracies. In all likelihood, recent attempts to forcefully privatize cultural heritage (Parlamento Italiano, 2001a, 2002a) have only strengthened such resistance and made our task even more daunting. This is, in our opinion, the greatest barrier we must confront.

Among the reasons why the Tremonti decree has not endeared deaccessioning to the Superintendences is because it emphasized the necessity of alienation for financial reasons rather than for the improvement of cultural heritage fruition. This leads us to our second recapitulative remark: deaccessioning does not harm public enjoyment. We find it nothing short of ludicrous that the current paradigm based on endless stocking is applauded for ensuring the availability of heritage (Acidini Luchinat, 1999; Settis, 2007), when ‘tutte le lanternine etrusche, i bolli laterizi [...] le croste e le pietre ammassate nei patri depositi’ [all the Etruscan lanterns, the Roman brick stamps, the crusts and stones amassed in national depots] (Acidini Luchinat, 1999, p. 49) are far from the eyes of the public and only ever accessible to a restricted few. This is a blatant contradiction that only someone currently enjoying such privileged access, with a mixture of professional pride and elitism, may coherently uphold. On the contrary, in our thesis we make a case

for deaccessioning because of the benefits it can bring to fruition and public trust, as suggested by international literature (Ackers Cirigliana, 2010). We claim that the perpetual storage of items in congested depot is unethical and wasteful. Furthermore, while the example of foreign museums is often rejected because the Italian situation is ‘just too different’ (Legambiente, 2003; Settis, 2007), we claim that the structural necessities at the origin of deaccessioning in American museums are very pressing in our institutions as well; maybe even more pressing, because Italian museums are traditionally housed in historical buildings with very limited space available. It is likewise evident to us that any breach of public trust is a consequence of poor policy-making rather than deaccessioning per se, which – this will never be stressed enough – must be considered a neutral, natural tool of collections management. From this perspective, the refusal of *any* regulation for fear that alienation may be a slippery slope is just as senseless as posing no restrictions whatsoever. An upright conduct, to say it with Aristotle, must be found in the golden mean between extremes (Bartlett, 2011). In our case, this most likely consists in a virtuous collaboration between public and private (Prato, 2001; Cammelli, 2002b; Severini, 2003; Ripamonti, 2008; Trione, 2012). For these reasons, and beyond all financial considerations, deaccessioning policies should at least be considered as a worthy possibility. We protest that this attention has been totally shirked so far.

The question of where to start with our campaign becomes very troublesome at this point. Ours is most evidently an uphill battle. As noted by Fedeli and Santoni (2006), in this and many other respects Italy is a bureaucratic country. Therefore, any sort of bottom-up strategy aimed at e.g. experimenting the virtuosity of deaccessioning in selected museums, cannot be realized because individual museums do not enjoy any degree of managerial independence. On the other hand, any top-down approach that would sweepingly implement deaccessioning through policy-making and legislation cannot succeed because the current bureaucracy is firmly hostile – to the point of obstructing even the present research in more than one occasion, as will be discussed later. What we are dealing with hence seems to be a self-reinforcing barricade that frustrates every attempt at changing the status quo. However, we believe there can be a way to make a breach. There is one viable course of action, through the questioning of what authority Italian museum managers can ultimately exert over their holdings. Indeed, the issue of whether museums should be considered the owners or merely the

stewards of their collections is crucial and sometimes not easily answered (O'Hagan, 1998). Business authors may lean towards the former option, as in the commercial sphere ownership is identified with discretionary power over the physical assets of a firm (Hart & Moore, 1990). However, this is clearly not our case: while museums can be considered from a business perspective and indeed bear many resemblances to vertically integrated firms, thus justifying economic analyses (Johnson & Thomas, 1991, 1992, 1998; Johnson, 2000, 2003; Verboom, 2011), Italian museums hardly behave as firms, especially when they are public (Settis, 2007; Ripamonti, 2008), despite all velleities to consider them as such (Solima, 1998; Bagdadli, 2002; Zan, 2003). Italian cultural goods are in fact acknowledged beyond all reasonable objections to belong to the people, and public museums are defined as fulfillers of public functions (Parlamento Italiano, 2004a). Therefore, all ownership rights sit with the public, and museum functionalities are delegates in the position of corporate managers (Meyer, 1979). More accurately, according to article 358 of our Penal Code (Governo Italiano, 1930), they are Appointees of Public Service; while their superior expertise makes them more qualified than the average citizen to make choices on heritage management, their operation remains subject to public accountability, as stated by articles 97-98 of our Constitution (Assemblea Costituente, 1947). Hence, if the public were revealed not to oppose or even favor the implementation of deaccessioning policies, at least under certain restrictions or with respect to specific categories of items, policy-makers would have stringent reasons to at least stop impeding the debate.

For however challenging, this is the only feasible strategy in our understanding. The first step in this direction is of course to determine whether the Italian public is indeed favorable to deaccessioning in light of the benefits it may entail, and, if so, under what conditions. Such is the purpose of our empirical research, which will be presented hereafter and for which this literature review served as a theoretical basis.

## **Part II – Research**

## 4. Objectives and methodology

### 4.1. Our research questions

As already explained, our aim is to survey the standpoint of Italian citizens, who are the legitimate owners of Italian cultural heritage and in whose interest museum managers operate, towards deaccessioning policies for public museums. Once again, the selection of this context is based on our personal familiarity as well as the impression that Italy counts among the most conservative environments in Europe with respect to heritage management. Such belief is grounded in this sector's legislative immobility, bureaucratic setup and overall entrenchment onto the status quo. These characteristics have stalled not only change but academic interest as well: as Solima (2008) notes, countries with a much younger museal tradition than Italy have tackled questions related to museum fruition much earlier, viz. England, with the pioneering study by Hooper-Greenhill (1994). In truth, researching the public's perspective on museums is increasingly interesting as visitors are shifting from the role of passive receptors of cultural activities to active protagonists and shapers of their own cultural experiences, thanks to digitization, multi-layered interaction and efforts of co-creation (Solima, 2008). With such objective in mind, the very first choice we are called to make from a methodological point of view is among qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods (Kelly, 2004). It is clarified already in the thesis subtitle that we have opted for the second: in fact, we see no alternative to cross-sectional surveying for probing the opinion of as broad a population as Italian cultural visitors. Since we do not seek to investigate noteworthy situations that deviate from a norm, but rather establish a norm in the first place, quantitative constitutes the best option for us. Given more time, we would have appreciated the possibility of mixing our methods with a preliminary enquiry through e.g. focus groups (Bryman, 2008) or Delphi forecasting (Sackman, 1974; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). Nevertheless, as the population to be investigated is the general public, our core method would have always



remained quantitative; additional qualitative techniques would have only been used to refine our final questionnaire.

Our primary research question can be formulated thusly: what is the attitude of Italian citizens towards deaccessioning practices for public museums? In other words, would the legitimate owners of Italian cultural heritage support the campaign for deaccessioning in Italy? Determining this is our foremost objective. Put in these terms, however, the question is unrefined and the answer may be trivial. Indeed, if we posed this question so bluntly we would expect a generally negative response. Firstly, we must assume respondents are uninformed about the ongoing trends in the cultural sector and our established tradition of public subsidization may cause them to believe that, since things have always worked this way, there is no reason to change. Secondly, bureaucracies in charge of museum management may influence them due to their perceived superior expertise, and convince them that deaccessioning is only a disguise for predatory privatizations. Thirdly, we may incur in rejection due to the impact of option and bequest values as well as endowment effects, which may encourage respondents towards perpetual retention. Furthermore, as the specificity of our topic will require some background information for respondents to correctly frame the issue, we reckon the validity of a dichotomous response would be affected because an introductory paragraph may overly influence it. We have already denounced the inadequacy of black and white approaches often adopted so far, and should certainly avoid making the same mistake.

For these reasons, we have devised a secondary research question, from which an answer to our primary query may be inferred. In addition, two further research questions will help us refine it beyond a basic positive or negative response. As they require participants to think more independently about the issue, responses are also likely to be more genuine. These questions are: (a) are there any item-related factors that make deaccessioning more or less acceptable for certain categories of objects? Asking this allows us to investigate whether certain items, e.g. objects with close substitutes or which have not been exhibited for a period of time, are more passible of being deaccessioned than others. From the overall response to different scenarios, a general positive or negative stance towards deaccessioning may be extrapolated. (b) Are there any conditions that are perceived as more or less important for the selling process? This

enables us to verify whether certain terms are required for deaccessions to be agreeable, e.g. the preservation of public accessibility for the item that is sold. (c) How should final proceeds be employed? This can provide insights on how acceptable some destinations are for the new income, e.g. maintenance of the building, lower admission fees, better services, etc. The methods with which each question is formally presented to respondents will be explained later on.

## 4.2. Sampling

The second methodological choice we are called to make regards survey administration, our main options being structured interviewing and self-completion questionnaires. We opted for the latter due to lower intrusiveness, higher impartiality achievable and better time-efficiency. In fact, self-completion enables the filling of more questionnaires at the same time, thereby allowing us to survey a greater sample within the timeframe allotted. Moreover, it minimizes interviewer effects and thus reduces the risk of response sets and social desirability bias, as well as mere acquiescence and interviewer prejudice (Schuman & Presser, 1981; Reyez-García et alii, 2005; Bryman, 2008). Because of the presumable unfamiliarity of our topic to the average respondent, it is also desirable that participants are able to read the questionnaire as a whole before they begin answering, if they wish, so they gain a clearer impression of what is being asked of them. On the other hand, and unlike structured interviewing, self-completion does not guarantee that all questions are answered or that they are addressed in the original order, and we are unable to probe or elaborate in case of confusion. Hence, problems of missing data or question order effects may arise (Bryman, 2008); however, we believe these pose less of a threat and are outweighed by the aforementioned advantages, thus motivating our final decision.

The third choice regards the medium of administration, which can have serious effects on the overall quality of a quantitative study (Bowling, 2005). At one end of the spectrum, mass administration through e.g. online or postal delivery ensures the greatest sample. However, these methods present greater risk of low response rate (Dillman, 1978; Mangione, 1995; Bryman, 2008) and sample bias (Kiesler & Sproul, 1986; Watt, 1997; Weible & Wallace, 1998; Lawton, 2005), which we did not wish to take. Personal

administration, on the opposite, may maximize response rate and thus seems preferable. However, it does not allow participants to fill in the survey at their leisure: if they are in a hurry or are simply not interested in the subject, the validity of answers may be affected. In all truth, even if they choose to respond there is no way to ensure that they are not simply ticking boxes at random (Adams & Brace, 2006) – which at any rate also stands for online completion. This can be partially remedied by making the survey as compact and well designed as possible (Bryman, 2008), but the only way to eliminate the risk would be offering an incentive, preferably monetary (Lunt & Livingstone, 1992). Clearly, our resources would not allow this; therefore, we attempted to reach a compromise by settling for personal administration at a culturally relevant location, such as a museum. This way, response rate would still be as high as possible but pass-byers could be presumed to be interested in the subject, and they can be expected to be more inclined to answer truthfully. Moreover, a culturally relevant location also helps us mitigate hypothetical bias (Murphy & Stevens, 2004). However, this choice poses a significant sampling problem, because the owners of musealized heritage are not only museum-goers, but the totality of citizens. The feedback of non-visitors is necessary to ensure the quality of our sample, but they may not be sufficiently represented at such locations. In an attempt to solve this problem, we retained the idea of collecting our data at a cultural site but decided to select one capable of attracting as broad a visitor base as possible, encompassing even infrequent cultural consumers. This is the case of e.g. a superstar museum (Frey, 1998). Admittedly, this is no more than a next-best option, dictated mostly by time constraints and convenience, but the presence of a considerable share of infrequent or non-visitors in our final sample proves it has been effective. These methodological decisions are recapped in Fig. 4.

Necessity	→	Address
a) Represent a large population		Quantitative approach
b) Unbiased, swift data collection		Self-completion questionnaires
c) High response rate		Personal administration
d) Attentive sample		Culturally relevant location
e) Represent infrequent visitors		Highly attractive location

In light of all considerations so far, we proceeded to examine ideal sites for our data collection. These were identified with public museums recording the highest number of visitors per year, based on the latest reports (Vavassori et alii, 2009; Pes & Sharpe, 2011). Our first choice was the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, which is also the best known Italian superstar museum (Fedeli & Santoni, 2006). Our alternatives included the Academy Gallery, also in Florence, and the Borghese Gallery of Rome, albeit these can only boast two-thirds and one-third of the visitors of the Uffizi, respectively (Pes & Sharpe, 2011). Our original intention was to distribute the questionnaires to visitors waiting in line to enter the gallery, with as little disruption as possible to regular museum operations and the visitors' own schedule. Unfortunately, we could not adhere to this plan because of the uncooperativeness of the museums. As anticipated in our literature review, responsible bureaucrats refused to facilitate our research. In the case of the Uffizi and the Academy Galleries, the Superintendence of Florence and individual museum directors did not grant their authorizations because they did not wish such survey to be administered to their visitors. Although our contacts would not share the exact reasons for their abrupt denial, we speculate this may have been due to a concern that their own reputation could be damaged if visitors came to believe that they were considering selling their holdings. In the third case, the Borghese Gallery, we contacted the official in charge but never received an answer. This may have been for similar reasons as Florence, or simply due to plain inefficiency in Italian bureaucracy.

Confronted with the pressing necessity to find another collection site, we contacted the functionary responsible for the Coliseum complex and received an answer, this time very timely, from the Superintendence of Rome, denying authorization due to the topic of our research. At this point, we were unable to spend more time negotiating or scouting for a new site and opted for a different route: after informing the Municipality of Rome through appropriate procedures, we settled for at-stop survey handout around the Coliseum Square, which unlike the monument proper is outside the jurisdiction of the Superintendence. We positioned ourselves in the proximity of the Arch of Titus, where we could intercept visitors heading to and from the Coliseum monument as well as the Imperial Forums and the Palatine area. Sampling occurred randomly, with Italian-speaking pass-byers being stopped once every five times. Thusly carried out, data collection took considerably longer than initially allotted, especially

because the ratio of foreign to Italian tourists at such location strongly favors the formers. However, between April 23 and May 18, 2012, we were able to complete our data collection, including an initial two days for a pilot test.

The size of our sample was set somewhat arbitrarily. Despite the reliability of certain rules of thumb (Wilson VanVoorhis & Morgan, 2001; Van Belle, 2002; Wilson VanVoorhis & Morgan, 2007), there is no formula carved in stone for determining sample size in social research (Aguinis & Harden, 2009). Bryman (2008) observes that the precision of research can be greatly affected when size climbs from low figures, and it is only after the mark of 1000 that it stops sharply increasing. This size, however, was unachievable because of time constraints. We hence decided to follow the indication of Hill et alii (2003), who assert that, while 500 is advisable, 300 is the minimum acceptable to trace comparisons between subsections. Our data collection netted a total of 310 responses, after the filtering of a few blatant response sets. Hindsight allows us to note that the small excess is useful for compensating some missing data.

### **4.3. Questionnaire design**

The questionnaire layout includes a single page, with enough spacing between questions to avoid confusion and sufficient instructions to make responding comfortable. In the present section, we will make an overview of our survey elements and explain our reasons for their inclusion. As a premise, we wish to underline that the layout and wording were subject to multiple modifications during and after our pilot test, reflecting the feedback from the earliest test respondents. Major changes include the addition of two survey items, the reduction of our question on education level from an open field to a multiple choice, and the compacting of our questionnaire from three to one page with more efficient spacing. The pilot test also confirmed the necessity for an introductory paragraph; in our final version, this consists of three periods pointing out the following: (a) in these years, museum associations in Europe are promoting the implementation of deaccessioning policies, which may effectively allow the sale of artwork among museums and, under certain restrictions, to private collections; (b) Italian museums possess many more items than they can realistically exhibit, which amounts to 10% of

the total on average (Davies & Wilkinson, 2008); (c) still, public museum collections are public property and legally inalienable.

At this point, respondents are invited to provide certain socio-demographic variables we are interested in registering for possible correlations. These include:

- a. Gender, dichotomous: a basic variable that must be included, albeit no significant difference is expected between male and female respondents.
- b. Age, ratio. This may affect respondents' overall perception of deaccessioning, and trends may be detected across different age groups. A rendition of this ratio variable to ordinal age groups will be operated for ease of presentation and regression analysis, but in most cases the variable will still be processed as ratio.
- c. Number of children, ratio, which may be of interest due to e.g. bequest values, from which stronger opposition to deaccessioning may derive.
- d. Citizenship, dichotomous: Italian/other. This is included to filter out Italian-speaking respondents who are not Italian citizens; however, this case was never reported and no completed surveys were eventually discarded for this reason.
- e. Education level, ordinal, with a multiple choice is based on the Italian education system: primary school, middle school, high school, bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctorate or specialization school. This variable is included to investigate the influence of higher education on responses.
- f. Number of museum visits in the past 12 months, ratio, which is useful to evaluate the presence of e.g. option values in the case of low visits.

After this, our questionnaire presents three batteries of Likert-type items, one for each secondary research question, for a total of 22 further elements. The agreement to them is measured on a standard 5-point scale, as described by Brown (2001; 2011): such scale does not present verbal labels but rather integers from 1 to 5, with extensive and repeated clarification that a mark of 1 corresponds to minimum agreement and 5 to the maximum. Our choice for 5 points is motivated by Likert (1932) and Cicchetti et alii (1985), who note that reliability starts plateauing after 5 or 7 options.

Our preference for a numerical scale over conventional verbal labels such as 'strongly agree', 'agree' etc., is due to allegations that it allows us to obtain a more truthful measure. In fact, a study by Chan (1991) suggests that verbal labels elicit

primacy effects, as respondents may be tempted to mark the first acceptable option. On the contrary, this should not occur when we employ integers that are not associated with specific value judgments. On the other hand, the use of integers makes it very unpractical to implement a two-stage Likert item, e.g. with the follow-up question ‘How strongly do you feel about your response?’, which would be desirable due to inferences that one-stage scales discourage extreme responses (Albaum, 1997; Hill et alii, 2003). However, they would require more space and instructions for respondents, thus cramping the questionnaire layout, which is definitively inadvisable for self-completion surveys (Hill et alii, 2003; Bryman, 2008). We hence decided to retain a one-stage scale for the sake of simplicity. Moreover, we questioned ourselves on the necessity of a mid-point in the scale, since a study by Garland (1991) suggests it encourages partial responses because of social desirability bias; however, there is evidence its omission significantly distorts results, especially if the purpose is to ascertain the population’s opinion. For this reason, we ultimately opted for its inclusion.

Our choice for Likert scales merits a final consideration concerning data analysis. Researchers usually tend to treat Likert-type measures as interval variables, due to the relatively large number of categories they generate, and make them subjects of parametric statistics both descriptive and inferential (Glass et alii, 1972; Blaikie, 2003; Lubke & Muthen, 2004; Göb et alii, 2007; Wu, 2007; Kislenko & Grevholm, 2008). However, the variable provided by a multiple-indicator measure is always different from ‘true’ interval or ratio variables because the gap between two labels is not mathematically consistent (Clason & Dormody, 1994; Bryman & Cramer, 2004; Kislenko & Grevholm, 2008). Furthermore, parametric analysis such as t-tests or the calculation of Pearson’s  $r$  require data to be normally distributed (Field, 2005), which hardly occurs when using Likert items (Clason & Dormody, 1994; Wu, 2007; Kislenko & Grevholm, 2008). For these reasons, some authors insist that research based on such misapplication can turn out to be profoundly flawed (Jamieson, 2004; Allen & Seaman, 2007; Norman, 2010). Quite eloquently, in their article *The Seven Deadly Sins of Statistical Analysis*, Kuzon et alii (1996) list the parametric analysis of ordinal data as the very first. Nevertheless, it has been argued that Likert measures may still be analyzed as if they were continuous, as long as there are at least 5 points in the scale and the supposed intervals are an attribute of the data rather than the labels (Carifio & Perla, 2007; Brown, 2011). However, the

issue remains that the intensity of feeling between ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ is not necessarily the same as between ‘agree’ and ‘neutral’, and the average of ‘fair’ and ‘good’ is not ‘fair-and-a-half’ (Goldstein & Hersen, 1984; Kuzon et alii, 1996; Mogey, 1999; Cohen et alii, 2000). Jamieson (2004) notes that this stands even when researchers adopt integers as labels. In fact, even if numerical they cannot be translated into equidistant magnitudes (Hart, 1996; Kislenko & Grevholm, 2008). Therefore, while we acknowledge that the jury is still out and the issue may be not finally resolved (Kislenko & Grevholm, 2008), we prefer to err on the side of caution and will refrain from making possibly disastrous assumptions. For this reason, we will keep to the ordinal-type analyses indicated by e.g. Mogey (1999).

1 <sup>st</sup> battery: are sales acceptable?	2 <sup>nd</sup> battery: conditions of the sales	3 <sup>rd</sup> battery: proceeds allocation
Survey items: 1. Provenance of the item; 2. Art-historical interest; 3. Scarcity (i.e. if substitutes exist) 4. In or out of theme; 5. Age of the item; 6. Not exhibited for a time; 7. Belonging to “Minor Arts” 8. In or out of theme (control).	Survey items: 9. Public accessibility; 10. Not originally a gift; 11. Public negotiations; 12. Limit to the number of sales; 13. Buyer in the same territory; 14. Buyer equally relevant; 15. Public accessibility (control).	Survey items: 16. Acquisition of new items; 17. Building maintenance; 18. Building improvements; 19. Conservation costs; 20. New services for the public; 21. Lower admission fees; 22. New didactic activities.

5 – OUR LIKERT-TYPE SURVEY ITEMS, OWN ELABORATION

As outlined in Fig. 5, each of our three batteries of Likert items deals with one of our secondary research questions. The first one presents a set of statements aiming to assess whether certain characteristics of the musealized items, e.g. its locality, art-historical interest, age, scarcity, etc., significantly facilitate our respondents’ acceptance towards deaccessioning practices or vice versa. In our analyses, this first question will also allow us to try and ascertain a general negative or positive disposition towards deaccessioning practices. The second battery investigates the importance of certain conditions for sales to be acceptable in the eyes of our respondents, e.g. that these are pursued through public negotiations or that future visitability by the public is preserved. The third battery examines the question of final proceeds allocation, proposing a number of possibilities such as building maintenance, better services, and the acquisition

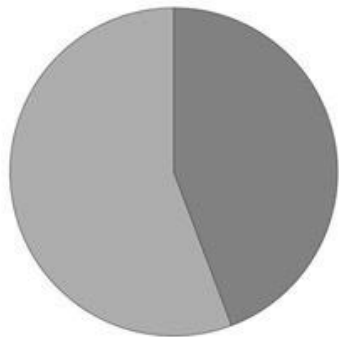


of new items. Items 8 and 15 from the first and second battery have been included as control questions: they essentially rephrase statements 4 and 9, respectively, for the purpose of confirming the validity of responses. An English translation of our questionnaire, which can be referred to for the exact formulation of each element, is presented as an appendix along with a completed original. In the next section, we will review and discuss the results of our research.

## 5. Research results

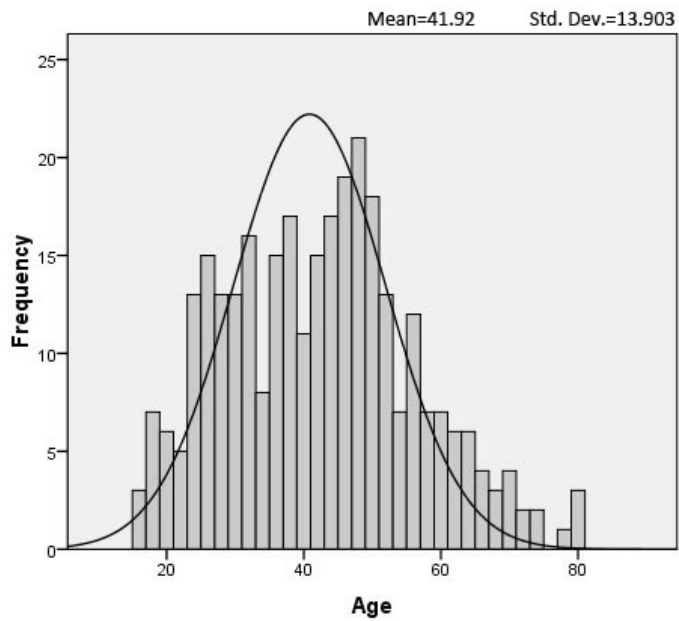
### 5.1. Socio-demographic profile

Our sample consists of 310 individuals, of which 170 females and 135 males (Fig. 6), excluding missing data and a few invalid questionnaires that were discarded. Age is recorded as ratio and tested for normality (Fig. 7), but a categorization of this variable is also operated according to the following age groups: up to 19, 20-26, 27-35, 36-45, 46-64, 65 and over (Fig. 8). These are the same categories used in the recent study by Bollo and Giangrande (2009) on Italian museums visitors, although they are somewhat different from national statistics carried out by ISTAT (Orsini, 2003; Bollo, 2004; Arosio, 2007; Zannella, 2008). Since all respondents were of Italian nationality, no responses were filtered out and the citizenship variable is henceforth ignored. With respect to children, 49.4% of respondents declared to be without offspring, while remaining responses are distributed between one and four (Fig. 9). This is a ratio variable, but given the number of categories generated some ordinal-type descriptions will be privileged, e.g. the calculation of interquartile range instead of standard deviation, and median and mode instead of mean, as we believe they are more suitable for interpretation. The number of respondents' museum visits over the past twelve months oscillates between 0 and 20. However, since we can reasonably question the accuracy of higher counts, this ratio variable has been recoded into the following ordinal categories: 0, 1-3, 4-7, 8 or more (Fig. 10). These groups are based on the questionnaire by Vecco (2002), and respectively identify infrequent or non-visitors, average visitors, frequent visitors and very frequent visitors. Thusly regrouped, nearly half of our sample falls within the second bracket. With respect to education level, around 40% of respondents possess a high school diploma, nearly 30% a bachelor's degree, 7.4% a middle school license and 4.8% a doctorate or specialization; a negligible amount possesses an elementary school license (Fig. 11). The charts below help us quickly visualize the mode, the frequencies and the distribution in percent, as well as the medians and quartiles.

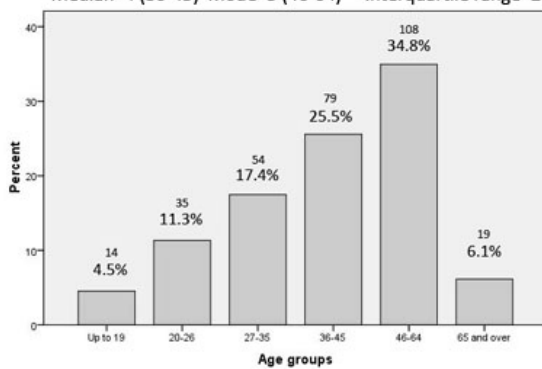
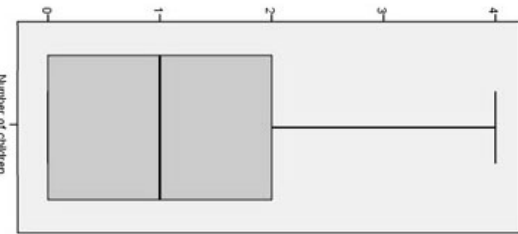
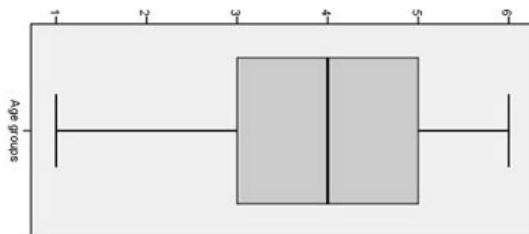


Male  
135 (44.3%)  
Female  
170 (55.7%)

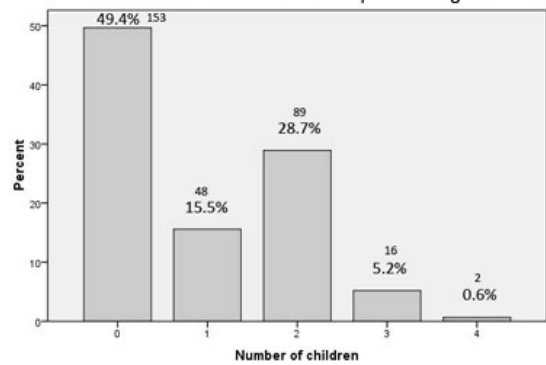
6 – GENDER DISTRIBUTION, OWN ELABORATION



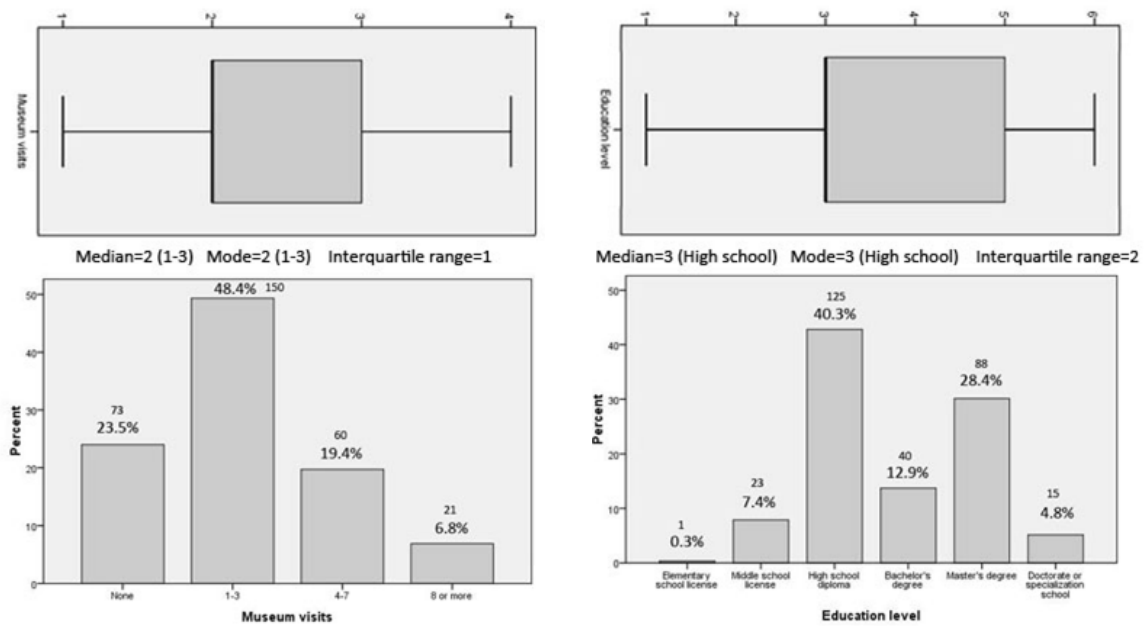
7 – CONTINUOUS AGE DISTRIBUTION, SHOWING NORMALITY CURVE, OWN ELABORATION



8 – CATEGORIZED AGE DISTRIBUTION, OWN ELABORATION



9 – NUMBER OF CHILDREN DISTRIBUTION, OWN ELABORATION

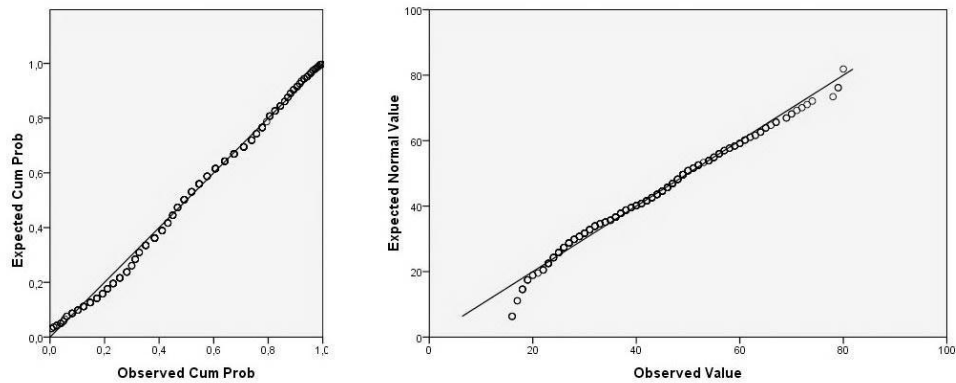


10 – MUSEUM VISITS DISTRIBUTION, OWN ELABORATION

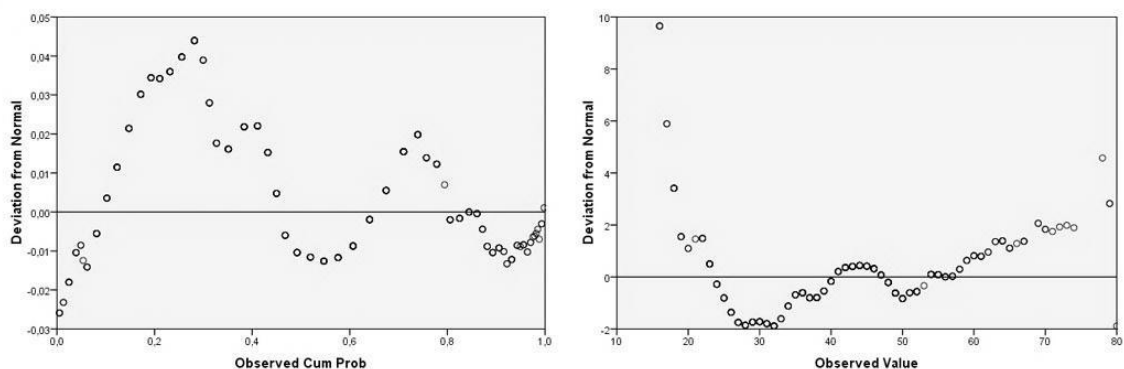
11 – EDUCATION LEVEL DISTRIBUTION, OWN ELABORATION

The socio-demographic profile hereby outlined generally overlaps with the one traced by existing literature. The distribution of gender (Fig. 6), for instance, corresponds by and large to the ratio described by ISTAT studies on cultural fruition (Orsini, 2003; Bollo, 2004; Arosio, 2007; Zannella, 2008). With respect to age (Fig. 7), we register a mean of 41.92 with  $\sigma=13.903$  in the ratio variable. The histogram compares the distribution to the normal curve: we calculate that 67% of cases lie within  $1\sigma$  of the mean, 99.6% within  $2\sigma$ , and 100% within  $3\sigma$ , which according to the empirical rule suggests that distribution is normal (Dai & Wang, 1992; Duncan, 2000). However, Harr (1987) warns that this rule may not be necessarily associated with a certain distribution model; therefore, it is advisable to conduct a complete normality test. Some authors (Judge et alii, 1988; Gujarati, 2002) recommend the Jarque-Bera for our case; however, since this is unavailable in our version of SPSS, we opt for equivalent graphical methods instead, namely P-P and Q-Q plots (Chambers et alii, 1983; Thode, 2002; Park, 2008). In both cases, as shown in Fig. 12, our values adhere to the normal line with the exception of few outliers. We may thus conclude that distribution is normal, albeit SPSS computations reveal it is positively skewed, with  $\gamma_3=0.285$ , and platykurtic, with  $\gamma_4=-0.389$ . The normality of the curve is further testified by the lack of specific patterns in the detrended P-P and Q-Q plots in Fig. 13 (Park, 2008). Further analyses and

comparisons of means with e.g. Bollo and Giangrande (2009) are unfortunately impeded by low statistical power due, which may be due to limited sample size (Araujo & Frøyland, 2007; Connelly, 2008).



12 – P-P (LEFT) AND Q-Q (RIGHT) PLOTS OF AGE, OWN ELABORATION



13 – DETRENDED P-P (LEFT) AND Q-Q (RIGHT) PLOTS OF AGE, OWN ELABORATION

Before moving on to the analysis of our first battery of Likert items, we are interested in verifying the influence of several socio-demographic factors on the frequency of museum visiting, since previous studies (Shapiro, 1990; Lord & Lord, 2001; Johnson, 2003) suggest strong correlations between museum visiting (Fig. 10) and e.g. education level (Fig. 11). However, since this relationship, if it exists, may be affected by intervening variables, for an accurate investigation we are obliged to employ multivariate analysis. Now, the question of what regression model is applicable to ordinal data is rather contentious (Field, 2005; Grace-Martin, 2009). As linear regression is only applicable to interval or dichotomous data, and multinomial regression implies

the loss of ordering information, our best option seems to be ordinal logistic regression, which is applicable whenever the dependent variable features ordered categories (Bender & Grouven, 1997; Ananth & Kleinbaum, 1997; Snedker et alii, 2002; Twarakavi & Kaluarachchi, 2005; O'Connell, 2006). This is present in SPSS under the Polytomous Universal Model, or PLUM, which is an extension of the linear procedure for ordinal data that does not require information loss (DeCarlo, 2003; Holguin, 2009; Norušis, 2011). This model is based on the calculation of logits, the log of the odds that an event occurs, and produces coefficients that reveal the extent of logit changes depending on predictor variables (Norušis, 2011). We conduct our regression analysis between the frequency of museum visits as the dependent variable and remaining socio-demographic data as predictor variables.

Prior to examining the resulting coefficients, we make two tests related to the assumptions underlying this model (Fig. 14). First, the application of PLUM requires the model with predictors to fit the model without, i.e. that the location coefficients for all variables in the model are different from 0 (Norušis, 2011). We thus run a test of model fit under the null hypothesis  $H_0$  is that location coefficients are indeed 0, resulting in  $\chi^2=26.317$  with significance  $p=0.01$ . The null hypothesis can thus be rejected. Second, in order for PLUM coefficients to be reliable, we assume the relationship between the independent variable and the logits is the same for all logits (Norušis, 2011). This assumption is controlled with a test of parallelism conducted under the null hypothesis  $H_0$  that relationships are consistent, resulting in a chi-square value  $\chi^2=35.329$  with significance  $p=0.064$ , by which we cannot reject the null hypothesis.

Model Fitting Information				
Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	334,732			
Final	308,415	26,317	12	,010

Link function: Logit.

Test of Parallel Lines <sup>a</sup>				
Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	308,415			
General	273,086	35,329	24	,064

The null hypothesis states that the location parameters (slope coefficients) are the same across response categories.  
a. Link function: Logit.

We are hereby allowed to look at location coefficients. With the exception of  $degree=1$ , i.e. respondents with an elementary school license as their education level, for which the negligible frequency count within our sample is unlikely to offer useful insights, the estimated parameters can be used to determine the presence of relations with the dependent variable. However, as visible from the table below, in the vast majority of cases the computed coefficients occur with a significance value  $p \geq 0.05$ , implying that detected relations, or the absence thereof, may be fortuitous. Among the exceptions is  $childrenbinary=0$ , meaning that for childless respondents there is a 0.678 increase in the log odds of visiting museums more often. This is the only clear relation that may be reliably deduced from our analysis, the results of which are fully presented in Fig. 15.

Parameter Estimates								
		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[museumwiscat = 1]	-2,231	,671	11,047	1	,001	-3,546	-,915
	[museumwiscat = 2]	,053	,656	,006	1	,936	-1,233	1,339
	[museumwiscat = 3]	1,705	,677	6,334	1	,012	,377	3,033
Location	[agecat=1]	-,426	,850	,251	1	,616	-2,092	1,240
	[agecat=2]	-,887	,645	1,892	1	,169	-2,151	,377
	[agecat=3]	-,432	,595	,527	1	,468	-1,597	,734
	[agecat=4]	-1,100	,547	4,042	1	,044	-2,173	-,028
	[agecat=5]	-,412	,522	,623	1	,430	-1,434	,611
	[agecat=6]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.
	[degree=1]	1,509	1,919	,618	1	,432	-2,252	5,270
	[degree=2]	-1,121	,692	2,622	1	,105	-2,478	,236
	[degree=3]	-1,028	,522	3,873	1	,049	-2,052	-,004
	[degree=4]	-,321	,584	,302	1	,583	-1,466	,824
	[degree=5]	-,295	,532	,309	1	,579	-1,337	,746
	[degree=6]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.
[gender=1]	-,208	,235	,777	1	,378	-,669	,254	
[gender=2]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	
[childrenbinary=0]	,678	,297	5,203	1	,023	,095	1,260	
[childrenbinary=1]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.	

Link function: Logit.  
a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

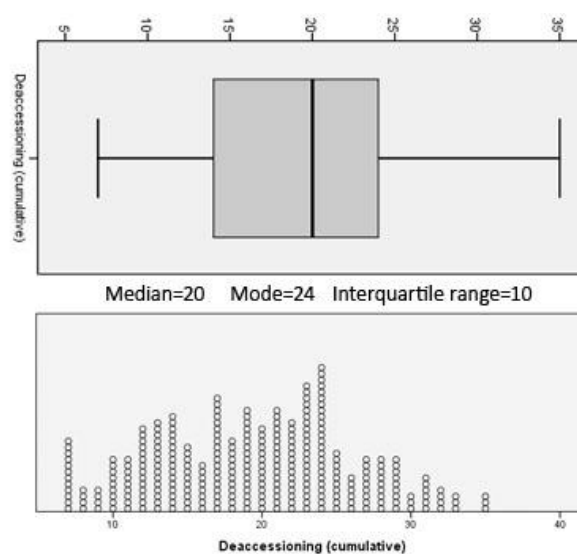
15 – ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION ON MUSEUM VISITS, COEFFICIENTS,  
OWN ELABORATION

## 5.2. First battery: item-related factors

This battery deals with the acceptability of deaccessions based on the characteristics of the deaccessioned item. According to our intentions, its purpose is twofold: it will help us extrapolate an answer for our primary research question, through the calculation of a

cumulative score, and it will help us refine it by verifying whether certain item-related factors make deaccessioning more acceptable for the public. Before presenting our results, we shall note that the Likert item regarding thematic relevance recurs with different wording at the end of the battery. This is a repeated measure included as a control question, and it can be evaluated through a marginal homogeneity test conducted under the null hypothesis  $H_0$  that the distributions of different values across the two variables are equally likely. Since this test produces a significance  $p=0.527$ , the null hypothesis of equality cannot be rejected and we may thus be more confident that responses are overall valid and interpretable. In the results presented and discussed below, only the first question on thematic relevance is examined.

Before looking at individual Likert measures, we take the opportunity this battery offers to evaluate respondents' overall disposition towards deaccessioning policies. The intention is to answer our primary research question: what is the attitude of Italian citizens towards deaccessioning practices for public museums? Although a clear survey item addressing the practice in principle was not presented, we suppose an impression may be obtained indirectly, through the sum of all seven measures in the battery. A cumulative scale was thus created, where respondents could totalize any value from a minimum of 7 to a maximum of 35. The distribution of responses is presented below (Fig. 16).

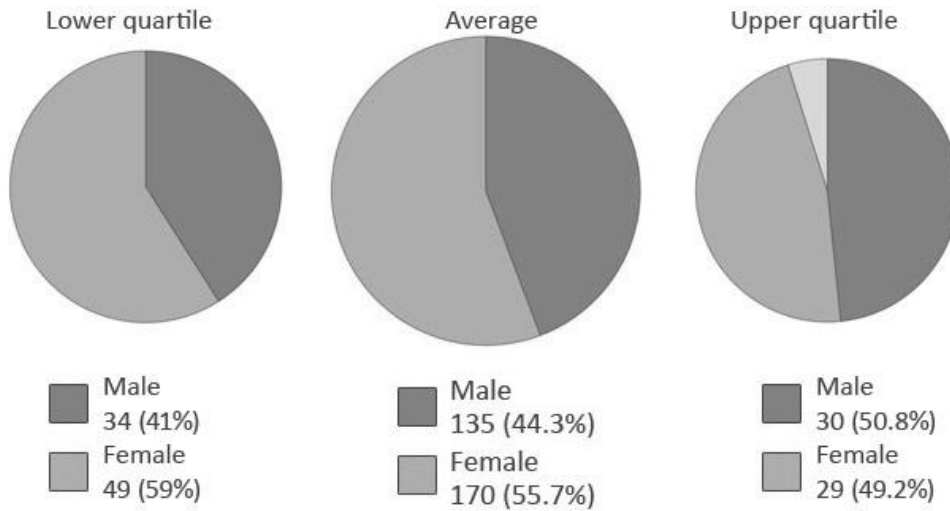


16 – CUMULATIVE RESPONSE TO DEACCESSIONING, OWN ELABORATION

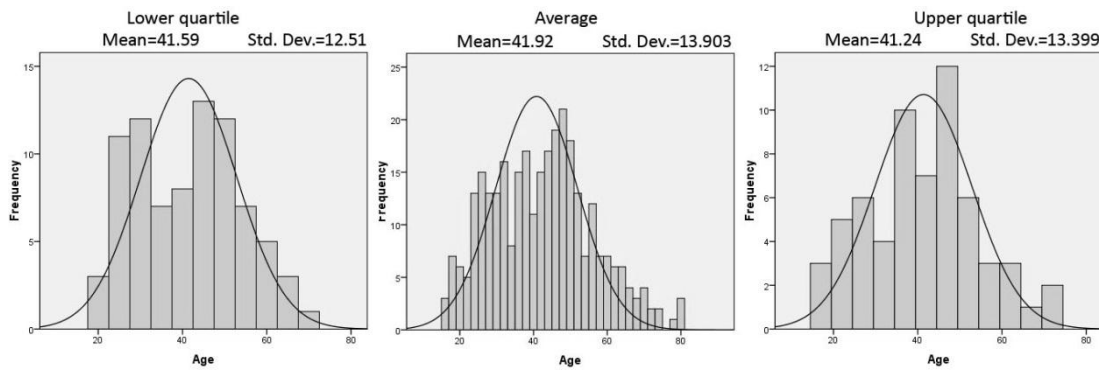


The seemingly continuous nature of this variable tempts us to consider it interval and make it a subject of parametric analyses such as normality tests. However, we must keep in mind that the original measures from which it derives are always Likert-type and ordinal; therefore, we are obliged to treat their sum as an ordinal variable as well. We stand by this decision even if suggestions have been advanced that the sum of multiple Likert items can be considered a scale score (Grace-Martin, 2009). In fact, much like individual measures, in a cumulative score there is no assurance that mathematical differences between values correspond to proportional differences in judgments. In other words, problems of information loss deriving from the approximation of opinions to integers still remain (Russell & Bobko, 1992). Parametric tests and measures of mean and std. dev. shall thus be avoided.

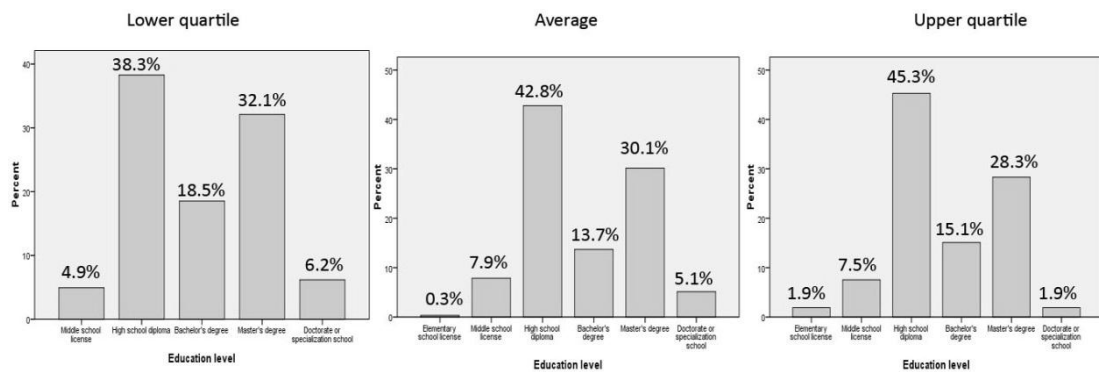
We observe the median is 20, which approximately corresponds to an average measure of 3 for each Likert item. There thus does not seem to be a fundamental aversion to deaccessioning among our respondents. We are eager to compare this disposition among different socio-demographic categories: to achieve this, we divide the dataset in quartiles based on the cumulative score and compare profiles between the lower and upper quartiles, i.e. outside the midspread. Based on the stem-and-leaf diagram in Fig. 16, this corresponds to respondents scoring 14 or less and 25 or more, respectively. As presented in the graphs below, such comparison yields some noteworthy evidence. Regarding gender (Fig. 17), the representation of males slowly but steadily increases from the lower quartile to the average and then to the upper – progressing from 41% to 44.3% and 50.8% – meaning that males are somewhat more likely to favor deaccessioning. The age (Fig. 18) seems to change little, instead, as the means of 41.59 std. dev. 12.51, in the lower quartile, and 41.24 std. dev. 13.39, in the upper quartile, do not differ substantially from the mean of the average. At a first glance, the education level of respondents (Fig. 19) would not seem noteworthy as well: in fact, the distributions within individual categories do not vary dramatically across quartiles. However, if we rearrange our educational categories into e.g. ‘lower education’, for cases up to high school diploma, and ‘higher education’, from bachelor’s degree and above, we suddenly pick up an important distinction: over 56.8% of respondents in the



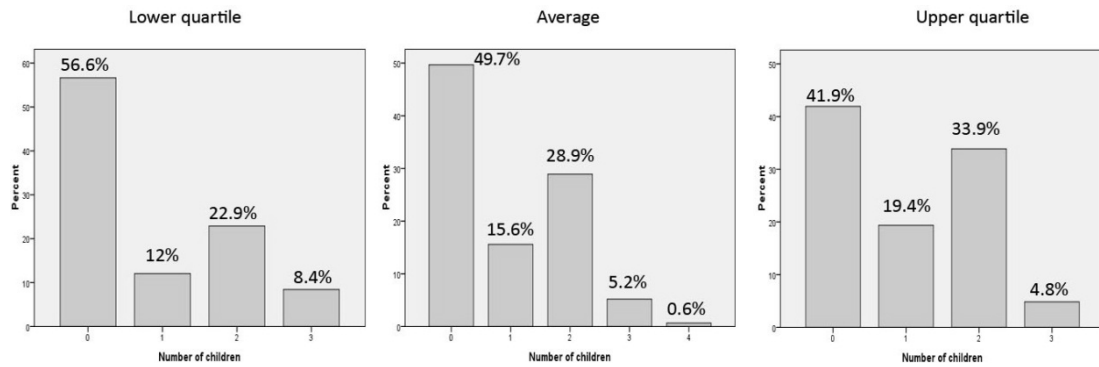
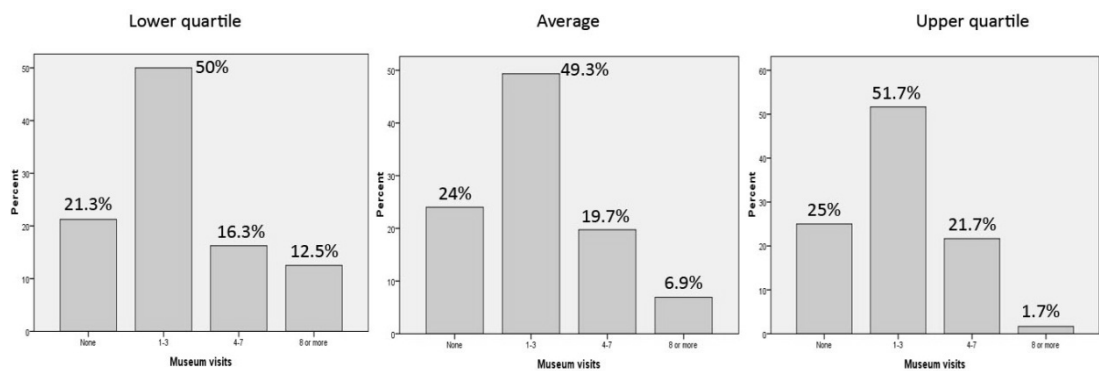
17 - GENDER DISTRIBUTION IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> AND 4<sup>TH</sup> QUARTILES, OWN ELABORATION



18 - AGE IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> AND 4<sup>TH</sup> QUARTILES, OWN ELABORATION



19 - EDUCATION LEVEL IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> AND 4<sup>TH</sup> QUARTILES, OWN ELABORATION

20 - NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> AND 4<sup>TH</sup> QUARTILES, OWN ELABORATION21 - MUSEUM VISITS IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> AND 4<sup>TH</sup> QUARTILES, OWN ELABORATION

lower quartile possess higher education, against 45.3% in the upper; on the other hand, only 43.2% in the lower quartile possess lower education, against 54.7% in the upper. This suggests that respondents possessing at least a bachelor's degree tend to be less favorable to deaccessioning overall. With respect to children (Fig. 20), we may observe a minor but steady decrease in the representation of childless respondents. In fact, these amount to 56.6% in the lower quartile and 49.1% in the upper, signaling that respondents with offspring tend to score higher. Finally, regarding museum visits (Fig. 21), we note that in all cases about 50% of the population qualifies as average visitors. However, in the lower and upper quartiles tendencies for the tails are opposite: 28.8% of respondents in the lower quartile are either frequent or very frequent visitors, whereas 21.3% are infrequent or non-visitors. On the other hand, only 23.5% of respondents in the upper quartile are either frequent or very frequent visitors, whereas infrequent or non-visitors amount to 25%. This suggests that respondents who visit museums more often tend to oppose deaccessioning, as would be reasonably expected.

From our observations so far we may construe that respondents averse to deaccessioning tend to be female, better educated, childless, and more frequent visitors; however, due to the risk of intervening variables and spurious relationship we may not ultimately ascertain this until we employ multivariate analysis. It would thus be advisable to conduct an ordinal regression in order to verify whether correlations actually exist. Unfortunately, our intentions in this respect are frustrated by data: if we elect the socio-demographic variables as our predictors, we are unable to reliably calculate location coefficients due to failures in the tests of assumptions (Fig. 22). The test of model fit, in fact, produces a chi-square value  $\chi^2=20.649$  with significance  $p=0.148$ , indicating we cannot reject the null hypothesis  $H_0$  that location coefficients are null. The test of parallel lines, instead, results in a staggering chi-square  $\chi^2=1435.102$  with significance  $p=0$ , revealing complete inconsistency across our logit relationships. We presume these failures are due to the large number of empty cells, i.e. dependent variable levels by combination of predictor variable values, left empty because they have zero observed frequencies. In fact, SPSS warns us that this number is as high as 92.9%, in all likelihood too high for the regression to be viable. The results of such tests are presented below.

Model Fitting Information				
Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	1455,752			
Final	1435,102	20,649	15	,148

Link function: Logit.

Test of Parallel Lines <sup>b</sup>				
Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	1435,102			
General	,000 <sup>a</sup>	1435,102	390	,000

The null hypothesis states that the location parameters (slope coefficients) are the same across response categories.

a. The log-likelihood value is practically zero. There may be a complete separation in the data. The maximum likelihood estimates do not exist.

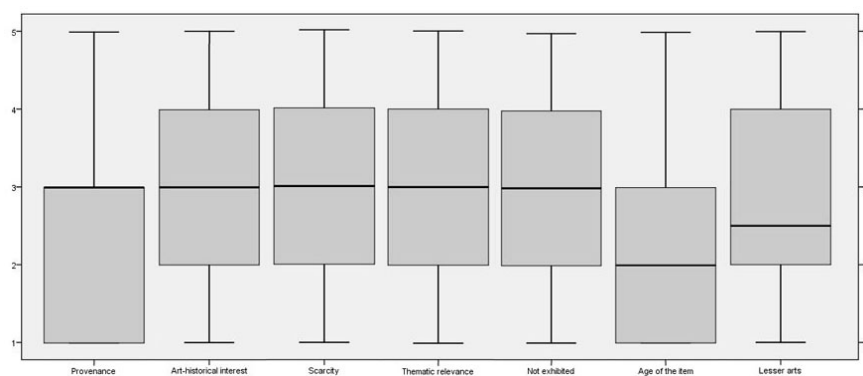
b. Link function: Logit.

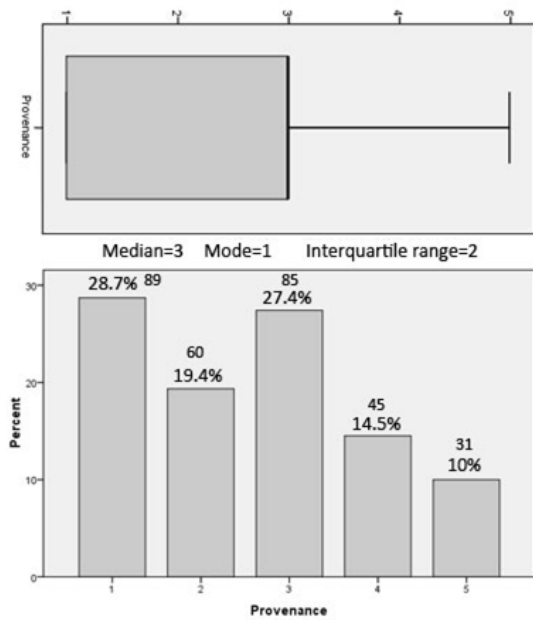
22 – REGRESSION ON DEACCESSIONING SCORE,  
TESTS OF ASSUMPTIONS, OWN ELABORATION

There are two ways to bypass this obstacle: either increasing sample size, which is not an option *post hoc*, or compressing our 7-through-35 scale into a smaller scale so that fewer cells are generated overall. While possible, this latter course of action is debatable because such compression would entail extensive approximation. We must keep in mind

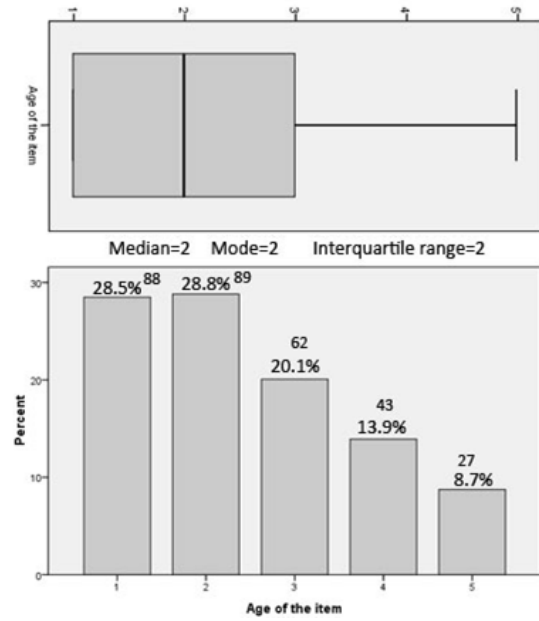
that Likert-type scores are indications of value judgments, and any alteration of scores essentially disconnects our analysis from the original data. We believe that, even if they allowed for a successful analysis, such compression would render any result fundamentally useless. It is true that approximation problems are intrinsic to Likert scores and their use, but there is a difference insofar as, given a certain scale, responsibility for the approximation falls upon respondents or the analyst. We cannot afford to modify the data we have collected.

As we are unable to continue, we move on to our first secondary research question with the examination of individual Likert-type items. The intention of this more specific analysis is to answer of secondary research question: (a) are there specific item-related factors that make deaccessioning more or less desirable for certain categories of objects? The bar charts and stem-and-leaf diagrams for each of these factors are presented below. The basic hypothesis we are verifying is that each of our proposed factors may make deaccessioning more acceptable in the eyes of the public. If this were true, we would pick up a concentration of responses towards the higher end of our Likert scales. For the interpretation of such scales, Mogey (1999) advises taking the variables' modes into consideration. In our case, however, we observe that modes are sometimes determined by very slight differences in count; hence, we believe medians may be more suitable measures of average on occasion. For most variables, they assume the value of 3, indicating a rather balanced distribution between agreement and disagreement. This means that no factor stands out as strikingly decisive. However, there are suggestions of the contrary for some of them, which are visibly unimportant. These are marked by differences in the median and/or interquartile range.

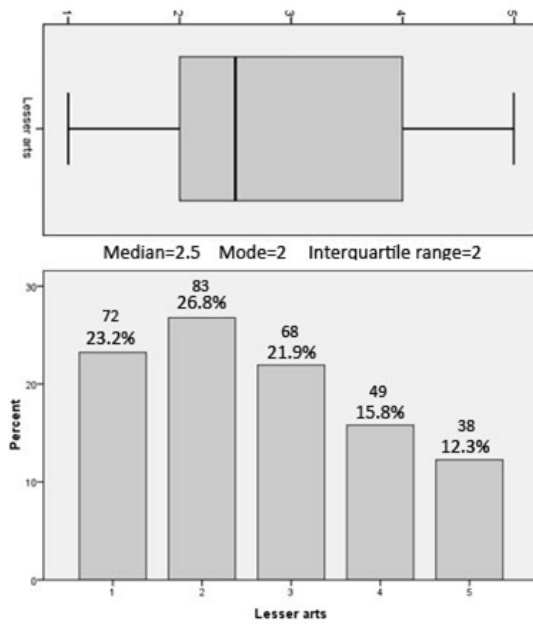




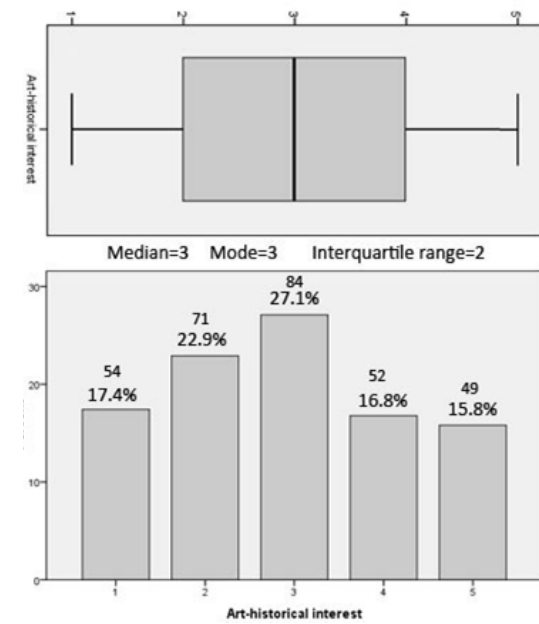
24 – ITEMS NOT LOCALLY PRODUCED, OWN ELABORATION



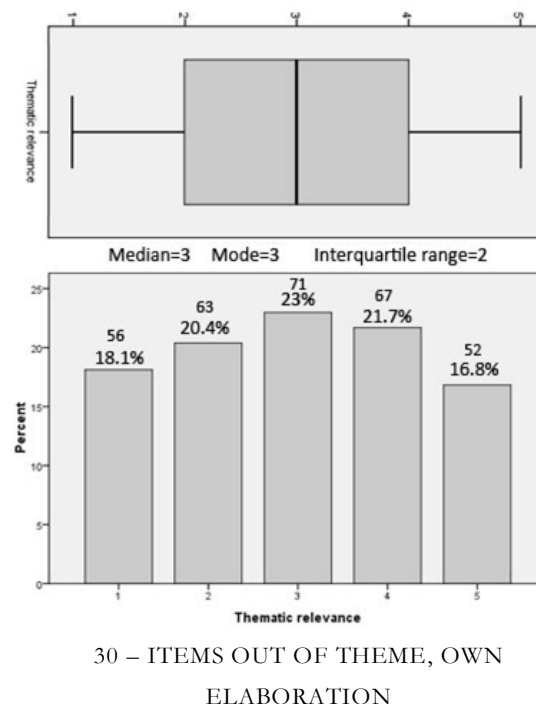
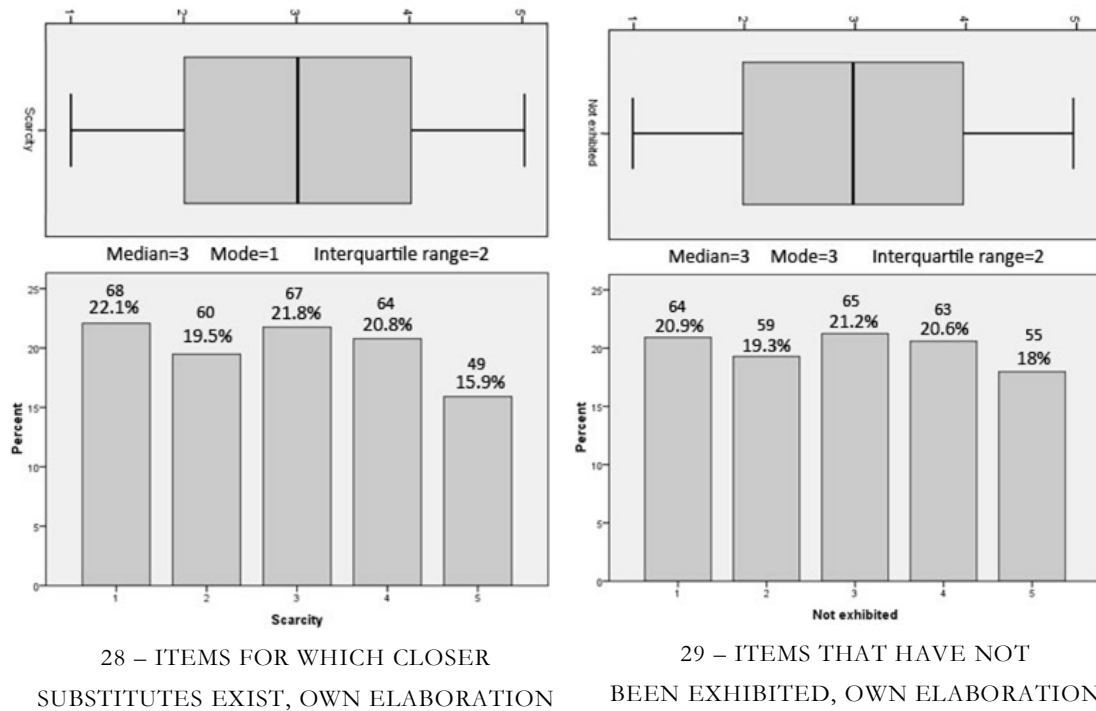
25 – MORE RECENT ITEMS, OWN ELABORATION



26 – ITEMS THAT BELONG TO THE LESSER ARTS, OWN ELABORATION



27 – ITEMS OF LESSER ART-HISTORICAL INTEREST, OWN ELABORATION



The first factor standing out as less decisive is foreign provenance (Fig. 24). The median is still 3 but we note a shifted midspread as the interquartile range spans from 1 to 3 rather than 2 to 4. This means that most responses are located at the lower end of the scale. The second is the age factor (Fig. 25), where the median is 2 and the

interquartile range spans from 1 to 3. Again, this indicates that most respondents populate the lowest two options. Thirdly, the Lesser Arts factor (Fig. 26), where the median is 2.5, implying that exactly 50% of respondents populate options 1 and 2, but the interquartile range still spans from 2 to 4, meaning that more than 50% are still distributed in the three central options. Therefore, it does not stand out as much as the previous two but it still differs from remaining ones. In fact, the art-historical interest of the item (Fig. 27), its scarcity (Fig. 28), the lack of recent exhibition (Fig. 29) and the low thematic relevance (Fig. 30), seem to be relatively more relevant as they feature a median of three and a midspread evenly distributed around this value. Clearly, none of them stands out as positively decisive, which is contrary to our expectations. In particular, the lack of a favorable tendency with respect to items not exhibited for a while (Fig. 29) is rather counterintuitive as we would expect this to be a major motive for expunging items from museum collections. However, it must be noted that an average tendency does *not* equal opposition: in other words, even in lack of concentration of responses towards options 4 and 5, we are reassured deaccessioning is still not out of question.

This terminates our observations with respect to item-related factors. Our conclusions will be recapped and expanded in the following chapter. For now, we move on to the second battery of Likert items, dealing with specific conditions that the public may perceive as important for the selling process.

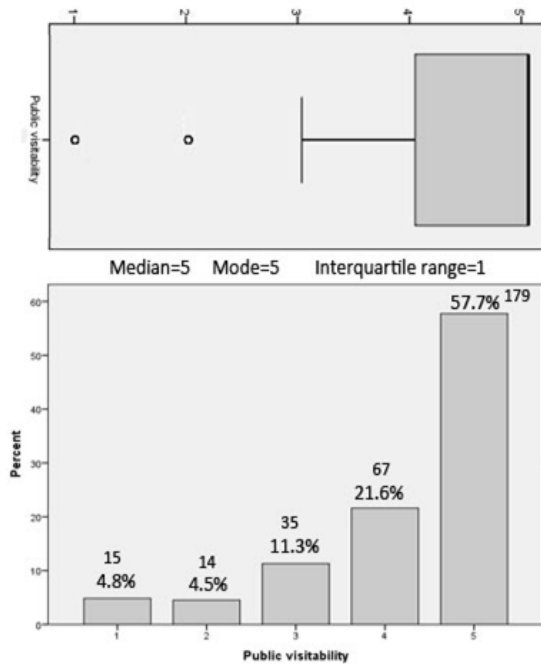
### **5.3. Second battery: conditions of the sales**

As explained in our methodology section, this second battery addresses our secondary research question: (b) are there any conditions that are perceived as more or less important for the selling process? Our hypothesis is that the conditions we propose will be perceived as more or less desirable elements for deaccessioning transactions in the eyes of the public. The options proposed include: the continuation of public visitability (Fig. 31); the fact that deaccessioned items must not have been originally donated to the museum, e.g. in legacies or bequests (Fig. 32); the commitment to public negotiations, such as auctions, as an assurance of transparency (Fig. 33); the establishment of a limit to the number of deaccessions allowed (Fig. 34); the fact that deaccessioned items are destined to museums or collections that are within the same territory as the seller (Fig. 35), or equally relevant as the seller, e.g. with respect to the life of the artist (Fig. 36). If

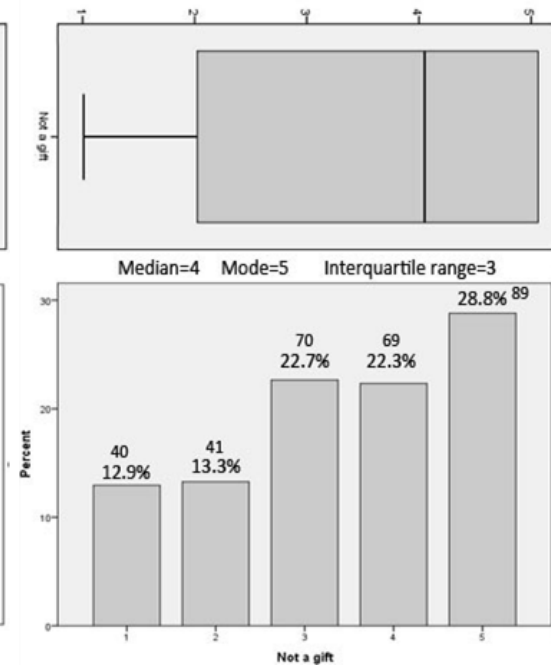


our hypothesis is true, we will observe a concentration of responses towards the upper end of our Likert scales. Like in the previous battery, a repeated measure is included for the purpose of control, as the continuance of public visitability is re-proposed at the end with different wording. Once again, we evaluate this through a marginal homogeneity test. As this results in a significance value  $p=0.368$ , there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis  $H_0$  that the distributions of different values across the two variables are equally likely. Once again, this means that responses to the two questions tend to be the same and we may thus be reassured that results are safely interpretable.

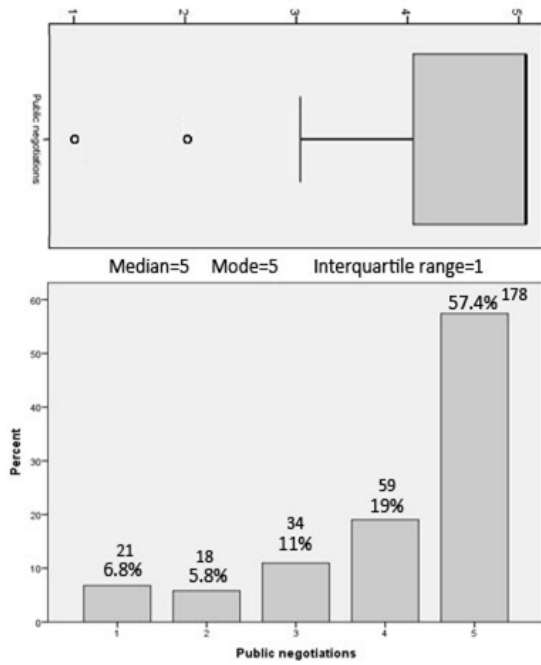
Unlike the previous battery, there is no need for a cumulative score and we proceed directly to the examination of individual items. In this case, however, interpretation is somewhat less immediate because there is not a clear trend from which some items noticeably stand out. Almost all of them are featured by the majority of responses being located on the upper end of the scale, which confirms our initial hypothesis. However, we still observe something unexpected: while certain conditions seem to be no less than paramount in the eyes of the public – namely, the preservation of public visitability (Fig. 31) and the commitment to public negotiations (Fig. 33) – the fact that sold items were not originally a gift for the museum (Fig. 32) is not quite as important, albeit it still scores higher than average. In fact, while the mode is still 5 and the interquartile range occupies the upper end of the scale, the range is considerably larger and unevenly distributed around the median. Therefore, granted that most respondents still see it as desirable, its perceived significance is inferior to the previously mentioned items. Concerning other conditions, the establishment of a cap to the sales (Fig. 34) seems moderately important: the mode is 5 and the interquartile range is evenly distributed around a median of 4. On the other hand, the facts that the final destination of the item is within the same territory as the original museum (Fig. 35) and that it is equally relevant with respect to the item deaccessioned (Fig. 36) appear less noteworthy: in both cases, medians and mode converge at 3, thus testifying a more even distribution between higher and lower scores. However, this latter item features a heavily shifted midspread, revealing it is marginally more relevant than the former. Like earlier, these differences are more clearly highlighted through a comparison of diagrams in the recapitulative boxplot (Fig. 37).



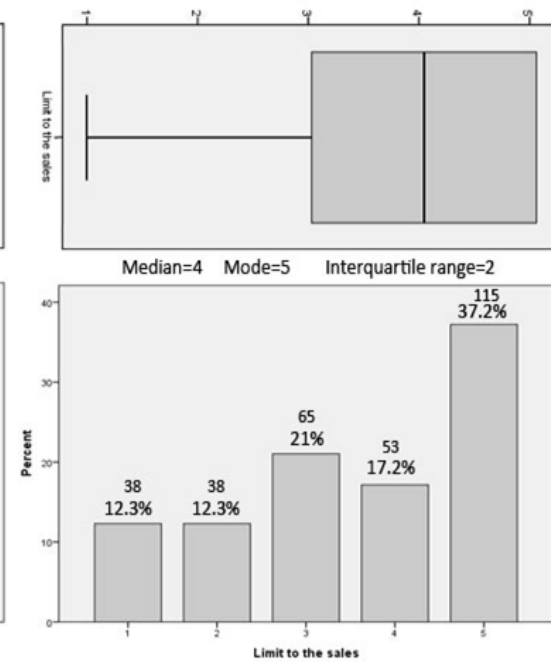
31 – PUBLIC VISITABILITY, OWN ELABORATION



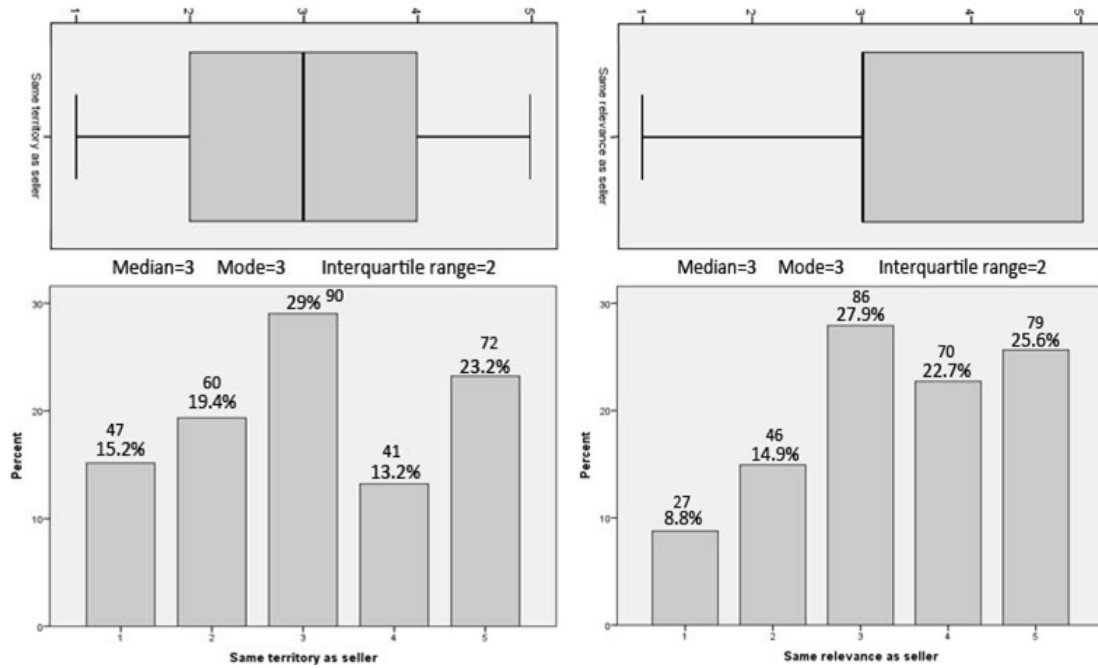
32 – ITEMS MUST NOT BE A GIFT, OWN ELABORATION



33 - PUBLIC NEGOTIATIONS, OWN ELABORATION

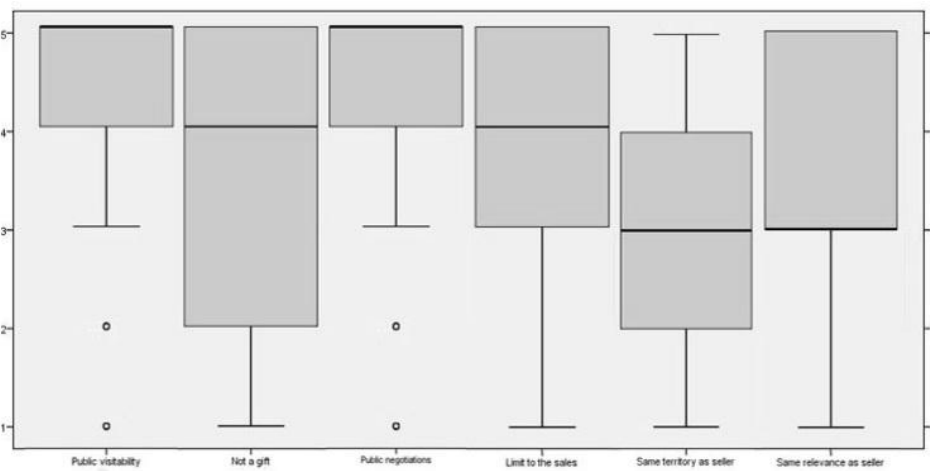


34 - LIMIT TO THE SALES, OWN ELABORATION



35 – BUYER IS IN THE SAME TERRITORY, OWN ELABORATION

36 – BUYER IS EQUALLY RELEVANT, OWN ELABORATION



37 – SECOND BATTERY: CONDITIONS OF THE SALES BOXPLOT, OWN ELABORATION

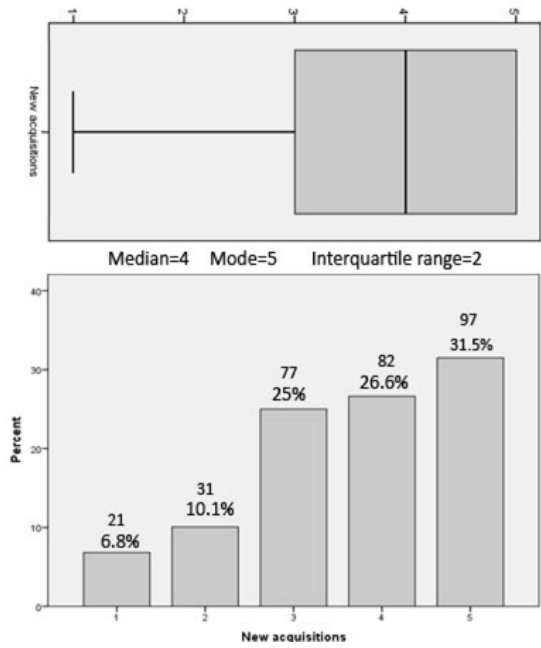
In this battery, the condition that the buyer is located in the same territory as the seller (Fig. 35) is the only one featuring a median of 3 and an even midspread. We may thus conclude its perceived importance is merely average. However, we may take a more attentive look at the distributions, particularly the tails: if we ignore the middle point, from which we are able to determine very little, and consider only the distribution on

the lower and upper ends of the scale, we observe that 34.6% of respondents populate options 1 and 2, against a higher 36.4% preferring options 4 and 5. In other words, with the exception of people electing the middle option, the public's opinion is still shifted towards a higher measure. For this reason, we deduce that respondents still consider it a somewhat desirable condition, if less readily than others in the same battery, implying that in any case it cannot be completely neglected by policy-making.

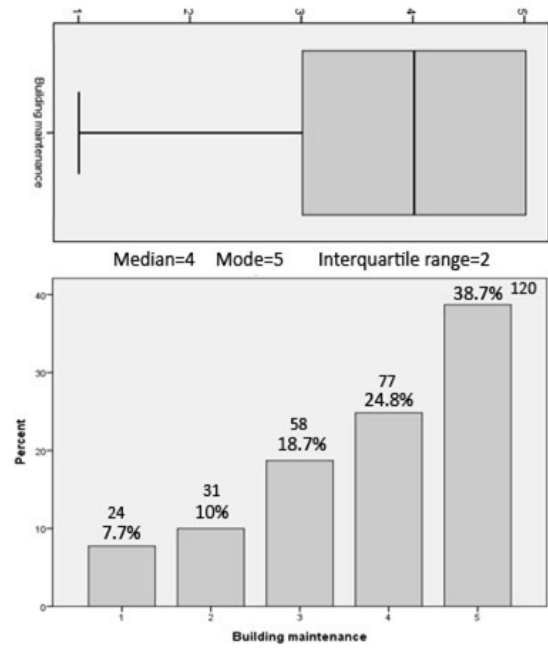
This concludes our analysis regarding selling conditions and provides the basis for an answer to our respective secondary research question, which we will summarize in our conclusions. We hereby move on to our third and final battery, dealing with the issue of proceeds allocation.

#### **5.4. Third battery: proceeds allocation**

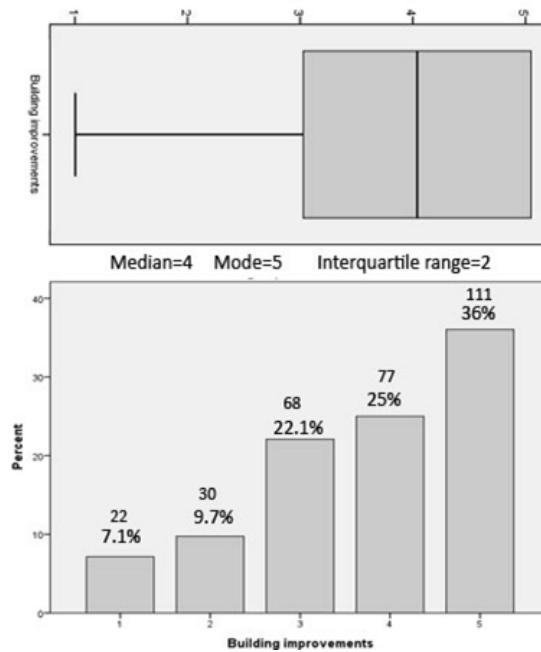
As explored in our literature review, this is one of the most problematic aspects of deaccessioning policies. The issue of proceeds allocation has been so far addressed by museum associations under the reasonable assumption that any other purpose than the improvement of the collection is unethical (Hart, 2007; Merryman et alii, 2007; Kennedy, 2008; Matassa, 2010). Prompted by our curiosity to determine whether such assumption is actually shared by the public, we present a number of possible museum-related destinations for deaccessioning income. By this, we intend to answer our last secondary research question: (c) how should final proceeds be employed? These include: acquiring more relevant artwork (Fig. 38), covering building maintenance costs (Fig. 39), financing building improvements (Fig. 40), covering restoration costs for other items (Fig. 41), creating new services for the public (Fig. 42), lowering admission fees (Fig. 43) and offering new didactic activities (Fig. 44). Although our expectation is different, our hypothesis here is that each of these destinations is perceived as agreeable, although some are likely to stand out as distinctively preferable. If this were true, we would once again observe a concentration of responses on the higher end of the scale. As before, since no cumulative score is needed, we directly move to examining individual Likert measures. The distributions for these are reported below in the usual composition of bar charts and stem-and-leaf diagrams, while a boxplot (Fig. 45) is presented later for ease of comparison.



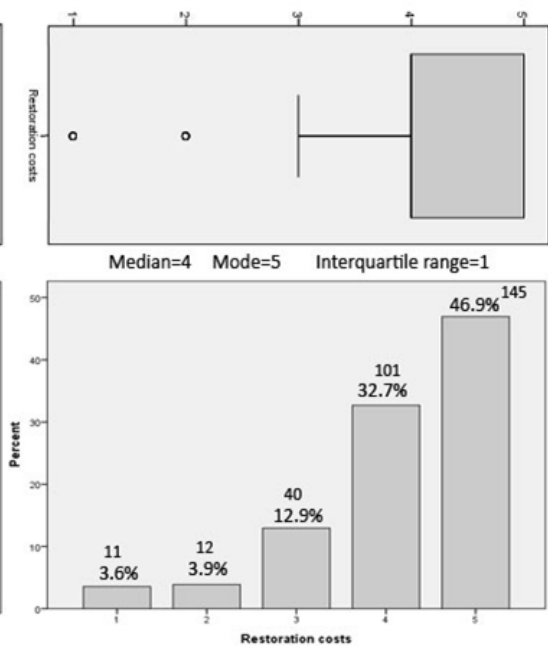
38 – NEW ACQUISITIONS, OWN ELABORATION



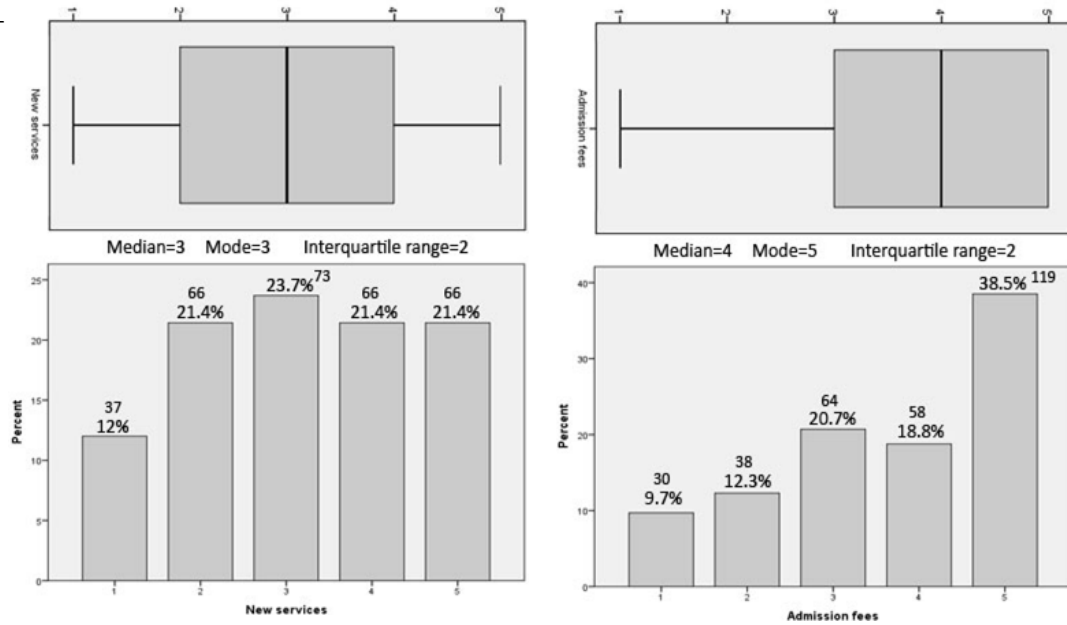
39 – BUILDING MAINTENANCE, OWN ELABORATION



40 - BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS, OWN ELABORATION

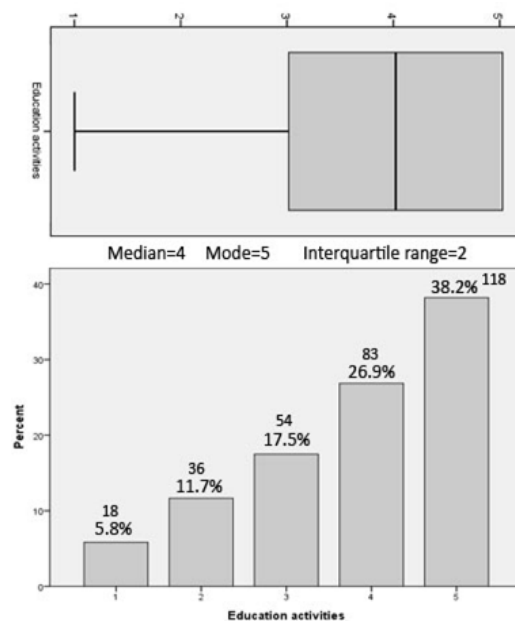


41 - RESTORATION COSTS, OWN ELABORATION



42 – NEW SERVICES FOR THE PUBLIC, OWN ELABORATION

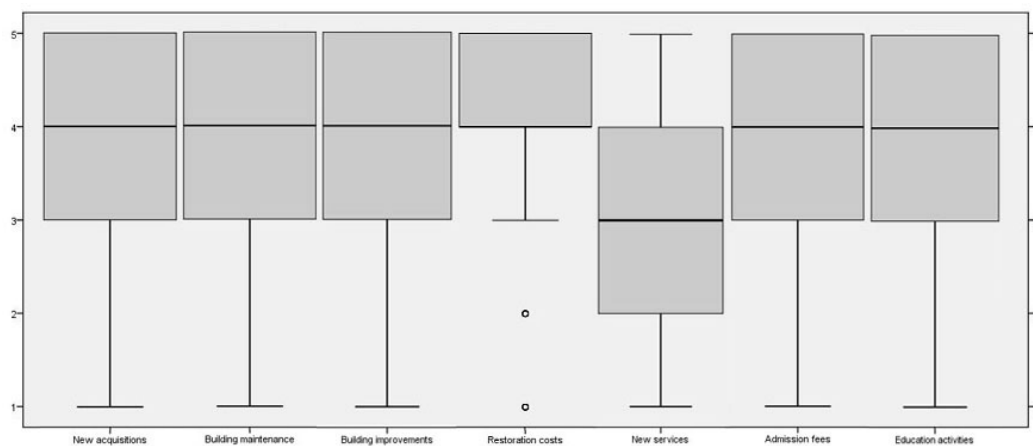
43 – LOWER ADMISSION FEES, OWN ELABORATION



44 – NEW DIDACTIC ACTIVITIES, OWN ELABORATION

The data shows that in almost every case the majority of respondents selected the highest two options. We believe these are our most interesting results so far, because they largely confirm our hypothesis and contradict the museum associations' fundamental assumption – which, in all truth, we happened to share. In fact, according

to it we would expect respondents to privilege the acquisition of new artwork (Fig. 38) over other possible destinations. Not only did this not happen, but many other items turn out to be even more desirable. In fact, with a mode of 5 and a median of 4, the score for many other purposes appears equally high at a first glance, but a closer look at the distribution reveals that in some other question the percentage of options 4 and 5 combined is actually higher. For the acquisition of new artwork, this equals 58.1%: for building maintenance (Fig. 39) and improvement (Fig. 40) this amounts to 63.5% and 61% respectively; for the restoration of other artwork (Fig. 41) this is as high as 79.6%, and for new didactic activities (Fig. 44) it is 65.1%. Only the creation of new services (Fig. 42) and the lowering of admission fees (Fig. 43) turn out to be less desirable than new acquisitions, although their respective values for responses 4 and 5 combined, 42.8% and 57.3% respectively, are still higher than for options 1 and 2, 33.4% and 22%. Among all, the most striking result is certainly the response to allocation for restoration costs (Fig. 41), for which nearly 50% of the sample expressed utmost agreement, which is 15% more than for new acquisitions. The vast majority, 246 out of 309, answered either 4 or 5. By contrast, as low as 23 answered either 1 or 2, making agreement practically undisputed. These results are recapitulated in the boxplot below.



45 – THIRD BATTERY: PROCEEDS ALLOCATION BOXPLOT, OWN ELABORATION

The establishment of new services for the public (Fig. 42) is the only one registering somewhat lukewarm feelings, as mode and median are set at 3 and there is a more even distribution over the Likert scale. However, as already mentioned, we may

still detect overall favorability due to a greater percent of people scoring higher than average. Nevertheless, this is still the lowest score for the battery, implying that this destination for deaccessioning proceeds is relatively less attractive.

This terminates our analysis on our third and last battery of Likert items: final conclusions with respect to our research question on proceeds allocation, as well as all other research questions so far, will be formulated in the following chapter.



## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1. Our findings

The breadth of our enquiry has allowed us to draw several conclusions so far. In more than one instance, especially the first battery, findings surprised us as they were different from our expectations; in others, they confirmed our suspicions as they were quite congruent. Our primary research question was determining the attitude of Italian citizens towards deaccessioning practices in Italian public museums. However, as explained in our methodology chapter, we did not intend to pose such question directly to our respondents, because a number of reasons including social desirability and the sheer lack of information – or rather, the misinformation – surrounding this topic would make a negatively-biased response very likely. Therefore, we attempted an indirect approach through the calculation of the cumulative score for all items from the first battery of our survey. This resulted in a scale from 7 to 35 with a median of 20, revealing a rather even concentration of responses across the board and suggesting that, while not quite favorable yet, the public does not seem to oppose deaccessioning in principle. The lower and upper quartiles were analyzed in order to detect trends in the socio-demographic characteristics among respondents scoring lower or higher. A few were found: respondents opposing deaccessioning tend to be female, have a better education, and no children, which strides with our expectations due to e.g. bequest values (Greenley et alii, 1981; More et alii, 1996; Navrud & Ready, 2003; Riddel & Shaw, 2003). Furthermore, they tend to be frequent or very frequent museum visitors. Due to the risk of spurious relationship, however, nothing could be ascertained without employing multivariate analysis. Unfortunately, an ordinal regression could not be performed because of failures in the tests of assumptions; therefore, our observations above remain tentative and further validation is needed to consider them reliable. In the end, the average result does not allow us to provide a clear-cut answer to our primary research question. Nevertheless, we find it thought-provoking that deaccessioning is *at*

*least* not out of question for the Italian public, considering the conservativeness of our museal sector. This convinces us that future research on this topic is not vain, and it may yield very interesting results if more sharply directed and designed as to ensure the feasibility of regressions.

As deaccessioning is a very multifaceted topic, our study also features three secondary research questions which can be useful in refining our understanding of the public's disposition. The first question concerns a number of item-related factors that may impact the tolerance respondents express towards deaccessioning practices, such as the age of the item, its scarcity, art-historical interest, etc. Having addressed it in our first battery, we are able to conclude that, while no single factor stands out as more important than average, three appear relatively irrelevant. The first is the provenance of the item (Fig. 24), indicating that there is no reason why local items should be considered less deaccessionable than imported ones and vice versa. Secondly, there is the age of the item (Fig. 25), meaning that e.g. contemporary artwork should not be considered more deaccessionable than ancient objects that have been part of the collection for centuries. The third is the belonging to the Lesser Arts (Fig. 26), implying that items such as ceramics and engravings should not be considered more deaccessionable than paintings and sculptures because of their lower 'nobility' and higher substitutability. Every other factor, including art-historical interest (Fig. 27), scarcity (Fig. 28), thematic relevance (Fig. 30), and, quite surprisingly, the lack of recent exhibition (Fig. 29), elicits nothing more – and nothing less – than an average response. We must admit that such a lukewarm reaction to our proposed factors, especially the lack of recent exhibition, was unexpected. On the contrary, we anticipated respondents to be considerably more favorable to selling in this case, as this is among the major reasons to ever remove items from museum collections. This counterintuitive outcome may have occurred because the breadth of this item is large and multifaceted: in fact, there are a great number of ifs and buts to be investigated and specified, including the entity of the timeframe of no exhibition we are considering, or whether the item stands any chance of being exhibited again in the future. If these aspects were effectively addressed, perhaps the public would be able to better frame the issue and express higher agreement. On the other hand, the dissonance with our expectations may have simply occurred because we were mistaken, in which case the respondents' indifference must

be interpreted as a reliable account of their opinion and would reoccur even if we provided better context for our question. Either way, we are generally satisfied with our results as they show that deaccessioning is not quite the scaremonger described by Italian literature (e.g. Mottola Molfino, 1998). A study dedicated entirely to this first sub-question may even succeed in pinpointing item-related factors that make it distinctively more acceptable, as will be explained later.

Our second sub-question focuses on certain terms of the sales that may be perceived as more or less important in the eyes of the public, e.g. the preservation of public visitability, and would thus need to be taken into account by policy-makers redacting deaccessioning guidelines. The response to individual items in this battery does not feature a clear trend and is hence very diverse. More than any other, the condition that the buyer should be within the same territory as the seller (Fig. 35) elicits a weak response, though respondents still leans towards desirability. This suggests that the public does not consider deaccessioning undesirable on the grounds that items exhibited e.g. in Naples may be relocated to Venice, although they may prefer that objects stay within their original territory if at all possible. At the other end of the spectrum, the preservation of public visitability (Fig. 31) and the commitment to public negotiations (Fig. 33), which may be perceived as necessary for transparency, produce such strong responses that participants selecting lower options on the Likert scale actually become outliers. This means that, if a clear deaccessioning policy were to be redacted in Italy, items should not be allowed to transfer over to non-visitable private collections, or to be sold through non-publicly accessible channels, such as private dealerships. Remaining items, including the condition that buyers are just as relevant as the original owners (Fig. 36) – e.g. equally prestigious on an international level, or located where the artist happened to live and work for some years – the establishment or a cap to the number of sales museums are allowed to make (Fig. 34), and the fact that the items in question were not originally donated to the museum (Fig. 32), lie somewhere in between the previous extremes. The latter one seems particularly problematic, as the broad interquartile range signals ample distribution of responses and thus very mixed feelings. We believe this is a noteworthy result, as the American literature on deaccessioning considers the original donors' wishes among the foremost obstacles to deaccessioning practices (Ackers Cirigliana, 2010; Urice, 2010; Whiting-

Looze, 2010). A suggestion that the breach of public trust in these cases may not be as severe in Italy as the States merits some reflection, especially due to the amount of artwork our institutions possess that would be affected by such clause. In fact, many of our most ancient and prestigious museums were not only expanded but actually established through private donations, e.g. the Capitoline Museums in Rome (Capitoline Museums, 2006). Overall, we are largely satisfied with our results from this battery as we obtained rather clear indications of what conditions are important in the eyes of the public, and what seem relatively negligible.

Our third and final sub-question regards the issue of income allocation, which is a veritable  *vexata quaestio*  within deaccessioning literature. As explained in several instances so far, most museum associations assume that any other purpose than the improvement of the collection would be fundamentally unethical (e.g. MA, 2007). As Temin (1991, p. 184) states, ‘one can only imagine the havoc that would have been wreaked by a decision to sell [...] to pay for a roof repair’. Our expectations were conform to this assumption: however, our survey results suggest a radically different scenario, and we believe these are our most striking results so far. In fact, all proposed destinations return higher-than-average scores, and most of them are even higher than new acquisitions (Fig. 38). The covering of restoration costs (Fig. 41) is particularly outstanding as the lower options on the Likert scale are populated by no more than 23 responses in total. However, the covering of sheer maintenance costs (Fig. 39), the improvement of the museum building (Fig. 40), and the creation of new didactic activities (Fig. 44), also turn out to be more desirable than new acquisitions. Indeed, only the creation of new services (Fig. 42) and the lowering of admission fees (Fig. 43) results less attractive by comparison. In our opinion, this constitutes a strong indication that the widespread assumption of museum associations is either misinformed or, as is more likely, simply does not apply to the Italian museum sector. Therefore, we think a hypothetical deaccessioning policy for Italian public museums should not be based on the same premise. Such difference may perhaps be due to the fundamental diversity of the Italian environment: the origin, age and amount of musealized heritage in Italy may have produced a different understanding of what priorities are in musealization and heritage fruition, particularly by comparison with younger countries like the United States. For example, the notion that most of our heritage is ancient and hence requires

costly hands-on intervention to ensure its durability may make the allocation for restoration costs more readily acceptable than the acquisition of new items itself. In addition, the fact that most Italian museums are housed in buildings of high historical interest and prestige may make the allocation of income for their maintenance, i.e. the proverbial ‘roof repair’ (Temin, 1991, p. 184), more agreeable too. On a similar note, since these buildings were very rarely built for exhibition purposes, they are often in need of modifications and physical adaptation in order to house a modern museum, which could make building improvements likewise acceptable. This is particularly congruent with observed reality if we consider that more than 50% of museums investigated by the Italian Touring Club’s latest dossier (Vavassori et alii, 2009) indicate the restoration of their building as a top priority. Furthermore, a favorable response emerges for the establishment of didactic activities (Fig. 44), often offered by American museum but hardly provided in Italy. An overall positive response, albeit weaker than the rest, is also obtained with respect to the creation of new services (Fig. 42). In our comparative socio-demographic analysis, we noted that respondents with children are more likely to favor deaccessioning: there may be a connection here insofar as these respondents would appreciate museums to implement services like children’s areas, which are practically inexistent in Italian museums (Vavassori et alii, 2009), and tend to favor deaccessioning as a possible source for the funds necessary to launch them. This nexus, however, is highly speculative and would need validation before being endorsed. In conclusion, there is much we may infer based on this battery: the bottom line is that the acquisition of new items is by no means the only destination for deaccessioning proceeds that the public is ready to accept.

## **6.2. Limits and further research**

We wish to underline how our results from secondary research questions were occasionally more interesting than for our primary query. Such serendipity may be due to the complexity of this topic, which rewards highly focused enquiries better than broad investigations. On the other hand, it may also be merely due to a suboptimal choice of Likert-type items for our first battery, from which the answer to our primary research question was extrapolated. In fact, these scores may have failed to cumulate into an accurate representation of the generalized attitude of respondents. The only way

to bypass this risk would have been to mix our methods with some preliminary interviewing or Delphi procedures, as they would have contributed to making our questionnaire sounder overall. Indeed, while our research is descriptive and adopts a quantitative method, the factors, conditions and allocations proposed in our three batteries were formulated on the basis of on our own understanding and educated guessing. In some cases, our guess was accurate and results clearly match or disproof our hypotheses; in others, namely the first battery, results turn out to be very average and thus difficult to interpret. For a more influential and interesting study, it would have been advisable to avoid guessing by basing hypotheses and survey items on reliable observations, e.g. from an exploratory enquiry employing qualitative methods. Clearly, this was not an option for us due to the formal limitations of a master's thesis in terms of time and space, but it may be a worthy recommendation for future research.

Each of our research sub-questions is broad enough to deserve a dedicated study and a survey in itself. Indeed, more item-related factors exist than we have proposed, as well as more conditions for the sale and more possible destinations for the proceeds. Several crucial aspects of deaccessioning were not investigated in our survey because they lied outside our most proximate interests, such as the priority free transfers and exchanges are supposed to have over irreversible sales, or the possibility of employing the income to cover outstanding debt. In fact, this latter scenario would be very worthy of investigation: while Crivellaro (2011) observes selling items to cover debts would be extremely unethical, we wonder whether this is the case when such debts are not caused by mismanagement but rather a decrease in public subsidization. After all, an Italian contemporary art museum recently resorted to burning its artwork in protest against the budget cuts (Le Monde, 2012) and we cannot help but argue that selling would have been a much more sensible option, and possibly a more effective demonstration. Finally, our survey is restricted to Italian public museum and does not investigate private institutions, which amount to no less than 16% of the total in the country and attract an increasing number of visitors (Ripamonti, 2008). Issues of ownership become more complex in their case but limitations around deaccessioning practices are looser as well, and the possibility of implementing them should be researched from a public-oriented perspective.

In conclusion, more research is needed on this topic and the limitations hereby enounced serve to point out some adjustments and directions for future efforts. We strongly believe we are on the right track with the adoption of quantitative methods: indeed, if we are supposed to advance towards better collections management policies in a way that does not endanger public trust, quantitative surveying constitutes the best instrument currently at our disposal. It is only through further studies on the public's perspective that we shall ever stand a chance to understand the perceived inadequacies of the museal sector in Italy. On the other hand, until the legislation loosens with respect to heritage management, a campaign for the implementation of deaccessioning in Italy will always be frustrated by a hostile legal framework: in order to pressure for its modification, it is paramount to move from the argument that deaccessioning, if cleverly regulated, does not endanger public trust and may even augment it. However, in order to effectively battle on the legal front a very different expertise is required than that of cultural economists. This is the reason why further research on deaccessioning must be a joint, multidisciplinary effort.

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### 8.3. Webography

Aedon	<a href="http://www.aedon.mulino.it/">http://www.aedon.mulino.it/</a>
ArsKey Magazine	<a href="http://www.teknemedia.net/artkey-magazine.html">http://www.teknemedia.net/artkey-magazine.html</a>
Culture24	<a href="http://www.culture24.org.uk/">http://www.culture24.org.uk/</a>
Deaccessioning.eu	<a href="http://deaccessioning.nl/">http://deaccessioning.nl/</a>
Eddyburg	<a href="http://eddyburg.it/">http://eddyburg.it/</a>
Il Giornale dell'Arte	<a href="http://www.ilgiornaledellarte.com/">http://www.ilgiornaledellarte.com/</a>
Italia Nostra	<a href="http://www.italianostra.org/">http://www.italianostra.org/</a>
Le Monde Culture	<a href="http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/">http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/</a>
Mecenate	<a href="http://www.mecenate.info/">http://www.mecenate.info/</a>
Museums Journal	<a href="http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/">http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/</a>
PatrimonioSOS	<a href="http://www.patrimoniosos.it/">http://www.patrimoniosos.it/</a>
Quotidiano Arte	<a href="http://www.quotidianoarte.it/">http://www.quotidianoarte.it/</a>
Rassegna Beni Culturali	<a href="http://beniculturali.blogspot.it/">http://beniculturali.blogspot.it/</a>
The Deaccessioning Blog	<a href="http://clancco-theartdeaccessioningblog.blogspot.com/">http://clancco-theartdeaccessioningblog.blogspot.com/</a>

## 9. Appendix

### 9.1. Questionnaire in Italian (completed)



**ERASMUS UNIVERSITEIT ROTTERDAM**  
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication  
Postbus 1738, 3000 DR Rotterdam, Paesi Bassi

**Gentile Sig.re / Sig.ra,**

*In questi anni, in Europa, viene promossa una nuova regolamentazione per la gestione del patrimonio museale, che permetta tra l'altro la **vendita di opere** tra musei ed, entro determinati limiti, anche a collezioni private.*

*I musei italiani possiedono molte più opere di quante ne possano esibire per ragioni di spazio, qualità e tema delle collezioni, e in media non più del 10% viene effettivamente esposto. D'altra parte, il patrimonio museale, in quanto pubblico, è inteso come inalienabile.*

*In quanto cittadini e proprietari del patrimonio museale, Vi invitiamo ad esprimere la vostra opinione su questo tema tramite la compilazione del presente questionario.*



Marcare la casella che, da 1 (min) a 5 (max), meglio esprime il Vs grado di assenso.

<b>Sesso</b>	M / <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> F	<b>Età</b>	38 anni
<b>Ha dei figli?</b>	Sì / <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No		
<b>Se sì, quanti?</b>	_____		
<b>Nazionalità</b>	Italiana / <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Non Italiana		
<b>Titolo di studio</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Licenza elementare <input type="checkbox"/> Licenza media <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Diploma di maturità <input type="checkbox"/> Laurea di 1° livello <input type="checkbox"/> Laurea di II° livello <input type="checkbox"/> Dottorato o scuola di spec.		
<b>Ha visitato musei negli ultimi 12 mesi?</b>	Sì / No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Se sì, quante volte? 1		

<b>Ritengo che possa essere consentita la vendita di opere:</b>	← - Sono d'accordo - →
1. Che provengano da un territorio diverso rispetto a quello del museo.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Di minore interesse storico-artistico rispetto alla media del museo.	1 2 3 4 5
3. Di cui esistano copie e/o esemplari simili, ad es. bozzetti o frammenti archeologici.	1 2 3 4 5
4. Che siano fuori tema rispetto alle altre opere del museo.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Di origine più recente, rispetto ad altre più antiche.	1 2 3 4 5
6. Che <u>non</u> siano state esibite dal museo per un determinato periodo di tempo.	1 2 3 4 5
7. Appartenenti alle cosiddette "arti minori", ad es. ceramiche o intagli.	1 2 3 4 5
8. Che <u>non</u> rientrino nel tema del museo.	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Ritengo la vendita accettabile a patto che:</b>	← - Sono d'accordo - →
9. L'opera sia destinata ad altri musei o collezioni aperte al pubblico	1 2 3 4 5
10. L'opera <u>non</u> sia stata un dono per il museo, ad es. in esecuzioni testamentarie.	1 2 3 4 5
11. La trasparenza sia garantita da trattative pubbliche, ad es. annunci ed aste.	1 2 3 4 5
12. Venga fissato un limite al numero di opere che è possibile vendere.	1 2 3 4 5
13. Il museo di destinazione sia nello stesso territorio di quello di provenienza.	1 2 3 4 5
14. Il museo di destinazione sia egualmente rilevante, ad es. per la vita dell'artista.	1 2 3 4 5
15. Si garantisca la futura possibilità di visita da parte del pubblico.	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Il ricavato della vendita dovrebbe essere utilizzato per:</b>	← - Sono d'accordo - →
16. L'acquisizione di opere più rilevanti per la collezione.	1 2 3 4 5
17. Coprire i costi di manutenzione della struttura.	1 2 3 4 5
18. Finanziare lavori di miglioramento della struttura.	1 2 3 4 5
19. Coprire i costi di restauro di altre opere.	1 2 3 4 5
20. Creare nuovi servizi per il pubblico, ad es. punti di ristoro, navette o aree per bambini.	1 2 3 4 5
21. Ridurre le tariffe d'ingresso.	1 2 3 4 5
22. Offrire nuove attività didattiche, ad es. corsi, seminari o conferenze.	1 2 3 4 5

Le risposte saranno sottoposte ad analisi statistica per ricerca accademica. Si prega di restituire il questionario compilato e la penna al ricercatore. Grazie!



## 9.2. English translation of the questionnaire



ERASMUS UNIVERSITEIT ROTTERDAM  
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication  
Postbus 1738, 3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands

**Kind Sir / Madam,**

*In these years, new regulations are being promoted in Europe for the management of musealized heritage, allowing e.g. the **sale of items** among museums and, within certain limits, to private collections as well.*

*Italian museums possess many more items than they can exhibit due to space, quality and theme of their collections. On average, no more than 10% of items is actually exhibited. On the other hand, museum collections are public property, and thus inalienable.*

*As Italian citizens and legitimate owners of Italian musealized heritage, you are kindly invited to express your opinion on this topic through the completion of the present questionnaire.*

Check the option that, on a scale from 1 (min) to 5 (max), better reflects your degree of agreement



<b>Gender</b>	M / F	<b>Age</b>	___ years
<b>Do you have children?</b>		Yes / No	
<b>If yes, how many?</b>		_____	
<b>Citizenship</b>	Italian / Non-Italian		
<b>Education level</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary school license <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary school license <input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree <input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree <input type="checkbox"/> PhD or specializ. school		
<b>Have you visited museums in the past 12 months?</b>		Yes / No	
<b>If yes, how many times?</b>		_____	

	← -	I agree	+ →
<b>I believe the sale can be acceptable for items:</b>			
1. Which originate from a different territory than that of the museum.	1	2 3	4 5
2. Of minor art-historical interest compared to the average for the museum.	1	2 3	4 5
3. Of which copies and/or close substitutes exist, e.g. sketches or archaeological fragments.	1	2 3	4 5
4. That are out of theme compared to other items in the museum.	1	2 3	4 5
5. Of more recent origin, as opposed to more ancient ones.	1	2 3	4 5
6. That have <u>not</u> been exhibited by the museum for a certain period of time.	1	2 3	4 5
7. Belonging to the so-called "minor arts", e.g. ceramics or carvings.	1	2 3	4 5
8. That are <u>not</u> within the theme of the museum.	1	2 3	4 5
<b>I believe selling is acceptable only if:</b>			
9. The item is destined to other museums or collections open to the public.	1	2 3	4 5
10. The item was <u>not</u> a gift for the museum, e.g. a testamentary legacy.	1	2 3	4 5
11. Transparency is guaranteed through public negotiations, e.g. notices and auctions.	1	2 3	4 5
12. There is a cap to the number of items that can be sold.	1	2 3	4 5
13. The museum of destination is within the same territory as the original.	1	2 3	4 5
14. The museum of destination is equally relevant as the original, e.g. for the life of the artist.	1	2 3	4 5
15. Future visitability by the public is guaranteed.	1	2 3	4 5
<b>The proceeds from sales should be used to:</b>			
16. Acquire new items that are more relevant to the collection.	1	2 3	4 5
17. Cover building maintenance costs.	1	2 3	4 5
18. Finance building improvements.	1	2 3	4 5
19. Cover restoration costs for other items.	1	2 3	4 5
20. Create new services for the public, e.g. restoration areas, shuttles or areas for children.	1	2 3	4 5
21. Lower admission fees.	1	2 3	4 5
22. Offer new didactic activities, e.g. courses, seminars or conferences.	1	2 3	4 5

All responses will be subject to statistical analyses for research purposes. Please, return the completed questionnaire and the pen to the researcher. Thank you!