

Master Thesis - Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship

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## Art for money's sake?

*An empirical enquiry of UK museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning.*

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## Abstract

The past decades, museums have had to cope with increasing financial pressure, confronting them to new challenges. The economic crisis had important consequences on corporate, private as well as public support. As a result, it has been necessary to consider new ways of managing museums. In this context, deaccessioning has become increasingly considered as an efficient collection management tool. Deaccessioning is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as the “official removal of an item from a library, museum, or art gallery in order to sell it” (Oxford Dictionary Online, 2016).

Surprisingly enough, despite the key role of museum professionals in deaccessioning processes and decisions, few systematic empirical studies have been conducted on their practices and attitudes related to deaccessioning. This research aims to fill this gap. United Kingdom has been chosen to collect the empirical data since that, as a common law country, deaccessioning is legally more admitted. More diversity in the practices and attitudes to be observed was therefore expected. The thesis is based on the data from an extensive literature review, written sources related to this practice, a web survey amongst museum professionals, and several qualitative interviews. Factor analyses and regression models were used to look at the survey data.

This inquiry led to several findings. First, deaccessioning is much more complex than it may seem at first glance. It does not only cover a wide range of practices: it is also driven by diverse motives and difficult financial times are only one of the factors that pushes deaccessioning decisions.

Second, item sales are more limited than it can be suggested by the literature. This seems related to the complexity of codes and guidelines related to deaccessioning, the sanctions in case of non-compliance, as well as the skeptical attitudes of museum professionals. More specifically, professionals seem more favorable than visitors towards deaccessioning when it is motivated by reasons related to the items themselves (e.g., interest, visitability), whereas they seem less favorable than visitors when deaccessioning is motivated by reasons related to the museum (e.g., buildings, services).

Third, the research has identified two important factors of museum professionals’ attitudes towards deaccessioning. On the one hand, a “cultural” factor seems to play a role at the individual and institutional levels. Indeed, museum professionals who have a professional experience in the private sector, as well as those working in a private museum, are more inclined

to support deaccessioning (for item-related reasons) than those who have a public-sector experience or work in a public museum. On the other hand, when museum professionals are clearly aware of deaccessioning rules and guidelines, and of the risks they are exposed to in case of code breaches, they prefer not to deaccession at all. To conclude, the practical implications of these findings are discussed and several avenues for future research are suggested.

**Key words:** Deaccessioning - UK Museums - Museum professionals - Collection management - Regulations *versus* practices

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*“Next time you’re playing Scrabble and want to wow opponents with a game-changing word, try this one: deaccessioning.”*

(Bishop, *Art Deaccessioning: Right or Wrong?*, 2010)

## 1. Introduction

Recently, the Northampton Museum hit the headlines for the sale of the Sekhemka Statue, an Ancient Egyptian artefact that had been bequeathed to them by the Marquis of Northampton back in the 1870’s (Heal, 2014). Following the sale, the Museum had his accreditation withdrawn by the Arts Council England. This case illustrates well how deaccessioning – defined as “the official removal of an item from a library, museum, or art gallery in order to sell it” (Oxford Dictionary, 2016) – remains a very controversial practice in the United Kingdom, and may lead to tremendous consequences for the institution at stake.

Over the last decades, museums around the world have had to cope with increasing financial pressure. The economic crisis had important consequences: in the USA, for instance, the endowments went down of 20 to 35 percent. In addition, corporate, private as well as State support strongly decreased (Cirigliana, 2011). As a result, it has been necessary to consider new ways of funding museums, which sometimes clashes with their fundamental mission: “acquiring, conserving, researching, communicating and exhibiting” works of art (International Council of Museums, 2007). This is clearly the case when it comes to deaccessioning given its influence on one of the most fundamental asset of a museum: its collection.

Museum professionals play a crucial role in deaccessioning processes and decisions: they identify the item to be deaccessioned and take care that the procedure be made in respecting all the legal and ethical standards of the museum field. They are therefore a key actor worth of interest when it comes to understand better deaccessioning practices. The role of museum professional is especially important in common law countries. In civil-law countries, most museum collections are viewed as public goods: deaccessioning them is therefore forbidden or very poorly looked upon. In common law countries, museum professionals, and particularly the board of trustees in charge of administrating the museum, are entrusted to manage collections in the most appropriate way. In doing so, they have to follow the rules and codes of ethics to which their museum adheres. Such codes are produced by various professional associations such as the Museums Association or the National Museum Directors’ Council in UK, the American Alliance of Museums or the Association of Art Museum Directors in the USA.

However, deaccessioning remains a controversial practice: newspapers are likely to report museum professionals' and the public's opinion about this contentious practice, be it positive or negative (e.g., Carvajal, 2015; Knight, 2009; Pogrebin, 2016). As will be suggested by the literature review conducted in this master thesis, academic research has abundantly documented the opportunities and risks related to deaccessioning too. For instance, two major topics that have attracted the attention of scholars are the public interest (e.g., Cirigliana, 2011; Fincham, 2011; Tam, 2012) and the ethical questions related to donations and bequests (e.g., Di Gaetano & Mazza, 2014; Miller, 1985; O'Hagan, 1998).

Surprisingly enough, despite the key role of museum professionals in deaccessioning processes and decisions, few systematic empirical studies have been conducted on their practices and attitudes related to deaccessioning. Most studies looking at the opportunities and risks related to deaccessioning have legal or ethical points of view. Some research has been conducted on visitors' attitudes towards deaccessioning (Vecco, Srakar & Piazzai, 2016). However, compared to visitors, museum professionals have specific backgrounds and different interests. In addition, they should have developed a specialized knowledge on collection management, in general, and deaccessioning practices, in particular. The present research intends to fill in this gap by examining the specificities of museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning.

Given the lack of academic knowledge on such a crucial issue, the objective of this master thesis will be to analyze the practice of deaccessioning by museums and museum professionals, as well as their attitude towards this practice. More specifically, the following research question will be addressed: What are the attitudes of museum professionals toward deaccessioning practices? How can those attitudes be explained? An extensive review of the existing academic research, as well as diverse written primary sources such as codes of ethics, professional studies, association websites, etc. will be used to report on the complexity, development and arguments for and against deaccessioning. This review will act as a theoretical starting point to develop a set of hypotheses on the nature and explanatory factors of museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning. Empirically, a web survey was conducted to examine UK museum professionals' practices and attitudes related to deaccessioning. Finally, the data from five semi-structured interviews was used to complete and bring nuances in the data collected through the literature, the written sources and the survey. This study has been conducted among UK museum professionals. The United Kingdom is a common law country. Given that museum professionals of common law countries should be offered more options related to

deaccessioning in general, a greater diversity of practices and attitudes should be observed, on average, compared to many civil-law countries. In turn, this should facilitate the identification of the factors explaining those attitudes. This is the reason why the empirical data were collected among UK museum professionals.

It is crucial to look at museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning for at least three reasons. First, people can be for or against deaccessioning – the existing research is a good illustration of this. For example, some people against deaccessioning can consider this practice immoral whereas some others can view it as a tool to improve the coherence of collections or to finance the services and infrastructures of a museum. However, such normative discussions do not tell a lot about the drivers and impediments of actual deaccessioning processes. What facilitates those processes? What hinders them? Deeper empirical insights into the attitudes and practices of museum professionals – i.e., the key players in deaccessioning processes - will provide a first answer to those important questions.

Second, professionals themselves have their opinion on deaccessioning, but they do not always know what their colleagues know about this practice. Do my colleagues support deaccessioning? In which conditions? Do they experience the same kinds of troubles when they are tempted to deaccession an item of their collection? For museum practitioners, those questions may act as an impediment to selling or deaccessioning items. But such an impediment is based on incertitude rather than on rational, elaborated arguments for or against deaccessioning.

Third, this study will complement previous research conducted on (Italian) visitors' attitudes towards deaccessioning (Vecco, Srakar & Piazzai, 2016). Is deaccessioning as controversial among professionals as in the general public? Do they hold more complex attitudes towards this practices, as could be expected from people involved in such issues on daily or at least regular basis? The collection of data among museum professionals will not only allow to compare professionals' attitudes on deaccessioning with visitors' attitudes. This comparison will also be useful to characterize professionals' attitudes, relative to attitudes of the general public. In addition, the research will also be a source of information for the general public to get a better understanding of the reasons that push professionals to promote or fight against deaccessioning. As said, deaccessioning is a controversial practice, but the results of this study could contribute to a decrease of this controversy through a better understanding of the actual reasons that push experts to support deaccessioning or not. At least, the findings of



this study will contribute to articulate the debate on sounder arguments rather than on more general ideas.

Theoretically speaking, this research will contribute to the fields of cultural economics and cultural management in several ways. First, the principal objective of this research is to provide a sound empirical basis to theoretical discussions on deaccessioning from the perspective of professional agents involved in deaccessioning processes. While a considerable literature discussing the normative reasons for or against deaccessioning exists (e.g., Rohner, 2010; O'Hagan, 1998; Whitting-Looze, 2010), few research has been conducted on museum professionals. Admittedly, a recent study aimed at modelling museum professionals' behavior towards deaccessioning from a formal perspective (Srakar, 2015), but this study does not provide insights into their actual attitudes and practices. In line with Vecco, Srakar & Piazzai (2016)'s research on visitors' attitudes, this research examines a set of theoretical expectations regarding the real attitudes and practices of museum professionals towards deaccessioning.

Second, the development of deaccessioning practices contributes to the creation of a specific market which is, at a higher level, interconnected with the arts market. In economic theory, one key factor to understand market evolutions is the actor or "agent" – his or her micro-level perceptions, interests and behavioral intentions (Jacquemin, Tulkens & Mercier, 2001). Hence, through a deeper understanding of museum professionals' attitudes, this research will contribute to the economic theory of art markets.

Third, in management studies, there is a strong tendency to look at organizational phenomena from a context-free perspective (e.g., "organizational leadership", "trust", "performance", etc.). The big advantage of such tendency is, of course, the generalizability of research findings to any context. However, there have been strong calls to combine such research insights with context-specific insights (e.g., Blair & Hunt, 1986; Erdem & Özen-Aytemur, 2014). An accurate understanding of organizational outcomes is only possible with such a combination. For example, the performance of museums depends on the general attitude of museum managers towards performance but also their use of deaccessioning, which depends on their attitude toward this practice. This research will contribute the development of a context-specific research on the management of museums.

By reviewing the existing literature, the first chapter of this thesis examines deaccessioning practices. Its different subsections are dedicated to the definition of deaccessioning in its various aspects (the evolution of the concept in the literature, codes of ethics, and guidelines), the main reasons that explain why museums resort to deaccessioning

and, finally, an overview of the most common arguments for or against deaccessioning as well as related issues such as the valuation of museum collections. In the second chapter, the methodological framework is introduced, including the case selection as well as the presentation of its quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The data collected through the survey and during interviews are then properly analyzed and confronted with the expectations presented in the first chapter. To this end, descriptive statistics and measures of associations are presented. To compare the complexity and dimensions of professionals' attitudes with visitors' attitudes towards deaccessioning, the results of factor analyses are discussed. Finally, to examine possible factors of professionals' attitudes toward deaccessioning, the results of regression analyses are examined. In the conclusion, the main findings of the research are summarized, before discussing the limitations of the thesis. On this basis, several avenues for future research are proposed.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. What is deaccessioning? An attempt of definition

According to the Oxford Dictionary (2016), deaccession consists in “removing an entry (for an exhibit, book) from the accession register of a museum, a library, etc., usually in order to sell the item concerned”. This differs from the definition of the US law according to which deaccessioning is “the permanent removal or disposal of an object from the collection of the museum by virtue of its sale, exchange, donation or transfer by any means to any person” (NYEL, §233A). White (1996) is closer of the UK definition since she limits deaccessioning to “the removal of an object from a museum collection with the intent to sell it” (p. 1042). In the present research, an important focus is precisely brought to deaccessioning as the sale of items. Furthermore, following the idea that deaccessioning is not only the decision to remove the item but also the ways by which the item is in fact disposed (Malaro, 1991), the present thesis intends to bring clarification on conditions and channels more acceptable amongst museum professionals.

Deaccessioning happens internally to the museum and has no effect on the ownership of the item deaccessioned (Gardner, 2004). Deaccessioning is therefore different from disposal which is defined as the transfer of ownership of the artwork by the museum, after this artwork has been deaccessioned. (Association of Art Museum Directors, 2010). In the case of false or fraudulent works, or in the case of artworks that have been irreparably damaged or cannot practically be restore, disposal means removal from the collection and disposition as determined by the museum, destruction of the artwork included (Association of Art Museum Directors, 2010).

Even if deaccessioning is an internal procedure, once the item is deaccessioned, this means that the museums does not hold it anymore in the public trust in perpetuity (Gardner, 2004). This is one of the reasons why deaccessioning must be handled carefully as it implies a sense of loss: the museum is not anymore the place where the item will be forever protected. Indeed, the accessioning of an asset implies a change in its status: from common, it becomes worth of being exhibited on museum’s walls. Hence, deaccessioning is obviously seen as a loss of standing and value for the items concerned (Vecco & Piazzai, 2015). One can easily understand why it puts museum directors and managers in a delicate position, since the practice of deaccessioning contravenes the most fundamental missions of a museum to “acquire,

conserve, research, communicate and exhibit” works of art (International Council of Museums, 2007).

Although this seems quite obvious, deaccessioning does not apply to an item that was never accessioned by a museum: “if a museum acquires an object but never accessions it, [...] the disposal of that object is not a deaccession” (Malaro, 1991, p. 273). Manisty & Smith (2010) further remind that is not accessioned an item that is on loan in an institution for a long period of time but does not belong to the collection it is exhibited in; neither an item which gift is rejected – both during the lifetime of the donor and after his death; nor an item that was never formally accessioned in one museum’s collection by record in dedicated registers. As one may notice, there is quite an impressive number of definition provided both by scholars and associations of the field. When trying to grasp the concept of deaccessioning, this is the first challenge one is confronted with.

#### 2.1.1. Historical perspective

“A museum is a collection of activities as well as a collection of art” (Gordon, 2009, p. 4). This sentence summarizes quite well the dilemma of deaccessioning. While opponents to deaccessioning often wave around the sacred nature of the collection, a museum is not only a collection; this is an entire ecosystem made of numerous key actors: curators, conservators, security staff, educational staff, etc. If a museum cannot meet operational expenses and is constraint to lay off people in order to ensure its fragile survival, is the argument of sacrosanct collection still valid?

Hereafter, we intend to give an overview of the evolution of the practice and the developments in the general museum field: its recognition as a managerial practice to ensure the global prosperity of the museum as well as the proper development of the collection and the attempts by the museum field’s associations to frame it with all the required precautions.

Deaccessioning is a very controversial aspect of museum management, one of the “most debated and sensitive issues for museums today” (Tam, 2012, p. 852). The debate on deaccessioning has undergone different developments in Europe and in the United States. “Museums in the United States, unlike their British counterparts, are free of statutory regulations directly governing deaccession.” (Range, 2003, p. 657). This means that, despite their similar law system (both USA and UK are common law countries), there are still differences that might explain why deaccessioning is a less accepted practice in the United Kingdom. In the US, several developments occurred in the 80’s that Malaro (1991) points out

as potential explanatory factors for the increasing appeal of deaccessioning. Amongst them, the tax reform of 1986 led to less favorable tax incentives for donors; museums brought an increased attention to collecting practices in order to collect more wisely; and concerns about the conservation and storage of the items – both from the public-interest and financial perspectives – became more acute. If there has been no tax reform in the United Kingdom, the willingness of increasing the coherence of the collection and improving the care of items are however shared concerns with their American counterparts (as developed in Section 2.2).

Beyond the debate on deaccessioning, some peculiarities specific to the two continents have an impact on the application of this practice. First of all, and often underlined by the critics (Netzer, 2011), is the legal framework. While US falls under common law, European countries – except for United Kingdom – follow civil law. In the latter ones, museums' collections are viewed as being part of a common property, and thus owned by the public. In common law countries, trustees in charge of museums are entrusted for taking care of the museum, including its collection. If one takes a look at the definition of a trustee: “a person having a nominal title to property that he holds for the benefit of one or more others, the beneficiaries” (Oxford Dictionary of Law, 2015), it becomes clear that the public, as beneficiaries, transfer the responsibility of carrying out the mission of the museums, also when it implies deaccessioning.

When it comes to funding, historically, the government has always played a smaller role in the US, constraining the cultural organizations to find other ways of financial sustainability, pushing for corporate and private support through fundraising campaigns. This might explain the bigger independence of US private institutions towards the State. According to Frey (1994), this independence allows museums to adopt more freely an “economizing behavior” that includes the deaccessioning of artworks in order to put the money back in the purchase of other pieces, in the better conservation of the remaining ones or in operating costs such as the moisture and temperature control, extended opening hours, etc.

As Towse points out (2010), deaccessioning may be much more difficult for publicly owned collections as they belong to the nation. In the United Kingdom, a lot of museums are dependent on public support (both at national and local levels). This means that they must comply with restrictions in terms of collection management, including the practice of deaccessioning and, especially, the use of proceeds that might result of the sale of an item. National museums in the United Kingdom, for instance, fall under the National Heritage Act of 1983, which takes precedence over the UK Museums Association's Code of Ethics and states

that “money accruing to the Board by virtue of a disposal [...] shall be applied by the Board in the acquisition of objects to be added to their collections” (National Heritage Act, 1983).

Finally, Europe and the US differ with respect to the homogeneity of museums’ practices of deaccessioning. This is related to the power of national associations. In the US, strong associations such as AAM and AAMD tend to bind together all art museums under common principles and tacit laws. As a result, museum practices are much smoothed. In contrast, despite the code of ethics provided by the International Council of Museums (ICOM, 2013), the governance of European museums lies in the hands of national bodies due to the so-called principle of subsidiarity (Vecco & Piazzai, 2015). This implies that the guidelines on deaccessioning may differ from one country to another. Indeed, the principle of subsidiarity “[establish] primary responsibility for cultural policy at the level of individual member-states” (Barnett, 2001, p. 12) and therefore set aside a potentially beneficial uniformization.

#### 2.1.2. Codes of ethics, toolboxes and guidelines

While art’s law has become clearer through the years, in the art world, the relationships between law and practices are often dynamic (DeMott, 2012). This sometimes results for museum actually practicing deaccessioning in a conviction by public opinion of the museum’s ethics, even if the laws and regulations are perfectly respected.

If governmental control can happen, in United Kingdom as well as in the United States, most of the practices are regulated by professional associations (Burgess & Shane, 2011). “Legal and non-legal rules complement each other by bringing both the procedure and merits of the deaccession under scrutiny” (Chen, 2009, p. 142). In UK, the legal considerations surrounding deaccessioning varies according to the different categories of museums (local, national), the different sorts of collections, and the different countries that form the United Kingdom (Moustaira, 2015).

Malaro (1991) underlines that when it comes to deaccessioning, ethics raise sometimes more convictions than laws, especially amongst the public opinion (Howard, 2012). In terms of compliance, ethical standards are higher than what the law requires and ethics are closer to the actual practices that occur in museums (Stephens, 2011). Even if more and more people acknowledge that “objects once in a museum are not sanctified in eternity, nor are they condemned to death if deaccessioned” (Cantor in Stebbins et al., 1991, p. 21), museum officials still have a duty of transparency. To help them in this process, numerous guidelines and toolboxes exist to know when it is good or not to deaccession an item and what procedures are

to follow: who takes the responsibility both for the decision of deaccessioning and for the method for doing so (Fayet, 2010, refers to it as “ethics of responsibility”) – who buys, whom to inform in case of donations, etc. Amongst those guidelines, there are “no overarching set of professional ethics that apply to the museum field” (Stephens, 2011, p. 137) which makes it sometimes difficult for museums to know where to start.

Deaccessioning policies and guidelines already existed in UK before the first concerns emerged in the US in the early 1970’s. In Europe, the first international body to release regulations and advices on deaccessioning is the International Council of Museums (ICOM). Founded in 1946, it counts more than 35.000 members worldwide, gathering 119 national committees and 30 international ones (ICOM, 2010-2016). In its 1997 report, it is stated that “material from the collections should only be taken after due consideration, and such material should be offered first, by exchange, gift or private treaty sale, to other museums before sale by public auction or other means is considered” (ICOM, 1997, p. 164). They further stipulate that “there must always be a strong presumption against the disposal of object” (ICOM, quoted in Merritt, 2008, p. 23). The ICOM Code knew several updates over the years, with the willingness to compile the existing codes in the museum profession.

In the United Kingdom, the first noticeable reflections on the issue of deaccessioning go back to the 1960’s when a cartoon of Da Vinci was threatened with sale (Crivellaro, 2011). A committee was set in 1962, and published two years later a legislative proposal to protect major works of art of being sold on the open market. This first report issued specifically treating about deaccessioning issues is commonly known as the *Cottesloe Report*. Published in 1964, the Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Sale of Works of Art by Public Bodies has served as a reference document for museums until its main principles were included in the “Code of Practice for Museum Authorities”, first guidelines issued by the Museums Association in UK in 1977 (Babbidge, 1991). Disposal is not encouraged and, when necessary, it is asked that the disposed item ends up preferably in another museum. The *Cottesloe report* was made in an attempt to address the legal framework regulating artworks possessed by public and semi-public museums (Manisty & Smith, 2010): the idea of the proposal was to increase the government control on the deaccessioning by sale decisions, in particular for item of great aesthetic value and of monetary value greater than 25.000 pounds. The British government did not eventually act any specific legislation and the proposal was abandoned. After a strong controversy that hit the Derbyshire County Council in 1991, the reviewed version of the Code of Ethics from the

Museums Association (2015) states clearly that financially motivated disposals are strictly forbidden (Ulph, 2015).

Amongst the guidelines existing to help museums proceed to deaccessioning, there is the report entitled *Museums and Art Galleries*, published in 2002 by the Charity Commissioners. The major aspects underlined in this report are the ones of cultural or educational value of the items as well as the public engagement of the collection. Concretely, this means that disposal of items are encouraged when they are of little value or when their access to the public is jeopardized by long-term storage.

In 2003, the National Museum Directors' Council released *Too much stuff? Disposal from museums*, a report addressing the issue of deaccessioning. It questions the prohibition of Museums Association's code of ethics of financially motivated disposal and brings another perspective to deaccessioning by inviting museum professionals to focus on the preservation and usage of their collection items, including when it implies to dispose those items to another institution able to take care of them properly. The critical positioning of this report is quite new in the museum world. In the conclusive part, it is reminded how collections must be managed as to benefit the best the public and not being used as prestige tools for one museum in particular. They finally conclude stating that "disposal should be regarded as a proper part of collection management, but if it is to be successful it must be properly resourced and carefully conducted" (NMDC, 2003, p. 14).

In 2005, the Museums Association published *Collections for the future*, reflecting on the best practices for collection management, including deaccessioning of items. In the wake of this report, a major consultancy project was led by the Museums Association in order to collect museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning. "The consultation revealed that attitudes had changed within the museum sector [...and] that sales for financial reasons to raise money would be tolerated in certain circumstances" (Ulph, 2015, p. 188). The Museums Association further published three revisions of the Codes, in 2007, 2010, and 2015, including cautious changes regarding financially motivated disposals. They also published a *Disposal Toolkit* (Museums Association, 2015 [Last edition]) providing guidelines for the process of deaccessioning, notably underlining the necessity that all incomes coming from the sale of the item be reinjected in order to fulfill the objective of satisfying the public.

In terms of lawmaking, it is only in 2007, with proposals from the Parliamentary Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, that an agreement has been reached about "Acquisition and Disposal Policies" (House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport



Committee, 2007). The MLA, or Museums, Libraries and Archives Council is the agent of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. They are in charge of providing leadership advice to UK institutions. To ensure the respect of good practices, an accreditation scheme is provided to which museums must conform. Funded notably by the Arts Council England, the Collections Trust has been set up in order to practically help museums reach the best practices possible (Manisty & Smith, 2010). Collections Trust is a charity established in 1977 in UK which provides concrete advices on the collection management, the digitization of collections, or the risk management, among other things (Collections Trust, 2016).

Next to the codes and guidelines provided by association of the field, the Arts Council of England proposes an accreditation scheme (Arts Council of England, 2016). Museums have to respect a series of standards if they want to benefit from the accreditation. Those standards are set up according to the Code of Ethics of the Museums Association and the non-compliance with the rules may lead to a withdrawal of the accreditation from both bodies for several years (See for instance the case of the Northampton Museum, notably reported by the BBC, August 2014). This touches not only on the reputation of the organization but has very concrete consequences. A museum that lost its accreditation also lost the preferred partnerships in terms of loans, collaboration and recognition by other museums that still adhere to the scheme. The fact of being part of the museums association allows museums to have pieces they won't have in any other way<sup>1</sup>.

In each country of the United Kingdom, national bodies also exist to set up boundaries and help museums take the right managerial decisions, be it for the collection or any other aspects of the operation of the museum. Those are the Museums Archives and Libraries Division (MALD) of the Welsh Government, the Museums Galleries Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Museums Council, that work closely together with the Arts Council England.

Together with the guidelines provided by international, national, and local bodies, museums often develop their own codes of acquisition and disposal practices, most of the times based on the content of the above cited bodies' policies (Paterson, 2013). The powers of deaccessioning are discretionary and museums most of the time exercise them according to their own policies (Moustaira, 2015).

Finally, lots of scholars propose guidelines and advice for practicing deaccessioning in the best conditions possible. This is for example the case of Stephens (2011): after reviewing

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<sup>1</sup> This will be shown more in details in Section 4.2.

the codes of different associations and museums, he provides some recommendations for museums to follow in order to process deaccessioning in respecting the common agreements of museum professional bodies.

In case museums do not respect the ethical standards set by those associations, several sanctions may apply to them. The first one, even if symbolic, is no less harmful: the reputation of an institution may be tarnished in case of disrespect of ethical guidelines for deaccessioning. In extreme cases, museums associations can chose to withdraw their accreditation from the museum concerned. This has very practical consequences for museums that are not anymore eligible for some grants, are excluded from partnerships of loans between accredited institutions, as already underlined above. For museums that are part of the MLA Designation Scheme, reserved to an elite of institutions other than the national ones, the risk is to loss their eligibility to special grants awarded by the MLA Designation Development Fund (Manisty & Smith, 2010).

Based on this review of literature and official documents, this is striking how important is the number of rules, codes and guidelines dedicated to deaccessioning. While it may be positive in the sense that museums can rely on a lot of support to practice deaccessioning, it can however presents the downside that museums have a lot to deal with when it comes to apply the best practices in terms of deaccessioning procedures. This may lead to misunderstandings and a feeling of confusion in front of the massive amount of information available.

*Hypothesis 1<sup>2</sup>*

Respondents more aware of the rules and of the negative consequences in case of non-compliance with those rules (withdraw of accreditation, loss of status, etc.) are less favorable towards deaccessioning.

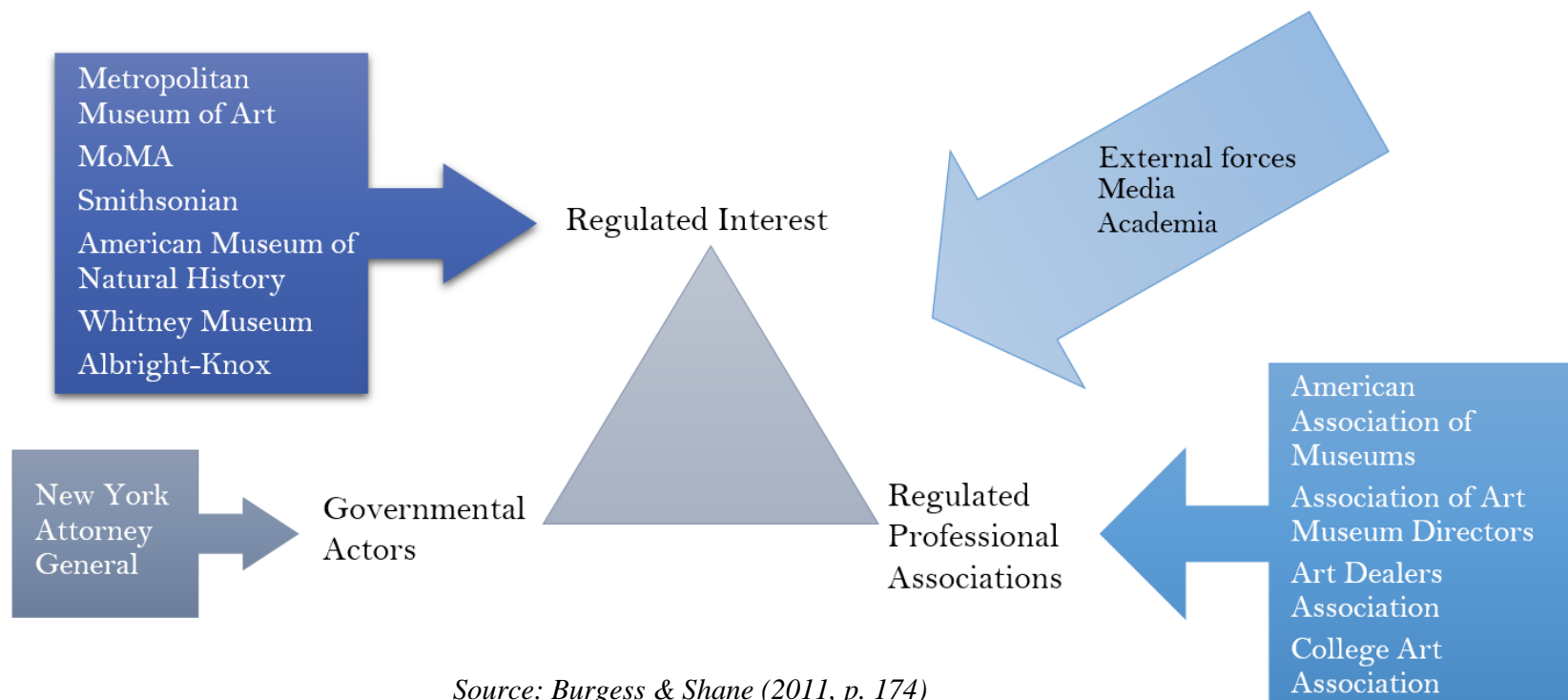
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<sup>2</sup> All hypotheses are presented at the end of the theoretical part directly linked to them. This set up was chosen in order to make clear the baselines on which the hypotheses are generated. Each of the hypothesis therefore results from the literature review presented in the above section. In the Section 4 of the thesis (“Results and findings”), all hypotheses will be systematically tested to determine their validity.

### 2.1.3. The multiple stakeholders of deaccessioning

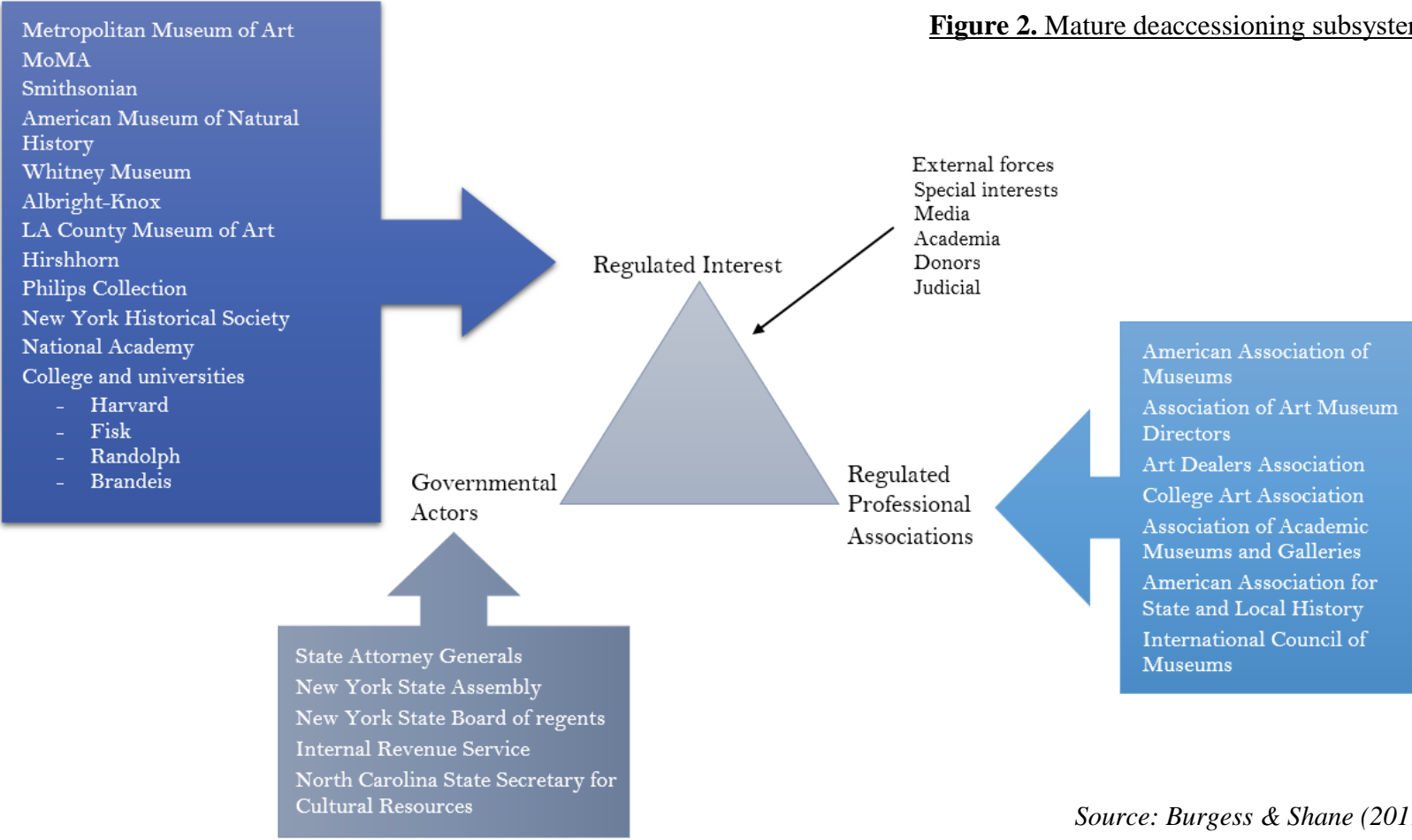
When it comes to deaccessioning, various stakeholders are concerned: museum professionals, members of the executive boards, associations of the field, the general public, the public authorities (governmental and local), collectors, art critiques, journalists, and scholars. In their paper, Burgess & Shane (2011) develop a scheme of the policy subsystem that emerged in the United States in the 1970's, when debates around deaccessioning became increasingly important. The Figure 1 clearly shows the different parties at stake when it comes to attitudes towards deaccessioning, defined as a “subset of a museum regulatory policy” (Burgess & Shane, 2011, p. 174).

**Figure 1.** Emerging deaccessioning subsystem



*Source: Burgess & Shane (2011, p. 174)*

As shown in Figure 2, media attention plays a significant role in the deaccessioning policy debate by shedding light on this controversial practice and catching the attention of the public, on the one side, and of the governmental bodies, on the other side. Indeed, the convocation of governmental actors by museum professionals and scholars in order to increase the existing regulations were each time – in the 1970’s and in the mid 2000’s – subject to a huge media coverage (Burgess & Shane, 2011).



Source: Burgess & Shane (2011, p. 182)

Besides media and academia, other actors has come to light as deaccessioning became more and more widespread. Amongst them, donors are certainly one of the stakeholders that attracted the most attention in the academic world. They are at the center of many concerns about deaccessioning, some scholars and museum professionals fearing that by adopting this practice, museums put themselves – and non-deaccessioning museums as well – in a delicate position that could undermine current supporter’s trust and result in decreased future donations and bequests (see for instance Di Gaetano & Mazza, 2014; O’Hagan, 1998, Miller, 1991).

#### 2.1.4. The variety of museums in the United Kingdom

In Europe, contrarily to America, lots of museums are public owned. This implies that collection may be considered as inalienable and, therefore, that the sale of items might be forbidden (Grampp, 1996). But even when it is legal, museums professionals stay quite reluctant to the idea of giving away works of art (O’Hagan, 1998). Furthermore, public museums have less incentive to sell items of their collection, as it may have negative consequences such as decreased public budget or increased control on the performance by external actors. The way a museum behaves can therefore be influenced depending on its institutional setting, private or public, and the sources of funds (Frey & Meier, 2006).

Beyond the division line between private and public, museums present various characteristics according to their quality. National as well as university museums enjoy a charitable status: it allows them to benefit from tax exemption. The status of charities is regulated by the *Charities Act* which includes a series of criteria which need to be satisfied. Among them, museums have to act for the public benefit and meet the purposes of advancing education, the arts, culture, heritage, or science (Charities Act, 2011). Not anyone can therefore decide to establish oneself as charity. A famous textbook case is the decision of the English Court of Appeal in 1965, *Re Pinion*, which refused the demand of an artist to establish his former studio as a charitable trust (posthumously). The attorney general explained the reasons for denial in those terms: “I can conceive of no useful object to be served in foisting upon the public this mass of junk. It has neither public utility nor educative value” (Re Pinion, 1965, Ch. 85).

Public collections in the United Kingdom are governed by statute law and their deaccessioning power is specified by government acts (Lydiate, 2011). Therefore, they are submitted to a certain number of statutory provisions governing deaccessioning from their collection (See Appendix 1). National museums, particularly, have to respect the legislation of the National Heritage Act (1983). Next to the national collections, a huge amount of museums

is managed at the local authority level by councilors in charge of deaccessioning decisions. Museum openings by local authorities are encouraged since the Museums of Art Act of 1845 (Ulph, 2015). The local authorities are also qualified by the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964 to establish funds for acquisitions of items once the local museum founded. To manage the museums, this is not uncommon that local authorities decide to establish charitable trusts. Those trusts allow them to keep the ownership of the collection while reducing costs and benefiting from tax exemption. As far as deaccessioning is concerned, they have more freedom than national museums for every item that belongs to the collection.

Next to the above mentioned settings, the United Kingdom counts three non-statutory national collections: the Arts Council Collection, the British Council Collection, and the Government Art Collection. They have been reviewed in 2011 (Shewell, 2011) after the request of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to merge them after drastic decrease in their public funding (House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2011).

Finally, a particular case is the one of university collections. At a legal level, there is no specific legislation determining the nature of university collections: “endowment property subject to the statutory rules of investment responsibility, program-related property governed by fiduciary duties, or cultural property subject to its own unique standards” (Sugin, 2010, p. 101). University museums do not act independently. They belong to the university and, consequently, are running higher risks than museums established as charitable trusts. Indeed, they are subject to endowments’ decrease of universities which occurred quite drastically in the mid-2000’s, following the economic crisis. Other educational needs can be prioritized over the survival of the museum. University museums have to prove themselves useful and valuable for the university community in order to strengthen the links with the parent institution and, therefore, reduce the risk that the collection be seen as common assets usable to cover operational costs (Brill, 2011).

### *Hypothesis 2*

Museum professionals belonging to a public museum are more reluctant towards deaccessioning than respondents from private (or hybrid) museums.

## 2.2. The reasons behind deaccessioning

### 2.2.1. Deaccessioning as a tool towards a greater consistency of the collections

*“Sometimes the thing itself does not belong in a museum; sometimes it is simply out of place in that particular museum [... and this] is collectively a huge drain on museum resources.”*

(Merritt, 2008, *Beyond the cabinet of curiosities: Towards a modern rationale of collecting*, p. 20).

Bequests and donations are common practice when it comes to the enrichment of a museum collection, especially if one thinks of how the vast majority of public museum collections have been built up. If there is now more attention paid to both the provenance of the art work and its relevance for the museum collection, a huge amount of items have been accepted by museums from donors, allowing the latter to benefit from substantial tax exemptions. As Miller (1985) points out, “things enter museum collections for many reasons, not all of which are grounded in a well-meaning desire for patrimonial [*sic*] preservation or aesthetic enlightenment” (p. 289). Acquisition policies have therefore become more and more refined the last years so as to avoid both unnecessary accumulation and the need to deaccession.

While in general the practice of donation is beneficial to museums, it may present two negative aspects: first, the important amount of works stored but never exhibited and not always used even for the purpose of research. Second, the fact that no particular rules govern the process of donations leads the museums to accept each of them. In some cases, this results in a misallocation of donated works of arts (Montias, 1995): indeed, while famous museums receive a huge amount of pieces, others, local or smaller, do not. This is a pity for the museums as well as for the visitors since a better allocation of the gifted items would allow smaller museums to enhance their collection and offer to the public a wider range of pieces exhibited. Further than representing a loss in terms of visibility of the piece donated, this also has a cost in terms of tax exemption: this costs money to the State and, if the item is stored, this money is not invested for the best (Montias, 1995).

When national museums started to open from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards in the United Kingdom, followed shortly by the regional and local museums, lots of private donors and collectors offered parts of their collection to those new temples of culture and heritage. Since that, at this time, no particular guidelines were followed for acquiring – and accepting – objects,

this has resulted in huge collections, some items of which being of little value for the museum's educational and cultural mission.

Nowadays, museums are more and more conscious of the importance of offering the best visitor experience possible and are willing to maximize the number of pieces exhibited. Some museums even open their storage spaces to the public in order to show more items<sup>3</sup>. However, this can present downsides as exhibiting poorer quality pieces. In this case, deaccessioning represents a good alternative for museums that prefer a smaller number of high quality items that will be appealing to visitors rather than a high quantity of lower-valued items.

### *Hypothesis 3*

Museums founded more recently will deaccession less than older institutions.

#### 2.2.2. Deaccessioning as a result of storage and collection care concerns

Due to the fact that no particular policies were set for acquiring new items, acquisition and preservation have long been considered as two separated issue, which has lead museums to acquire more than they could take care of (Weil, 1990). This results in a poor management of the collection that deaccessioning would allow to improve. Furthermore, museums are only able to show a small percentage of their collection, about 10% in average (Vecco & Piazzai, 2015).

Beyond the display of items, if artworks are kept in storage for study purpose, it makes only sense in the case where time and money are devoted to it: conservators, curators and researchers must dedicate their knowledge and competences in order to preserve and take benefit of those stored items (O'Hagan, 1998). If not, deaccessioning may also represent an interesting alternative, especially when pieces are delegated to another museum. However, in the case where items would be sold to private collectors, the question of conservation is a major issue: the storage and display conditions as well as a lack of knowledge in conservation matters can lead to damages for the deaccessioned item (Miller, 1985). This is particularly the case for bulky items and for pieces which need particular attention of preservation<sup>4</sup>.

Moustaira (2015) provides an interesting overview of the potential arguments for and against deaccessioning by art museums. One of the most important is undoubtedly the improvement of the collection which may come from two main parts. First, the curatorial and conservation attention payed to the items stored is better when there are less items to take care

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<sup>3</sup> This example comes from Interview 5.

<sup>4</sup> This will be shown in the qualitative results section (4.2).



off. Second, the money spent in administration, storage, security, and conservation costs could be used for acquiring other artworks in order to enrich the collection. From the perspective of utility, a smaller collection is also economically more efficient. Indeed, as Merritt (2008) underlines: “once available resources of space, staff time, or money are exceeded, adding material to the collection actually diminishes its overall utility by contributing to overcrowding and a backlog of documentation” (p. 21).

On the basis of Hudson’s law, Vecco & Piazzai (2015) also argue that deaccessioning may be more ethical than it sounds. The idea of Hudson’s law is that the bigger the collection, the smaller the quality of management. Indeed, museums’ resources and competences such as funds, curatorial attention as well as exhibition and storage spaces, do not increase as much as the collection grows. In this sense, deaccessioning seems quite more ethical as it prevents the museum from “object bulimia” (Vilkuna, 2010, p. 74) that might occur when museums become unable to manage the collection correctly and to maintain its original spirit, due to its growing size. In this way, deaccessioning becomes aligned with the main mission of museums.

#### *Hypothesis 4*

Museum professionals will tend to be favorable to use the proceeds of deaccessioning for the betterment of the collections.

### 2.2.3. Deaccessioning as a result of financial difficulties

The economic downturn that hit the world during the mid-2000’s brought new developments to the museum field and the use of deaccessioning. In the United States, for instance, museums started deaccessioning items for covering their operating expenses. This resulted in a strong reaction from the associations of the field that called governmental bodies to set up stricter regulations to avoid such situations in the future (Burgess & Shane, 2011). Famous cases, notably, were the sale by the National Academy Museum in New York City of two Hudson River School paintings as well as the plans of Brandeis University (MA) to sell the entirety of its Rose Art Museum’s collection. This resulted in the introduction of a bill to the New York State legislature proposing the prohibition of artworks sales to manage operating costs. The bill did not pass because of the strong opposition expressed by museum and art professionals (Paterson, 2013).

Those financial circumstances led to a redefinition of the subsystem of deaccessioning where other actors such as university and donors came into play (Burgess & Shane, 2011). Cirigliana (2011) speaks of a “deaccessioning crisis” (p. 2) resulting from the economic crisis.

In his paper, he also mentions the role of the government when museums faced critical situation in the years following 2008: the New York Board of Regents (Education Department, Cultural Education Committee) proposed an emergency amendment offering the possibility to museums to use deaccessioning's proceeds to cover debts – no other operating expenses – in order for the museum to stay open, only in case of extreme and proven necessity. The same board proposed in 2011 an amendment to the then-contemporary New York State policy: in addition to several specific conditions under which a museum could deaccession, the bill would also had prevent museums from using proceeds of deaccessioning for anything else than collection improvement. This caused a wave of discontent amongst museum directors and professionals that feared for the survival of the museums in time of economic downturn. This is quite different from the discourse of UK Museums professionals<sup>5</sup>.

Deaccessioning has thus known a key moment in the mid 2000's. Museums found themselves in a cruel dilemma where some had to choose between deaccessioning items on the one side, with all the negative consequences it can bring – withdraw of accreditation, condemnation by the public opinion –, and, on the other side, facing high operational costs very difficult, if not impossible, to cover (Cirigliana, 2011).

This situation raised questions in the public opinion and the downsides of not deaccessioning items appeared more clearly: collective redundancies, decreasing number of exhibitions, limited hours of operation, increasing entrance fees, or even the forced closure of the museum. In the USA, it made the debate a bit more open to deaccessioning as a “tool for museum survival” (Cirigliana, 2011, p. 9). In the UK, however, the practice of selling items to cover any costs other than the acquisition of new items remains highly unethical and illegal for national and royal museums (National Heritage Act, 1983).

As a result of this financial difficulties, a good number of museums have turned to the business world to look for solutions. The last years, museums have increasingly looked at what happens in this sphere to learn from their managerial practices. This is also visible in the staff museums hire: much more people than before – especially for the bigger ones – have business training. However, resorting to deaccessioning because of the willingness to behave as financially competent must be handled very carefully. While the intentions are laudable, all corporate practices are not directly applicable to the museum world. Indeed, the main object of the “museum business” are items intended to be preserved and not classical assets. Furthermore,

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<sup>5</sup> At the very least, this is different of the opinions of the museum professionals interviewed (See Section 4.2).

business practices most likely conflict with the very mission of a museum which is to preserve items and not to use them as financial objects.

#### 2.2.4. Deaccessioning as a result of obligations (health, legal)

While deaccessioning may be a free choice, there is sometimes an obligation to deaccession items, be it for health matters or for legal reasons, with one of the famous case being the art seized by the Nazis during World War II as well as other situations where the item was unfairly taken from its original place<sup>6</sup>. Range (2003) mentions the case of deaccessioning in Holocaust claim context as a particular matter that has the consequence of changing public opinion's mind regarding the ethics behind deaccessioning. While law and ethics are in favor of deaccessioning the work, this place museums in an uncomfortable situation as they do not receive any compensation for the financial lost the item might represent and costs incurred by an in-depth provenance research and other legal obligations.

This may be very tempting for the museum to use the arguments against deaccessioning in order to avoid such a lost. Organizations exist to ensure that the claimant's right to obtain reparation be respected. In Europe, the ECLA, European Commission for Looted Arts, plays the role of intermediary between museums and heirs of the work in order to ensure the best protection to the claimants. Since 2000, British museums can count on the support of the Spoliation Advisory Panel, a neutral body that gives recommendation in case of Holocaust claims. They recognize Holocaust art restitution as deaccessioning and therefore recommend it to be taken into account given the restrictions UK museums are subject to. However, the SAP has no legislative power and the final decision rests with the government.

### 2.3. Deaccessioning: a multi-faceted concept

From the debate on the practice of deaccessioning, two main schools of thought emerge, as Crivellaro (2011) points out. On the one hand, the Yale Model focuses on the financial, marketing and branding aspects of museums, which are viewed as corporate commercial organizations. The main goal of a museum is thus the financial sustainability of the institution, and deaccessioning is considered as one possible way of funding. On the other hand, defenders of the orthodox perspective argue that the major aim of a museum is to fulfill its public function. In this view, deaccessioning is an unethical behavior as it seems privileging the profit rather than enhancing the public good. This perspective is often more popular among museum officials

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<sup>6</sup> Examples of deaccessioning for those reasons will be presented in Section 4.2, based on the interviews.

than among law-bodies. Indeed, as O'Hagan (1998) points out: "many people in the museum world argue that it is not ethically right to sell works of art unless it is for the purposes of trading them in for other works of art" (p. 203).

### 2.3.1. The issue of valuation of the collections

As mentioned hereinabove, followers of the Yale model defend the idea that museums should be financially-responsible organizations. Amongst the major problems related to the non-optimal behavior of museums, Grampp (1996), O'Hare (2005), as well as other cultural economists, argue that museums do not act rationally and efficiently enough because they do not evaluate their collection.

This has two negative outcomes. First, museum officials remain unaware of the opportunity cost of preserving an item: as museums do not have any knowledge of the actual value their collection represents, they do not know either what the holding of the collection costs them. Second, this prevents visitors from seeing more artworks due to the lack of exhibition space. In the process of adopting a rational behavior regarding its collection, a museum definitely has to include deaccessioning practices. If not, it will not make an efficient use of its resources (Towse, 2010). Weil (1990) underlines two major problems when it comes to the valuation of a museum's collection: first, giving a good estimation of a painting's value is a very difficult process as it does not only depend on intrinsic characteristics of the painting but also on the aesthetic and intangible value of the piece as well as on the demand for it. Second, in the case where an important number of items of one collection would go on sale, as the offer would be bigger, a shift in the market would occur, probably resulting in a decrease of value of the total of items put on sale. He concludes that no valuation is thus a preferable choice than a flawed assessment of the collection's value.

Some museums are however assessing their collection but most of the time, this is only for insurance purposes. According to Miller (1985), the needs of insurance are the only valid reason why museums should price-tagged their collection. Sometimes, other parties such as local or national authorities also require from museums that they value their collection (Ulph, 2015). This does not mean, however, that museums will act rationally – economically speaking – as wanted by tenants of the Yale Model. On the contrary, it may raise new questions such as "If something is good enough to sell, is it not good enough to save?" (Miller, 1985, p. 292).

When asked to assess the value of their collection, museum professionals often disagree. In his paper, O'Hare (2005) presents some of the most common arguments against it, for

instance that art is priceless and that any attempt to price it will only lead to a degradation of its value. Furthermore, assessing a work of art can prove to be very difficult as each item is unique and a precise value is only assigned with certainty once the item is sold at an auction. As already underlined above, until that moment, it is hard to determine accurately its monetary value. Finally, one of the most important argument is directly linked to the core of the present thesis: museum professionals refuse to evaluate their collection in order to avoid that the collection be seen as a financial asset as this goes against the museum policy not to sale items.

Opponents to deaccessioning thus fear that if museums get a better knowledge of the value of their collection's items, there is a risk that they be tempted to sell the most valuable asset. There has been however no examples of such a practice resulting from the valuation of collection (Paterson, 2014). Finally, when asked to evaluate their collections, museums should first establish a complete inventory of their items. The costs related to such an inventory were one of the major concerns of American museums when a bill was introduced to the New York State to prohibit deaccessioning for financial purposes (Paterson, 2013).

Miller (1985) also points out another negative consequence of valuating the collection: once all a museum owns is priced, this can tarnish the image of the museum as a temple of conservation. Indeed, collection management practices would then be examined under the light of collection valuation and each acquisition and disposal could be perceived as only the result of financially-motivated strategies. This may raise a problem of trust amongst the public as well as result in high tensions between people of the same organization that do not share the same view on items.

### 2.3.2. When is deaccessioning more acceptable?

*“Collections are akin to living organisms. Collections that are not cared for, that are not actively researched, conserved, published, and exhibited become weak, and they may even die”*

(Stebbins, 1991, *The museums' collection*, p. 13-14).

Even if deaccessioning is very controversial, this is commonly accepted that the care of collection must be the utmost priority of a museum. Reviewing the literature, it appears that deaccessioning seems more acceptable under certain conditions and that an evolution is visible from the mid-1980's to the present. In his pioneer article, Miller (1985) presents the different reasons given by a museum to justify its will to deaccession an item. He classifies them in two categories, according to their acceptability. The “easiest to understand” (p. 290) include for

instance the definitive closing of the museum, the illegal character of the ownership of an item (notably for seized artworks by the Nazi regime, see e.g. DeMott, 2012), and the dangerousness of an item for health questions. Amongst the more questionable reasons for deaccessioning stand the willingness to make proceeds, the refinement of the collection, and the existence of duplicates (Miller, 1985).

Reviewing the codes provided by the ICOM, AAM, AAMD and four American museums, Stephens (2011) summarizes the most acceptable reasons for deaccessioning and arrives to quite different results from Miller's findings (See Appendix 2). He presents the following classification, from the more to the less acceptable: the inconsistency of the work with the museum's collection or mission; the existence of duplicates; the incapacity for the museum to bring appropriate care to the item. In the case the ownership of the item is legally questionable, the agreement is smaller amongst different associations and museums, the same for items which attribution is called in question. Finally, deaccessioning for acquiring 'better' items is few accepted.

The evolution from Miller (1985) to Stephens' review (2011) shows that museums have become more conscious of the importance of a coherent collection. The purpose of collection improvement through the sale of less valuable or relevant items has therefore become a much more accepted reason for deaccessioning items. The transparency of the procedure is another crucial aspect: it has been increased by the deaccessioning toolkits provided by museum associations and by the development of clear acquisition – as well as disposal – policies by museums themselves. Indeed, as Malero (1991) underlines, "mindless collecting" (p. 278) is at least as harmful as deaccessioning for the public. Deaccessioning must therefore be considered as one part of a broader collection management plan. Finally, a case-by-case treatment of the items to be deaccessioned seems the more accurate<sup>7</sup> (Crivellaro, 2011).

While museums are condemned when selling objects in case they consequently disappear from the public sphere, they are however encouraged to proceed deaccessioning when the channel of disposal is another museum or public institution that will offer a better environment for the deaccessioned work in terms of relevance for the collection and/or better conservation care. Beyond the decision to deaccession an item, the way of deaccessioning it is at least as important to determine whether deaccessioning is for the best, or not (White, 1996). The method of disposal can be sale, transfer or exchange.

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<sup>7</sup> This view is also sustained by museum professionals (See Section 4.2).

As far as the public interest is the central consideration, approval is also obtained from associations of the field (Ulf, 2015). In the same way, national museums in the United Kingdom are free to proceed to transfer of objects from one collection to another (Ulf, 2015), be it by “sale, gift or exchange” (Museums and Galleries Act, 1992, p. 9). Here again, this is a question of preservation of public access to the collection’s items. This is another story when it comes to sell, exchange or transfer a piece to any other institution than a national museum.

#### *Hypothesis 5*

5a) Museum professionals are more favorable towards deaccessioning by sale when copies exist (a1) or when the item is less coherent with the rest of the collection (a2).

5b) Museum professionals believe selling is more acceptable when the future visitability of the item is guaranteed (b1), especially when the procedure is transparent towards the public (b2).

### 2.3.3. Concerns about deaccessioning

Persistent concerns exist when it comes to deaccessioning, probably because this touches on the most fundamental aspect of a museum: its collection. As underlined by Stebbins, “the collection is what gives the museum its identity, establishes its mission, and suggests its future” (in Stebbins et al., 1991, p. 13).

Amongst the concerns of opponents to deaccessioning, a lot of matters have to do with ethical questions. This is undoubtedly the case when it comes to bequests and donations which can raise both ethical and legal questions: in contracts established for donating the artwork, donors may apply restrictions to the item they give to one museum in order to prevent it to be sold or transferred to another institution.

O’Hagan (1998) investigates more deeply the question of donors as main explanation of the disinclination of museum professionals towards deaccessioning practices, together with the more general values and beliefs of museum staff regarding the collections, often seen as sacred and untouchable. This is a position already defended by Miller (1991) when he states that decrease in gifts to museum may be due to the bad image museums give to donors by mismanaging their collection. According to him, this can also be one of the explanatory factor – together with tax incentives – of the openings of several personal museums in the US at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The ethics related to gifts are also treated by the *Museum and Art galleries Report* (Charity Commission, 2002) which mentions that the public interest must always prevail while

respecting the donor: sales of items are therefore considered inappropriate. Another perspective is given by Paterson (2013) according to which deaccessioning may be seen as a “sign of welcome change in direction” (p. 9) by the donor, in the case where the item donated would belong to a totally different category of item than the ones deaccessioned in the past.

More recently, Di Gaetano & Mazza (2014) state that deaccessioning can present two major risks for museum with respect to donations. First, when a museum deaccessions, it can be understood as being self-managed and not in need of any external support, notably from donors. Furthermore, donors may be afraid that their gifts go never exhibited and that the feeling of social prestige they might search from donating to a museum be lost in the process. The authors were able to show that deaccessioning may result in decreasing private donations, not only for deaccessioning but also for non-deaccessioning institutions. As far as public support is concerned, a decrease in public subsidies would be less harmful for non-deaccessioning museums than for the ones that deaccession items.

Besides the problem of donations, one of the most triggering question when it comes to deaccessioning is the one of public access. Strict guidelines have been set by associations and museums themselves in order to prevent the items to fall in the private domain. The *British Museum Act* of 1964, for instance, puts firm conditions to the sale, exchange and transfer of items when it is not to be picked up by another national museum: objects that can be deaccessioned must be a duplicate of another object, printed works dated not earlier than 1850 and for which photographic record exists, or item considered not coherent with the rest of the collection and of no interest for research (British Museum Act, 1964). Any proceeds earned from the sale of such items have to be dedicated to the improvement of the collection, notably by acquiring new items.

Beyond the socio-educative role the museum holds and the symbol it represents for one community to have the broadest access possible to culture, when items go of the public radar, it also has very practical consequences in terms of information (Miller, 1985). Be it for researchers, students, the broad public, when an item is sold, it becomes very difficult to get insight on it, especially if it passed to the private sphere but also when it is sold to a far-away public institution. However, this question of public access is more complex than it sounds: while the basic argument would be that no deaccessioning should be made in order to preserve best access possible, it does not hold for several reasons. The first one is the fact that, if museums could deaccession more, it would allow some items of storage rooms to go public in another place; secondly, as far as proceeds from deaccessioning are concerned, the majority of



associations of the museum field strongly condemns that proceeds be used for other purpose than new acquisitions or, more largely, the improvement of the collection.

Two questions may come from this interdiction. On the one hand, is this really coherent to invest money from deaccessioning in new acquisitions when the exhibited/stored ratio of items is so problematic? Indeed, the British Museum for instance, had in 2011 99% of its collection in storage (BBC News, 2011). And the British Museum is certainly not an isolated case (Groskopf, 2016). In 1991, Perry was already noticing that one can fairly ask opponents to deaccessioning “whether storing art rather than selling it serves the public” (in Stebbins et al., 1991, p. 32). On the other hand, one may also wonder whether this is really in the best public interest that a museum is forced to close doors because he cannot face economic downturns. Is it best for the public that the museum collection goes deaccessioned anyway after its closure? Or that a museum proceeds, carefully, ethically and transparently, to thoughtfully deaccession some items of its collection in order to pursue its mission of preserving and showing culture? As stated in White (1996), “the public cannot be served best by a policy in which one interest - the art itself - is allowed to prevail absolutely over the very important interest of providing public access to the art through the maintenance of museums as healthy institutions” (p. 1065).

Deaccessioning may in fact prove to be better for the public: sometimes, a museum is the only cultural and educational venue for a community (Tam, 2012) and, at times, it needs to deaccession items to stay afloat. In that case, again, rules regulating deaccessioning seem quite adverse to the public interest. As far as the use of proceeds is concerned, using the benefits from the sale towards the creation of more educational staff and programs seem at least as much profitable to the public as acquiring new items for the collection. In the same way, deaccessioning represents a possibility to decrease museum fees and open museums’ doors to the less well-off. When museums cannot resort to deaccessioning, rising fee may constitute the best alternative. For example, Vecco & Piazzai (2015) mention the case of the Art Institute of Chicago. Its affiliation to the AAM prevents it from deaccessioning for other purposes than enriching the collection. As a result, it was obliged to increase significantly its entrance fee in order to ensure its survival. It raised much discontent among Chicagoans knowing that the sale of less than 1% of the collection would have been enough to relieve the funding problems and allow free entrance over the very long term (Cirigliana, 2011).

The question to know what the best for the public interest really is – the “public” including employees, collaborators and present as well as future visitors (Throsby, 2003) – certainly needs further examination in the next revisions of the codes of ethics and guidelines to deaccessioning.

The public interest cannot be reduced to a small range of people: the complex matter of public interest must be considered with all due attention in order to take wise decisions. Considering the public issue in all its facets will allow to reach the best solution for the benefit of the greatest number, without creating trust issue and by keeping at the center of the reflection the need to care for collections.

Currently, even when museums sell items to public institution, if proceeds are used at other ends than the improvement of their collection, museums tend to be banned of any collaboration with museums affiliated to national associations and put their reputation at high risk. However, as stated by Fincham (2011), “it is difficult to see how the public interest [is] harmed by the sale, unless we include in a narrow definition of public interest that works of art must stay at their current institutions, a proposition that seems to conflict with the prevalence of loaned artworks and travelling exhibitions” (p. 29). What is more, selling to a private individual does not necessarily mean that the item would be gone forever from the public sphere (Tam, 2012). Indeed, many collectors are prompt to lend and share their collection with public institution and, in the end, the item could well be donated back to a museum.

Next to donations and public interest, some other potential downsides of deaccessioning raise concerns. Hereafter is an overview of the more recurring ones within the literature. First, there is the fear that the sale of items for other purpose than the collection improvement decrease even stronger the public funds for the years to come (O’Hagan, 1998). If a painting is sold and brings revenues to the museum, it might cause a decrease in the budget allocated to the museum by the public authorities (Frey & Meier, 2006).

Furthermore, while deaccessioning is often presented as a useful management tool, Srakar (2015) demonstrates that deaccessioning may lead to a non-optimal museum management due to agency costs resulting from free cash flow of deaccessioned items. The author further shows that when deaccessioning is a solution to cover operating expenses, this has several downsides in terms of managerial efficiency. First, managers will be less eager to dedicate energy and commitment for ensuring the financial sustainability of their museum. Following that, managers will put less effort in raising funds, solving punctual problems by deaccessioning rather than establishing long-term relationships with external supporters. This results in a situation where managers do not search to increase revenues that are beneficial to the museum. The excess of cash flow deriving from the allowance of deaccessioning has therefore a negative impact on non-profit museums.

Another recurring concern is the one of “mistake” or bad judgment. Indeed, once the decision to deaccession an item through a non-public channel is taken, this is forever. The same holds for the conservation of cultural heritage: once it is lost, there is no way of turning back. This means that a careful valuation of the item is needed, and that the decision to deaccession be never dictated by current – and temporary – trends. Numerous are the cases where a museum decided to dispose an item of “little value” to further realize that its value was actually far bigger than thought (Ulf, 2015).

Beyond the aforesaid concerns, a global explanation to the reluctance of museum professionals towards deaccessioning could be the organizational culture (Schein, 2010). As Merritt (2008) states: “collections planning calls for profound change in the culture of how decisions are made in museums, and therefore the power structure, and status, and everything that goes with it”. Conflicts between organizational subcultures are not uncommon, especially in institutions such as museums. In art museums, for instance, the trend until very recently was to hire people largely from the art field. Nowadays, together with the willingness to position themselves as financially competent, a lot of museums are hiring people with business and management background or with experience in private institutions (be it in or outside the cultural world). This may lead to conflict of views and interests.

As far as deaccessioning – and acquisition – procedures are concerned, decisions should be taken collectively and involve all the parties at stake in the museum as well as take into consideration the needs of future generations (Vecco, Srakar & Piazzai, 2016). The curators should therefore work hand-in-hand with collection managers, conservators, but also with the financial and educational department to gain maximum benefits from deaccessioning and be fully effective for the museum both for the present and for the future. However, in reality, this is not always simple to get all the players with different values, backgrounds, and interests work together efficiently.

#### *Hypothesis 6*

- 6a) Museum professionals with an experience in the private sphere will be more favorable towards deaccessioning.
- 6b) Museum professionals with a background in business or economics will be more favorable towards deaccessioning.

#### 2.3.4. Improvements to deaccessioning

In the Academia, this is not uncommon that scholars propose ways of improving deaccessioning. In his early paper, Miller (1985) stresses the need to have an overarching international body in charge of overlooking every deaccessioning – on a world-wide basis – so as to optimize the deaccessioning procedures and favor the sales from one public institution to another and therefore decrease the number of items that go off the public sphere. Having in place such an organization would also ensure that proper care is taken during and after the disposal of an item.

However, this idea seems quite unrealistic, especially if one thinks of the differences between Europe and USA, where principles and regulations surrounding deaccessioning are very different. And even in the case where there would be a specific focus, only on Europe for instance, others obstacles arise. Indeed, while the interest of establishing a transnational body in order to overview the different policies and practices at stake in Europe is recognized (Vecco & Piazzai, 2015), the principle of subsidiarity we mentioned earlier prevents the implementation of such an organization.

Fincham (2011), quite favorable to deaccessioning, exposes in his conclusive reflections three possible changes that would improve the process of deaccessioning, by minimizing its adverse effects and optimizing the positive points. First thing would be to lift the ban on the use of proceeds gained from deaccessioned items: it should not be limited to the purchase of new pieces, especially in time of hard financial constraints. Second, a certain period of time should be allocated to individuals and organizations to raise money in order to ensure that the item bought stay accessible to the public. As stated in White (1996), a preemption agreement already exist to ensure the priority to public institutions that gives them a couple of days to match a potential bid done by a private investor. The idea would therefore be to extend this period of time and to enlarge it to private bidders willing to exhibit the work after purchase. Following this idea, in the case where the item to be deaccessioned has a particular meaning for the country or region it comes from, extra efforts should be made to favor that it remains close-by. Finally, more transparency is needed, transparency that can better occur in a context where deaccessioning is less stigmatized and more understood: the controversies that might appear in the media and amongst the public would be lowered if the museum states clearly the reasons of deaccessioning and the future resource allocation. All of those procedures will allow to determine with more accuracy whether public interest is really at the center of the museum concerns or whether its selling behavior is unethical and, therefore, reprehensible.

This position of more flexibility towards the use of proceeds from deaccessioning is not uncommon amongst academia. In his 1997 paper, Goldstein already recommends a “more liberal use of museum deaccessions as a means of raising operating funds necessary for the care and maintenance of the museum's collection, programs, and physical plant” (Goldstein, 1997, p. 216-217). He also already points out the need for more disclosure to the public when deaccessioning an item.

### 2.3.5. Alternatives to deaccessioning

In some cases, generally the most tremendous ones, deaccessioning is the obligated result of a poor management and questionable financial strategies (Tam, 2012). Rather than arriving to this point of dilemma that deaccessioning presents, measures could be taken in order to help museums improve their management and take wise choices for their investments, be it acquisitions of items or flagship construction projects that often imply high sunk costs.

In her paper, Ulph (2015) mentions several alternatives proposed to pure deaccessioning. However, for each of the alternatives exposed, she presents the issues related to those practices, be it sale and leaseback, by which the museum could raise money in selling the item but not losing the public character of the item in requesting a lend from the buyer for a certain period of time each year. In that case, two problems might occur in particular: if the buyer resale the item to a third party, the latter is not compelled by the lease contract anymore (this could be avoided by limiting the reselling rights in the first place); if the buyer dies, the heirs may not be willing to pursue the arrangement set with the museum. This also presents logistics issues as the transport of the items is costly and may damage the work; the question of who would bear the insurance costs also remains unclear.

Another possibility lies in co-ownership: the museum sells part of an item to a private bidder (be it an individual or a company). This allows raising funds while keeping part of the property of the item. Amongst the downsides of such a solution is the one of reputation: if the co-owner got in trouble, it will undoubtedly have a knock-on effect on the museum; the problem of legacy and willingness of the heirs to pursue such a practice also exists.

When one museum wishes to acquire a costly piece at sale on the market, it sometimes finds itself in the dilemma where he has too little liquidity relative to the amount required to purchase the item. In that situation, the temptation is big to turn to deaccessioning in order to raise the necessary funds. However, other solutions exist for museums wishing to acquire a new piece for their collection. If the museum management is aware of the sale from a long time,

they can decide to save money for several years to then invest it all in a new expensive purchase; they may otherwise request monetary support from privileged sponsors. In the case where another institution buy the desired item, loans can be considered, for temporary exhibitions or on a longer time-basis. However, as the retention of an item – rather than its deaccessioning – can prevent a museum from an interesting purchase for the improvement of its collection and, therefore, for the increase of public benefit, this has an opportunity cost that has to be carefully considered (Montias, 1995).

### 3. Methods

This master thesis is based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. In this research, a QUAN+qual research design was selected (Bryman, 2012) in which the results of a survey conducted amongst UK museum professionals will be the main source of empirical data. This survey allowed to collect data on the attitude of museum professionals towards deaccessioning as well as on the deaccessioning practices in their museum. The interpretation of those data will be triangulated with the information retrieved from five semi-structured interviews conducted amongst museum professionals holding key positions within the institution. Such a quali-quantitative methods' research design is valuable as it allows the triangulation of the research results (Bryman, 2012).

In the first of the three next sections, the case selection of United Kingdom is explained. In the second section, details are provided on the content, population and response rate of the survey, as well as the methods used to analyze the quantitative data. Finally, in the third section, questions and characteristics of the qualitative interviews are reviewed.

#### 3.1. Case selection

This research looks at UK museums and museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning practices. The choice of United Kingdom is based on two reasons. First, it is the only common law country in the European Union (See Section 2.1., p. 10). In civil law countries, as already stated in the literature review, museums' collections are considered as a part of a common property, which is therefore owned by the public. Hence, this is the duty of museums to preserve this property of the public – rather than to give or sell it – and museum managers' opinions, in general, should be rather homogeneously unfavorable to deaccessioning. In contrast, in common law countries, artworks are under the responsibility of the board of trustees which is entrusted to manage the property. Hence, we should observe greater diversity in museums managers' attitudes and, statistically, more opportunities to detect effects of managers' characteristics on their attitudes.

Second, in United Kingdom, deaccessioning is a sensitive issue which has received a great deal of attention from national and local associations of the museum field. As explained in the literature review, those museum associations, such as the Museums Association, the National Museum Directors' Council or the Collections Trust, have issued numerous codes of ethics and guidelines in order to help museum deal with deaccessioning. There were also several

cases of museums that were dismissed from those associations because their code of ethics had not been respected (see for instance the recent case of the Northampton Museums Service, reported by Kendall, 2014). For those reasons, museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning should be more pronounced than in some other countries. Museum practices related to deaccessioning should also be more diverse and based on deeper reflections or on more specific regulations than in other countries. Again, this should facilitate the identification and statistical explanation of professionals' attitudes and provide richer interview data.

### 3.2. Quantitative methods

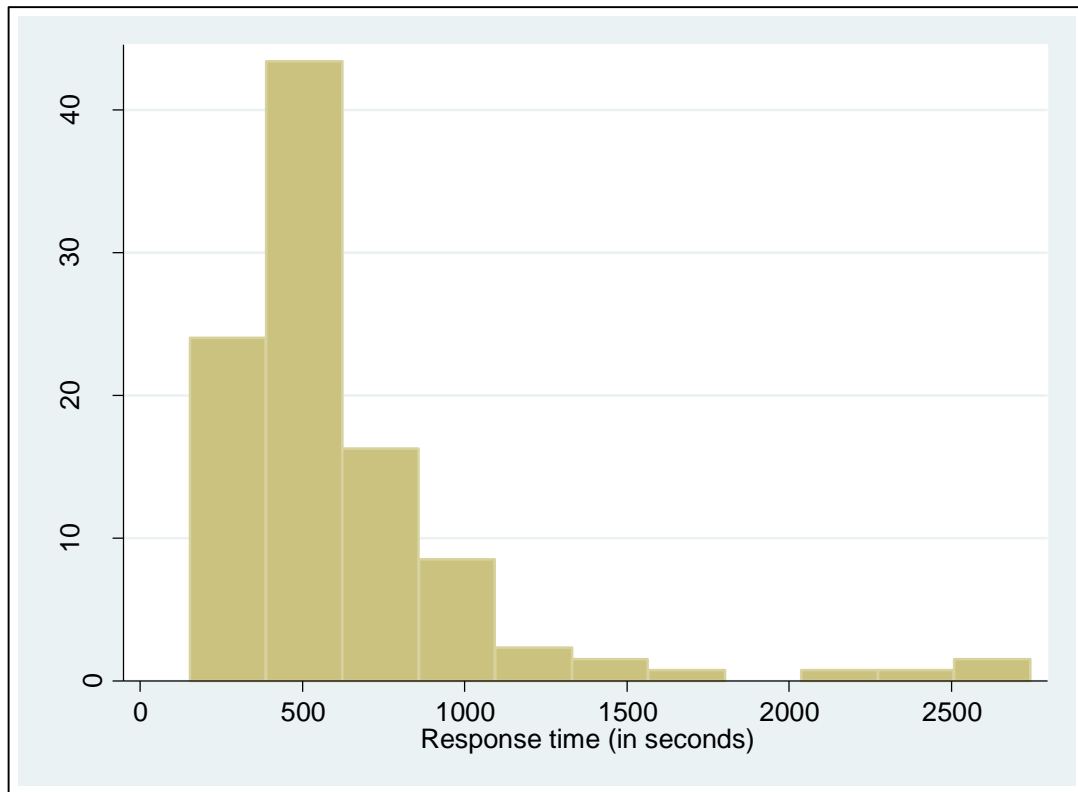
#### *Online survey amongst UK museum professionals*

An online survey has been conducted amongst UK museum professionals. This survey was administered using through the platform LimeSurvey (Software developed by Carsten Schmitz, 2012) between February, 29, 2016 and May, 30, 2016. The questionnaire was composed of five sections. A first set of introductory questions concerned the involvement of the respondent in, and his or her knowledge of, deaccessioning practices. A second section of the questionnaire was composed of questions on the museum of the respondent (e.g., establishment year, number of employees, number of items, etc.). In the third section, questions were asked on deaccessioning practices in the museum of the respondent (number of items deaccessioned, assessment process, etc.). Various attitudinal questions (mainly Likert-types items) were asked in the fourth section to get a better understanding of the respondent's attitude towards deaccessioning (acceptability of deaccessioning, necessary conditions to make deaccessioning, etc.). Finally, the fifth section was devoted to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent (gender, age, education and professional experience).

A histogram of response time is presented in Figure 3. This histogram shows that 90.69% of the respondents filled in the questionnaire in 5 to 25 minutes. (300 to 1500 seconds). The five respondents who took between 24 and 45 minutes probably left their computer or the questionnaire some time before continuing it. As I was suspicious about the reliability of the answers provided by the 7 respondents who took less than 5 minutes to fill in the questionnaire, a closer look was brought at the response pattern of each of them: as this pattern seems really close to the pattern of the other respondents, there was no reason to remove them from the sample. Overall, the average response time of the respondents is 10 minutes 34 seconds.



**Figure 3.** Average response-time to the survey



*Source: own elaboration.*

In order to submit the best survey possible, two of the first contact persons reached through emails agreed to test it in order to identify any mistake or inaccuracy in the terms used. This was made before the actual opening of the survey (Mid-February). This allowed to catch typos as well as imprecisions (layout, questions that did not appear when they should) and led to the final version of the survey to be launched at the beginning of March.

Web surveys offer at least three advantages that were particularly useful in this research context (Poynter, 2010; Sue & Ritter, 2007). First, web surveys require few resources, compared to other diffusion processes. Many good-quality programs of online survey management, such as LimeSurvey (Carsten Schmitz, 2012), are open source. The dataset resulting from the survey is encoded by the respondents themselves when filling in their questionnaire. Web surveys also allow to address time constraints. Second, web surveys are particularly convenient to deal with sensitive information because it easily allows to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of the responses. In this case, only a survey link accompanied by a short explanation of the research circulated (See Appendix 3). In addition, no question or combination of questions would allow to deduce the identity of respondents. Hence, full

anonymity could be guaranteed. Third, web-based tools are particularly appropriate to survey populations that are hard to reach and highly disseminated.

Indeed, one challenge of this survey was the structure of its population. The questionnaire was mainly dedicated to UK museum professionals involved in deaccessioning practices. Such a population is extremely difficult to target with precision. On the extreme of one continuum, survey populations are easier to target when they belong to few organizations. On the extreme of another continuum, survey populations are also easier to target when many or all members of each organization may be surveyed in an undifferentiated way. The survey of this research is on the other extreme of each of those two continuums. Deaccessioning experts are few in number, in each museums, and dispersed among all UK museums. Hence, classical invitations systems could not be used (one email address, one invitation).

Intense efforts were delivered to foster the diffusion of the survey in networks of museum curators and other professionals involved in deaccessioning, from end of February until the very beginning of May for the last reminders. Diverse strategies were implemented. First, associations were contacted by email. They have been asked to include a short presentation and link to the survey in their newsletter and/ or provide me with relevant contact details in the UK museum world. Invitations have been sent to the Museums Association, the National Museum Directors' Council (NMDC), the Contemporary Art Society, the Museums Galleries Scotland, the Museum Development North West, and the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO), sometimes using different email addresses as well as phone calls in order to increase the chances of success. Amongst the associations contacted, the NMDC included my survey in their newsletter (See Appendix 4) which is distributed to about fifty directors and chief executives of national collections and major regional museums (NMDC, 2014) and the Museum Development North West passed the word to the Collections Trust to publicize.

Second, the Museums Association membership database has been thoroughly screened in order to find contact details from UK museums' staff members. The database provides names and functions of staff members in different UK institutions (museums, galleries, and regional councils, not all of them owning collections). Sometimes, direct emails were indicated but most of the time, it only included general email addresses<sup>8</sup>. After identifying each relevant staff member, that is, from museums owning collections and with a position allowing at least a minimal knowledge of deaccessioning, the search engine Google has been used in order to find personal email addresses. This has been done for all the 11761 names listed on the Museums

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<sup>8</sup> Such as *enquiries@...* or *info@...*

Association website. When the research was successful, emails were directly sent to personal addresses. In other cases, the general email addresses have been used to contact museums. Furthermore, even when direct contact details were available, as the database was not always recently updated, this led to several *Delivery Failure*<sup>9</sup>. In those cases, Google has also been used in order to find correct email addresses. When emails were sent to general email address, follow-up had to be ensured as to make sure that the email was read and transferred to the appropriate museum members. For the museums for which no valid email address was found, contact forms on websites were used. All in all, 520 invitation emails have been sent, which were followed by one or two wave<sup>10</sup> of reminders after a two-week time frame.

Finally, at the end of each qualitative interviews, the interviewee was also asked to use his or her address book to foster the diffusion of the survey in appropriate networks of museum professional. In some cases, respondents also contacted me by email to share further comments. Some of them offered me to share the survey with relevant people in the UK museum world. For example, one of the respondent was part of the Natural Sciences Collections Association (NatSCA) and invited the other members to fill in the survey. Following this, a member of the NatSCA emailed me to offer (I surely accepted) to share the survey with the Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA), the archaeological subject specialist network for the UK which counts about 250 members. In the end, 245 invitees opened the questionnaire and filled a certain number of questions. 145 respondents filled in the entire questionnaire. As only fully completed questionnaires were used in the empirical section, this is the final sample size of the survey.

This diffusion process raises two issues. On the one hand, it would be extremely speculative to report a response rate for this survey. Only clues may be drawn from the following numbers. Indeed, the combination of the different distribution channels make it difficult to count: individual emails, the newsletter of the National Museum Directors' Council, the Collections Trust, the five interviewees as well as other respondents' own addresses books. On the other hand, this diffusion process is less precise than an invitation-based one. More specifically, one could wonder whether respondents were really museum professionals involved in deaccessioning practices.

To address this potential issue, in the introductory section of the questionnaire respondents were asked two questions about their involvement in deaccessioning and the level of their knowledge on deaccessioning. In Table 1, the results demonstrate that the sample is

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<sup>9</sup> About 5% of Delivery Failure on the total of 520 emails sent (approximately 25).

<sup>10</sup> Some of the museums asked not to receive reminders anymore.

composed of 79% of respondents involved in deaccessioning practices. Furthermore, 77% of the respondents have a “rudimentary” to “very good” knowledge of deaccessioning. Table 1 also shows that some respondents involved in deaccessioning practices judge they do not have any knowledge of deaccessioning. Assuming those respondents are too strict with themselves, we only removed the 16 respondents who reported no knowledge of deaccessioning *and* no involvement in deaccessioning practices. . In the next steps of the research, I will work on the 129 remaining respondents. This research step increases the credibility of the respondents and responses on which the results are based, fostering the validity of the findings of the thesis.

**Table 1.** *Two-way table of Knowledge of deaccessioning with Involvement in deaccessioning practices*

My knowledge of deaccessioning is	I am involved in deaccessioning practices		TOTAL
	No	Yes	
Very good	8	69	77
Good	5	0	5
Rudimentary	1	38	39
Inexistent	16	8	24
<b>TOTAL</b>	30	115	145

*Source: own elaboration.*

The descriptive statistics of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents appear in Table 2. They include the gender, age and educational level of the respondent. The sample is composed of a majority of women. There is, also, a fair number of PhD. The distribution of age is relatively normal – in the statistical sense.

**Table 2.** *Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents – Descriptive statistics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Total</b>
Gender	Male	32.03 %	41	128
	Female	67.97 %	87	
Age	21-30	12.90 %	16	124
	31-40	23.39 %	29	
	41-50	26.61 %	33	
	51-60	29.04 %	36	
	61-70	7.25 %	9	
	71-80	0.81 %	1	
Education level	Primary education	0.78 %	1	128
	Secondary education	8.59 %	11	
	University degree	68.75 %	88	
	PhD	21.88 %	28	

*Source: own elaboration.*

To analyze the results of the survey, a set of various methods of data analysis was used. The statistics of several questions will be tabulated or summarized to illustrate or counter-illustrate theoretical hypotheses presented in the previous parts of the thesis. In addition to one-way tables, two-way tables will be analyzed with measures of associations.

One key issue of this thesis is to look at the attitude of UK museum professionals towards deaccessioning. In the survey, I used a battery of questions developed in Vecco, Srakar and Piazzai (2016) that have been set to examine attitudes of Italian museum visitors. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses will be reported to compare the factorial structure of their dataset collected among Italian visitors and the factorial structure of the dataset in this research. Then, the factor scores will be used in regression analyses to test hypotheses on the characteristics of museum professionals that could explain their attitude towards deaccessioning. Factor analyses and regression analyses have been conducted with Stata (14.1).

### 3.3. Qualitative methods

#### *Interviews with UK museum professionals*

Qualitative interviews are a useful complement to reveal nuances that a survey did not especially allow to see. The interviews were semi-structured (Longhurst, 2010). This means that, consistent with a mixed-methods approach, the questions were structured but the discussion was sufficiently open to allow interviewees highlighting topics and issues that the web survey did not allow to cover properly as well as bringing nuances on specific questions. For example, while the web survey focused on sales of items, several interviewees suggested that, very often, items are also given, transferred, shared, loaned, etc. This suggests avenues for future surveys that will be discussed in my conclusions.

The interview guide (See Appendix 5) was structured in two parts. The first part was introductory and followed the suggestions provided by Arthur and Nazroo (2003). In this part, an overview of the objectives and content of the research was presented. The details about the practicalities of the interview itself were also discussed at this point (e.g., reaching an agreement on the possibility to record it). The first part of the interview guide also contained a set of introductory questions. The first of those questions were devoted to the educational background, professional experience, and role of the interviewee in his or her museum. Such “easy” topics typically help to establish a good connection with the interviewee. The objective of the last question was to know whether there is any form of deaccessioning in the museum of the interviewee.

The questionnaire contained two alternative second parts, depending on the answer of the interviewee to the last of the introductory questions. If the interviewee responded that there is some practice of deaccessioning in his or her museum, the questions of the second part were devoted to this practice, specifically. For example, six questions concerned the processes and rules followed to deaccession items; two questions were devoted to the objectives of deaccessioning (e.g., incentives to deaccession, use of the proceeds, etc.); two questions were also devoted to the opinion of the interviewee towards deaccessioning practices. In other words, the questions were formulated in such a way to operationalize the topics and concepts covered in the theoretical framework.

The other alternative second part was submitted to the interviewees when they responded that there is no deaccessioning in their museum. In this case, interviewees’ opinion on deaccessioning was scrutinized on a more theoretical basis. For example, on practices, one question was: “are you aware of any type of guidelines existing to provide insight on how to

practice deaccessioning?” On attitudes, one question was: “would you be in favor of deaccessioning for your museum?” It was expected that interviewees could answer those questions because, even if they were not concretely involved in deaccessioning practices in their own museum, they were involved in some forms of collection issues. It is on the basis of that involvement that they accepted to have an interview with me. This expectation was confirmed.

As shown in the quantitative methods section, extra efforts were made to reach people. This was also difficult to get people willing to participate in interviews, often due to schedule-constraints of museum professionals. As the selection of the sample was already made to target the most relevant people for administering the online survey – by searching the Museums Association database and focusing on the curatorial or managing staff – the selection of interviewees followed the same logic. Purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012) was used in order to get the best sample possible as to meet two objectives: first, get people to test the pilot form of the survey and, second, get more insights on particular aspects that were difficult to grasp within the close-ended questions of the online survey.

Five interviews were conducted with museum professionals: Interview 1 was conducted with the Deputy Director of an English small-size museum (local art and history); Interview 2 was conducted with the Keeper of Collections services of a Welsh large-size museum (multi-topic institution); Interview 3 was conducted with the Collections manager of a Scottish small-size museum (local art and history); Interview 4 was conducted with the Museum officer of a Welsh small-size museum (local art and history); Interview 5 was conducted with the Senior curator of an English medium-sized museum (railways). With those interviews, I have been able to collect the knowledge and opinions of five museum professionals working for small to large organizations, in three of the four constitutive countries of the United Kingdom, occupying various positions within the organizational structure of their institution. Despite the small number of interviews, this nevertheless meets the goal of purposive sampling which is to get sample members with different characteristics relevant to the research question (Bryman, 2012).

## 4. Results and findings

In this chapter, the theoretical expectations formulated in the previous parts of the thesis regarding the deaccessioning practices in UK museums and the attitudes of UK museum professionals towards deaccessioning are examined. To conduct this analysis, the results of the web survey will be triangulated with the data of the qualitative interviews. This does not apply to the factorial analysis of the attitude of UK museum professionals towards deaccessioning: this section is exclusively based on the results of the web survey.

### 4.1. Quantitative results

#### 4.1.1. Deaccessioning practices in UK museums

How does deaccessioning occur in a UK museum? In this section, deaccessioning practices in UK museums are presented and analyzed, based on the data collected through the web survey.

First, museum professionals are very careful so that the decisions to deaccession items always respect the applicable codes of ethics and laws (Stephens, 2011). Therefore, this is for example forbidden to the members of the museum to acquire the deaccessioned item. Furthermore, cautious care is taken regarding donations and bequests (reviewing the contractual terms, notably). The museum must respect all specificities stated by ethical standards and status when applicable (most of the museums are established as charitable trusts). Finally, a list of deaccessioned items is required: museums have to report on all deaccessioning decisions.

Most of the time, the proposition of deaccessioning an item comes from the curator, for the different reasons exposed all along the theoretical framework: items too damaged, duplicate, legal duty, etc. Besides from particular cases, the decision get almost always reviewed by the museum director and directly after to the board of trustees that must express their consent to the decision. As stated by Tam (2012, p. 858): “usually, the curators, the director, and the board of trustees are all involved in deciding on acquisitions and dispositions”. Depending on how often the board meets, and when the proposition of deaccessioning is made with respect to the date of next board’s meeting, the process of deaccessioning can take from a couple of weeks to one year. As Table 3 shows, the majority of items (64.34 %) are deaccessioned within a one-year time lapse, but there is a fair proportion of at least 12.53 % of processes that take over 13 months (perhaps even more if we take the ‘Don’t know’ category into account).



**Table 3.** *On average, how long does it take to deaccession one item of your museum? – Descriptive statistics*

<b>Average time of deaccessioning</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Proportion</b>	<b>Cum. proportion</b>
0-3 months	18	13.95 %	13.95 %
4-6 months	29	22.48%	36.43 %
7-12 months	36	27.91%	64.34 %
13 months – 2 years	14	10.85%	75.19 %
More than 2 years	2	1.68%	76.87 %
Don't know	30	23.26%	100.00 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	129	100.00 %	

*Source: own elaboration.*

As far as the number of items deaccessioned is concerned, at least 41.86 % of the respondents belong to a museum that deaccessioned fifteen items or less in the last five years and at least 28.69 % work in museums that deaccessioned more than sixteen items in the past five years (Table 4). However, this question may be difficult to answer when it comes to particular collection items. Indeed, when unique objects such a railway carriage<sup>11</sup> are deaccessioned, it includes many different 'items': in that case, this could bias the total number filled in by respondents. What Table 4 also shows is that a small proportion of museums does not deaccession at all. This confirms the expectations that museums, given both tensed financial times and updated regulations by associations of the field, are encouraged to deaccession items, insofar as ethical standards are followed.

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<sup>11</sup> Example retrieved from Interview 5.

**Table 4.** *How many items did your museum deaccession during the last five years? – Descriptive statistics*

# items deaccessioned last 5 years	N	Proportion	Cum. proportion
0	14	10.85 %	10.85 %
1-5	25	19.38 %	30.23 %
6-10	15	11.63 %	41.86 %
11-15	5	3.88 %	45.74 %
16-25	9	6.98 %	52.72 %
>25	28	21.71 %	74.43 %
Don't know	33	25.58 %	100 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	119	100.00 %	

*Source: own elaboration.*

The procedure of assessment of the items to be deaccessioned varies according to the museum. While in most of the cases (almost 58.13 %), the process is managed by museum staff members themselves, some external experts are sometimes called upon to contribute to the valuation, especially when items could be valuable and attribution raises questions.

**Table 5.** *Who assess the value of the items deaccessioned by your museum? – Descriptive statistics*

Who assess the value of the items	N	Proportion	Cum. proportion
Expert internal to the museum	75	58.13 %	58.13 %
Expert external to the museum	25	19.38 %	77.51 %
Auction house	8	6.20 %	83.71 %
Don't know	21	16.29 %	100.00
	129	100.00	

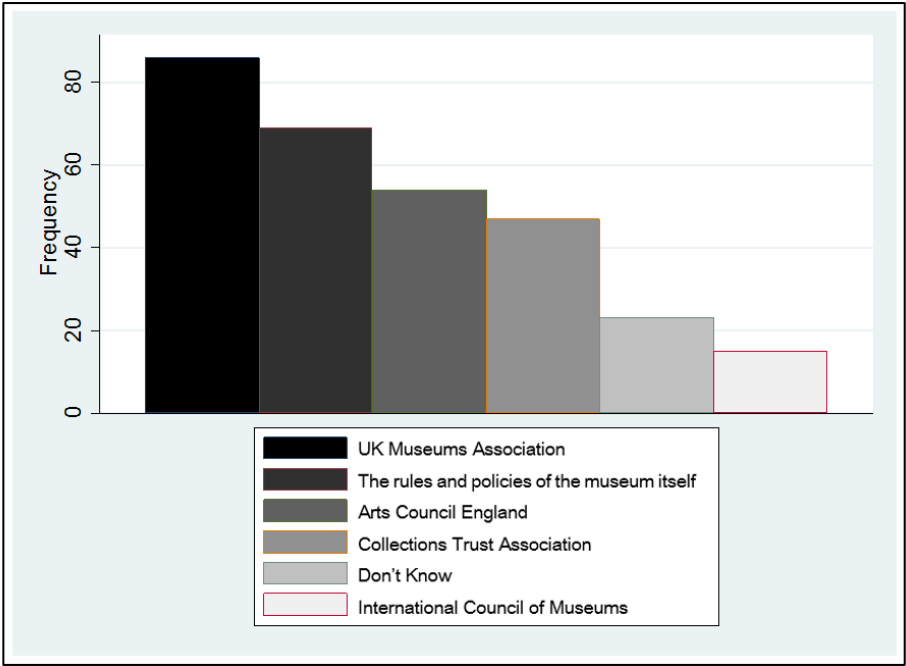
*Source: own elaboration.*

Further analyses have been made in order to determine whether the number of items deaccessioned and the way of assessing the value of the items were related. The same was done for the number of items and the genre of the museum as well as for the number of items and the time deaccessioning procedures take. Those analyses were inconclusive. All the chi-squared tests provided p-values far above 0.10 (e.g., for the relation between the number of deaccessioned items and the genre of the museum:  $\chi^2 = 4.22$ ; p-value = 0.65). Related to those results, many of the two-way tables were imbalanced, with some cells very filled whereas some

others were close to 0. To address this issue, variable transformations were realized but the chi square tests remained insignificant. Given the inconclusiveness of those analyses and the few information they provide, the tables have not been reported in the thesis itself.

In the literature review, the different codes of ethics and guidelines issued by associations of the UK museum field were presented. In the survey (Table 6), the more important ones were reported to determine which of the guidelines were actually the most used by museums. Not surprisingly, the Museums Association standards are the most commonly followed: this is not surprising since this is the first association that published guidelines specifically dedicated to deaccessioning and they are also the biggest museums association in the United Kingdom. Museums have been encouraged to develop their own acquisition and deaccessioning policy, often very much inspired by the existing ethical standards of associations. This is thus quite logical that they attract a large number of positive responses. The Arts Council England, then, as a body in charge of the Accreditation scheme, is followed by a great number of museums. Again, this is quite expected since the accreditation museums can benefit from lies into their hands. As stated in the theoretical framework, museums are very careful when it comes to deaccessioning notably because of the negative outcomes it can cause in case of non-compliance, the withdrawal of accreditation being one of the most harmful sanctions that jeopardize both the legitimacy and development of a museum.

**Table 6.** Use of codes of ethics – Bar chart



Source: own elaboration.

Please note that the total frequency is higher than the size of the sample of respondents given that many of them reported they follow more than only one code ethics. The proportion of “Don’t know” is quite low. In the “other” category were mentioned one time the code of ethics of local authorities, Museums Galleries Scotland, the National Heritage Act 1983 and rules from owners of collection.

#### 4.1.2. Attitudes of UK museum professionals towards deaccessioning: descriptive statistics

The attitude of UK museum professionals was examined through a set of 22 5-point Likert-scale items presented in Table 7. Most of them come from a study conducted by Vecco, Srakar and Piazzai (2016) among Italian museum visitors. For comparison purposes, similar variable labels have been used. Only three changes have been introduced. First, an extra item was originally formulated as follows: “that are not within the theme of the museum” (Out of theme 2). Given the repetition of the “out of theme” topic (Item 4), this item has been removed. Compared to this topic, the openness to public is a recurrent subject in discussions on deaccessioning (as the literature review shows). Hence, its repetition has been maintained (Items 8 & 9). However, compared to the original survey that looked at this topic two times in the second series of questions (“I believe selling is acceptable only if...”), the second repetition has been moved to the first series of items (“I believe the sale of items can be acceptable for items...”). Third, the last item (22) of the third series (“The proceeds from sales should be used to...”) is new.

**Table 7.** *Attitudinal items of UK museum professionals toward deaccessioning*

<p><b>A) THE SALE OF ITEMS CAN BE ACCEPTABLE FOR ITEMS:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Which originate from a different territory than that of a museum (“Provenance”);</li> <li>2) Of minor art-historical interest compared to the average for the museum (“Minor interest”);</li> <li>3) Of which copies and/or close substitutes exist, e.g. sketches or archaeological fragments (“Substitutes”);</li> <li>4) That are out of theme compared to other items in the museum (“Out of theme”);</li> <li>5) Of more recent origin, as opposed to more ancient ones (“Age of item”);</li> <li>6) That have not been exhibited by the museum for a certain period of time (“Not exhibited”);</li> <li>7) Belonging to the so-called “minor arts”, e.g. ceramics or carvings (“Lesser arts”);</li> <li>8) For which future visitability by the public is guaranteed (Open to public 2).</li> </ol> <p><b>B) I BELIEVE SELLING IS ACCEPTABLE ONLY IF:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9) The item is destined to other museums or collections open to the public (“Open to public”);</li> <li>10) The item was not a gift for the museum, e.g. a testamentary legacy (“Not a gift”);</li> <li>11) Transparency is guaranteed through public negotiations, e.g. notices and auctions (“Transparency”);</li> <li>12) There is a cap to the number of items that can be sold (“Set a limit”);</li> <li>13) The museum of destination is within the same territory as the original (“Eq territory”);</li> <li>14) The museum of destination is equally relevant as the original, e.g. for the life of the artist (“Eq relevance”);</li> </ol>
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**C) THE PROCEEDS FROM SALES SHOULD BE USED TO:**

- 15) Acquire new items that are more relevant to the collection (“Acquisitions”);
- 16) Cover building maintenance costs (“Maintenance”);
- 17) Finance building improvements (“Expansions”);
- 18) Cover restoration costs for other items (“Restorations”);
- 19) Create new services for the public, e.g. restoration areas, shuttles or areas for children (“New services”);
- 20) Lower admission fees (“Entrance fees”);
- 21) Offer new didactic activities, e.g. courses, seminars or conferences (“New education”).
- 22) Cover museum’s debts (“Cover debts”)

*Source: own elaboration.*

The descriptive statistics of those items are presented in Table 8. Those statistics reveal that, on average, museum professionals are more positive rather than negative towards deaccessioning, except when it is motivated by the use of proceeds to cover debts (mean of Cover debts = 2.20) or to create new services for the public (mean of New services = 2.33). Still on average, they do not really support more deaccessioning if the museum of destination is within the same territory (mean of Eq. territory = 2.47).

**Table 8.** *Descriptive statistics of attitudinal items towards deaccessioning*

Item	This survey <i>Museum professionals (UK)</i>		Vecco, Srakar & Piazzai (2016) <i>Museum visitors (Italy)</i>	
	Mean	Coefficient of variation	Mean	Coefficient of variation
Provenance	2.74	0.55	2.58	0.51
Minor interest	2.99	0.54	2.91	0.45
Substitutes	2.98	0.50	2.89	0.48
Out of theme	2.89	0.48	2.99	0.45
Age of item	2.79	0.54	2.46	0.52
Not exhibited	3.18	0.46	2.95	0.47
Lesser arts	2.98	0.46	2.67	0.49
Open to public 2	2.67	0.58	4.27	0.26
Open to public	2.87	0.46	4.23	0.27
Not a gift	2.74	0.55	3.41	0.40
Transparency	2.77	0.43	4.15	0.30
Set a limit	2.56	0.59	3.55	0.40
Eq territory	2.47	0.68	3.10	0.44
Eq relevance	2.59	0.58	3.42	0.37
Acquisitions	2.72	0.45	3.66	0.33

Building maintenance	3.21	0.42	3.77	0.34
Building expansions	3.22	0.43	3.73	0.33
Restorations	2.93	0.44	4.16	0.25
New services	2.33	0.47	3.19	0.41
Entrance fees	3.25	0.48	3.64	0.37
New education	3.17	0.44	3.80	0.32
Cover debts	2.20	0.46		

*Source: own elaboration.*

The descriptive statistics of this survey are also compared, in Table 8, to the descriptive statistics of the same items submitted to Italian visitors by Vecco, Srakar and Piazzai (2016). The purpose of this comparison is twofold. On the one hand, it confirms that the results of this survey “make sense” because their statistical behavior is not so drastically different than in the visitor survey that they could be questioned.

On the other hand, in general, visitors *and* professional have rather positive attitudes towards deaccessioning, but the comparison between professionals and visitors provides additional insights. First, the comparison suggests that, in general, museum professionals hold more contrasted attitudes than museum visitors about deaccessioning. Indeed, coefficients of variation are higher for museum professionals than for visitors for all except two items (not exhibited and lesser arts).

Second, on average, museum professionals have more favorable attitudes than visitors toward deaccessioning when those attitudes are motivated by item-related reasons (i.e., items of question A in Table 7, except item 8). For example, museum professional are more favorable toward deaccessioning than visitors for items that originate from a different country, when they are of minor interest or when substitutes exist. They are also more favorable to deaccessioning than visitors when they are more recent, out of theme, not exhibited or come from the minor arts. In contrast, visitors are more favorable toward deaccessioning than professionals when this attitude is motivated by the conditions of sales or by the use of sale proceeds (i.e., items of questions B and C in Table 7). For example, visitors support deaccessioning more than professionals when it is motivated by public visitability or when proceeds will be used for buildings maintenance or expansions. The transparency of processes also leads visitors to support deaccessioning more than professionals.

To conclude, professionals share with visitors a rather positive attitudes toward deaccessioning. However, professionals have more positive attitudes than visitors as far as deaccessioning is motivated by item-related reasons. In contrast, visitors have more positive attitudes than professionals as far as deaccessioning is motivated by museum-related reasons or the public visitability of the collection. All in all, the results of this survey seem quite coherent.

#### 4.1.3. Attitudes of UK museum professionals towards deaccessioning: factorial structure

In this section, I conduct factorial analyses on professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning. Again, visitors' attitudes will be used as a starting point to test a five-factor structure that has been identified in Vecco, Srakar and Piazzai (2016) with principal component analysis:

- (1) Factor 1: Attitudes related to the nature of the items to be deaccessioned;
- (2) Factor 2: Attitudes related to the public identity of the collection;
- (3) Factor 3: Attitudes related to the limits to the sales and the museum of destination;
- (4) Factor 4: Attitudes related to the collection and infrastructure of the museum;
- (5) Factor 5: Attitudes related to the sales, marketing and education.

Compared to visitors, professionals are knowledgeable about deaccessioning practices or, at the very least, involved in such practices. Hence, it could be expected that their thoughts about such practices are more elaborated and nuanced, leading to the identification of more factors. In this case, factorial analyses will also allow to model new, consistent factors of attitudes specific to professionals, which could be explained by my theoretical hypotheses in the regression analyses of the next section.

The test of the factorial structure was conducted with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA: Brown, 2015; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005). CFA was performed with maximum likelihood procedure. Starting values of the parameters were set to 1, except for the covariance parameters, which were set to 0.5. This is appropriate when working on standardized variables with positive covariance (Kolenikov, 2009). Factors scores were computed with the Bartlett method because this method provides unbiased scores (Hershberger, 2005). In general, good model fit is indicated by values of the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) lower than 0.60, values of the comparative fit index (CFI) higher than 0.90, values of the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) lower than 0.08, as well as a p-values of the chi square test higher than 0.05 (i.e., failure to reject the null hypothesis of good fit) (Brown, 2015). The results of those analyses appear in Table 9. They are disappointing: while Stata was unable to perform

goodness-of-fit tests on factors 3 and 5 (lack of degrees of freedom), the fit statistics are really bad for factor 4 or just satisfactory for factors 1 and 2: their RMSEA and SRMR are good but their CFI are just lower than 0,90. In addition, the chi square test succeeds in rejecting goodness of fit (even if this test is very sensitive to lower sample sizes: Hair et al., 2010).

**Table 9.** *Test of the factorial structure of Vecco, Srakar and Piazzai (2016) – Fit statistics of confirmatory factor analyses*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>RMSEA</b>	<b>CFI</b>	<b>SRMR</b>	<b>p-value (<math>\chi^2</math>)</b>
Factor 1	0,14	0,87	0,06	0,00
Factor 2	0,15	0,87	0,06	0,02
Factor 3				
Factor 4	0,33	0,52	0,14	0,00
Factor 5				

*Source: own elaboration.*

Based on those results, I decided to re-start the factorial analysis “from a blank page”, i.e. without any prior assumption on factorial structure of museum professionals’ attitudes. To do that, an Exploratory Factor Analysis was performed (EFA: Costello & Osborne, 2005) on all attitudinal items. Shapiro-wilk tests rejected the normality hypothesis on 8 out of the 22 items. Hence, principal axis factoring was used, since it is more appropriate than maximum likelihood methods when the normality assumption on items is violated (Fabrigar et al., 1999).

The results of EFA appear in Table 10. Three factors with eigenvalues higher than 1.0 (Kaiser criterion) can be retained. Fabrigar & Wegener (2011) suggest complementing the use of the Kaiser criterion with the observation of a screeplot. In Figure 4, such a screeplot shows that the last major drop occurs following the third eigenvalue. This confirms that the three-factor solution is the most appropriate. Together, these three factors explain 84,80% of the total variance of professionals’. Factors loadings of rotated factors appear in Table 10.

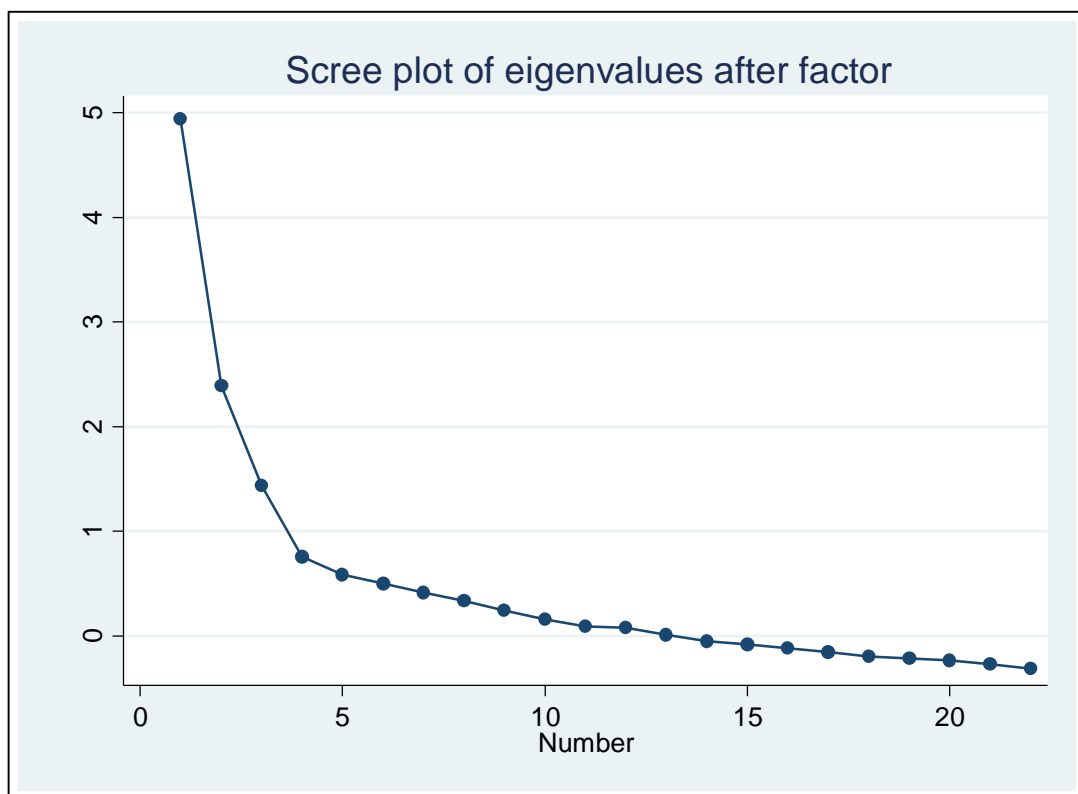


**Table 10.** *Principal axis factoring – Eigenvalues and explained variance of factors*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Eigenvalue</b>	<b>% of explained variance</b>
1	4.94	47,75 %
2	2.39	70,88 %
3	1.44	84,80 %
4	0.76	92,13 %

*Source: own elaboration.*

**Figure 4.** *Principal axis factoring – Screeplot*



*Source: own elaboration.*

**Table 11.** *Factor loadings of attitudes of UK museum professional towards deaccessioning*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Factor 1 “Item-related”</b>	<b>Factor 2 “Museum-related”</b>	<b>Factor 3 “Destination”</b>
Provenance	<b>0,70</b>	0,03	0,12
Minor interest	<b>0,69</b>	0,04	0,01
Substitutes	<b>0,71</b>	0,11	0,12
Out of theme	0,40	-0,09	0,20
Age of item	<b>0,62</b>	0,04	0,15
Not exhibited	0,34	0,17	0,10
Lesser arts	<b>0,52</b>	0,09	0,12
Open to public 2	0,42	0,08	0,20
Open to public	0,13	0,12	0,19
Not a gift	0,13	0,01	0,42
Transparency	0,22	0,05	0,23
Set a limit	0,21	0,07	0,35
Eq territory	0,14	0,16	<b>0,54</b>
Eq relevance	0,24	0,02	<b>0,66</b>
Acquisitions	0,03	-0,04	0,09
Buil. maintenance	0,09	<b>0,62</b>	0,10
Buil. expansions	-0,06	<b>0,71</b>	0,13
Restorations	-0,01	0,19	0,11
New services	0,02	<b>0,70</b>	0,03
Entrance fees	0,13	<b>0,80</b>	-0,02
New education	0,03	<b>0,62</b>	-0,09
Cover debts	0,23	0,37	0,11

*Source: own elaboration.*

A classical cut-off value to decide whether an item should or should not be included in a factor is 0.30 (Whitley & Kite, 2013, p. 345). However, when sample sizes are limited, Fabrigar et al. (1999) advise to focus on factors with higher communalities. For this reasons, I decided to focus on factor loadings higher than 0,50. In this analysis, statistically, such a limit allows to distinguish quite clearly the family of “low” loadings from the family of “high” loadings. Furthermore, conceptually, this lead to interpretable factors.

A first factor named ‘Items’ was constructed. The factor Items concerns the acceptability of deaccessioning according to the characteristics of the items at stake: is it rather recent? Is it of minor interest? Are there substitutes or copies? Does it belong to the so-called ‘minor arts’? Does it originate from a country other than that of the museum? On average, if the answer to these questions is rather ‘yes’, museum professionals will score high on the factor ‘Items’, which can be interpreted as an indication that they accept and support deaccessioning (for those specific reasons).

A second factor named ‘Museum’ was constructed on the basis of items from factor 2. The factor Museum concerns the acceptability of deaccessioning according to the use that will be made of the proceeds to the benefits of the museum: will the proceeds be used for building maintenance or building expansions? Will they be used to develop new services or education activities? Will they be used to decrease the entrance fees? If the answer to these questions is ‘yes’, museum professionals will score high on the factor ‘Museum’, which can be interpreted as an indication that they accept and support deaccessioning (for those specific reasons).

The fit statistics of the confirmatory analyses conducted on the factors Items and Museum appear in Table 12. In the two cases, the items perform far better than on the original factorial structure tested in Table 9. In particular, the CFI goes beyond the limit of 0,90. For the factor Items, the chi square test even nearly fails to reject goodness of fit, which is a hard-to-reach statistical outcome with a 129-respondents sample. The Cronbach alpha of the factor Items is 0,83 while it is 0.82 for the factor Museum, which is “good”: Cronbach alphas are “acceptable” when above 0,70, “good” above 0,80 and “excellent” above 0,90 (George & Mallery, 2003, p. 231).

**Table 12.** *Factors extracted in this research – Fit statistics of confirmatory factor analyses*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>RMSEA</b>	<b>CFI</b>	<b>SRMR</b>	<b>p-value (<math>\chi^2</math>)</b>
Items	0,10	0,97	0,04	0,04
Museum	0,14	0,93	0,05	0,01

*Source: own elaboration.*

The summary statistics of factors Items and Museum appear in Table 13 while the kernel estimation of their frequency distribution appear in Figure 5. The distributions of the two factors are relatively similar and statistically close to normality, even if this is rejected by Shapiro-Wilk tests. Compared to supportive professional, there are fewer museum professionals who are

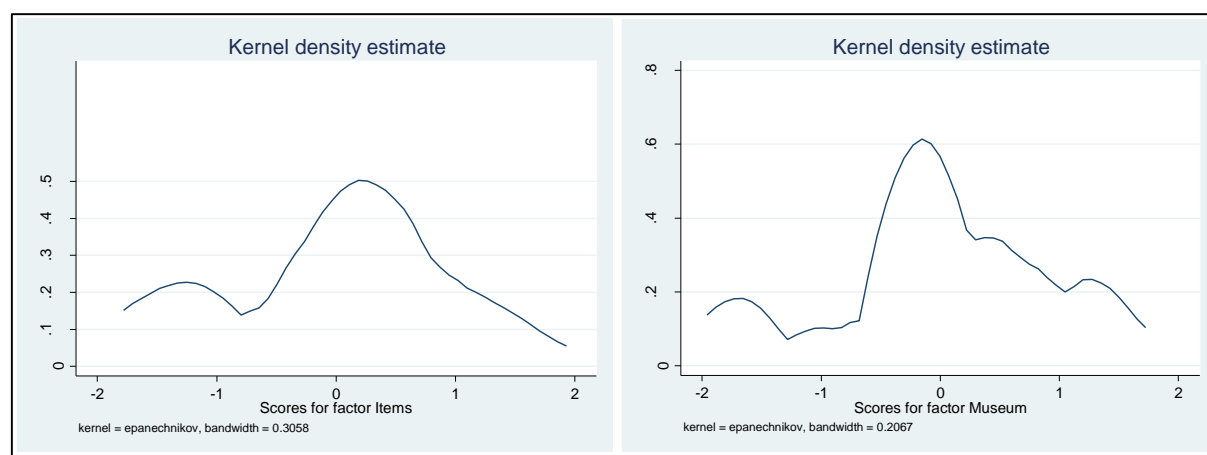
opposed to deaccessioning but, in this case, they are most often more extremely opposed to deaccessioning. Those who are positive towards deaccessioning are more normally distributed between neutrality and strong support. The correlation between the two factors is not inexistent, but insignificant ( $\text{corr.}=0.16$ ;  $\text{p-value}=0.007$ ). This means that, on average, museum professionals who are positive towards deaccessioning for item-related reasons slightly tend to be also rather positive for museum-related reasons. Statistically speaking, however, it is not especially the case.

**Table 13.** *Factor scores of ‘Items’ and ‘Museum’ – Summary statistics*

Factor	N	Mean	Std deviation	Min	Max
Items	129	0,00	0,89	-1,47	1,62
Museum	129	0,00	0,90	-1,75	1,51

*Source: own elaboration.*

**Figure 5.** *Factor scores of ‘Items’ and ‘Museum’ – Kernel estimation of the frequency distribution*



*Source: own elaboration.*

Based on the eigenvalues in Table 10 and the factors loadings in Table 11, a third, two-item factor named “Destination” could be distinguished. Is the museum of destination within the same territory as the original? Is the museum of destination equally relevant as the original? On average, if the answer to these questions is rather ‘yes’, museum professionals will score high on the factor ‘Destination’, which can be interpreted as an indication that they accept and support deaccessioning (for those specific reasons). However, this factor does not only explain

fewer variance of the data than two previous ones: conceptually, it does not related to my theoretical hypotheses neither. Hence, this factor will not be used in subsequent analyses.

To conclude, what have we learned from the comparison between these results and the results of Vecco, Srakar and Piazzai (2016)? First, museum professionals have more favorable attitudes than visitors toward deaccessioning when those attitudes are motivated by item-related reasons. In contrast, visitors are more favorable toward deaccessioning than professionals when this attitude is motivated by the conditions of sales or by the use of sale proceeds.

Second, contrary to my expectation, professionals' attitudes seem less complex than visitors' attitudes. Two main factors are sufficient to account for 70.88% of the variance of professionals' attitudes whereas five factors have been identified amongst Italian visitors (Vecco, Srakar & Piazzai, 2016, p. 10). This suggests that an extended involvement in discussions related to deaccessioning does not lead to more elaborated thoughts. Rather, probably as a result of social interactions between professionals rather supportive of deaccessioning and professionals rather opposed to deaccessioning, their respective lines of reasoning have become articulated according to a simpler schema. More specifically, professionals' attitudes are organized around two main dimensions. One factor brings together a set of attitudes related to the characteristics of the items whereas the other factor brings together all reasons related to the use that will be made of the proceeds to the benefits of the museum. To shorten even more, some museum professionals look at items and collection in an 'artistic' perspective whereas the others think in business terms, which confirms the content of the literature review pretty much. This also suggests that the patrimonial/business tension does not only oppose museum professionals to visitors, but also two groups of people amongst professionals (as far as deaccessioning is concerned).

This being said, it should be noted that Vecco, Srakar and Piazzai (2016) relied on principal component analysis whereas principal axis factoring was used in the present research for two reasons. First, Vecco, Srakar and Piazzai (2016) used a 310-repondent sample whereas this research is based on a 129-respondent sample. Principal component analysis is a large-sample method whereas the results principal axis factoring are less subject to variations in smaller-sample contexts (Suhr, 2005). Second, principal component analysis a technique that aims to reduce the number of variables used to measure a concept into a fewer number of components which account for most of the variance of the observed variables. In contrast, principal axis factoring aims to find the latent constructs accounting for common variance in a set of items without imposing any structure to those constructs (Suhr, 2005; Brown, 2015). This

is more appropriate to find internally consistent attitudinal constructs that can be explained in regression analyses. Finally, the factorial analyses were repeated using PCA, which led to the identification of six components. The factorial structure of those components did not correspond to Vecco, Srakar and Piazzai (2016)'s components at all. In addition, the factor loadings of the items did not exceed 0.30, which is to argue that each component measures one concept. For those reasons, principal axis factoring was used rather than principal components analysis. However, this change can explain why fewer factors were identified among professionals than among visitors.

Finally, the survey included a new item – whether deaccessioning proceeds should be used to cover debts. This item has a statistical behavior that differs very much from the other attitudinal items. Its mean is much smaller than the mean of every other item. Mean-comparison t-tests are significant when this mean is compared to all other means. In addition, this item could not be related to the other items, in factor analyses. All in all, on average, this means that museum professionals think that financial incentives (i.e. covering debts) are really bad incentives to motivate deaccessioning and that this is true even if they see good item-related or museum-related reasons to support deaccessioning practices.

#### 4.1.4. Attitudes of UK museum professionals towards deaccessioning: regression analyses

In this section, my theoretical hypotheses to account for UK museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning are examined with regression analyses. The two factors 'Items' and 'Museum' identified in the previous section are used as dependent variables of the regression analyses.

In the theoretical chapter of this thesis, several hypotheses were formulated to account for variations in museum professionals' attitudes. Hypothesis 3 suggests that museum founded more recently will deaccession less than older institutions. The survey included a question on the establishment year of the respondent's museum that was used to operationalize this independent variable.

Hypotheses 2 and 6 suggests that museum professionals with a background and experience in the private sector will be more sensitive to the advantages of deaccessioning and then supportive of this practice. To operationalize a background and experience in the private sector, three indicators/questions of the survey were used. First, a question on the educational background of the respondents was used to isolate the respondents who have a background that should have more spontaneously led them to work in the private sector: management,

marketing, business administration, finance, accountability, computer science, ICT, mathematics, statistics, natural and exact sciences<sup>12</sup>. More generally, those disciplines provide a sensibility to business and “numbers”. Second, a question on the professional experience of respondents was used to isolate those who worked in the private sector (versus public sector) before working in their current museum. Third, a question on the ownership of the museum allows to distinguish the respondents who work in the public-owned museum from those who work in the private-owned or hybrid museum.

Hypothesis 1 concerns professionals’ view regarding deaccessioning regulations: in case they have a clear view of those regulations, they should also be more aware of the negative consequences when non-complying to the existing rules and ethical standards (accreditation loss, status loss, etc.). As a result, they should be less favorable to deaccessioning than respondents for which guidelines are more unclear. The survey included a Likert-type question on the clarity of the UK regulations related to deaccessioning (in which ‘agree’ meant ‘clear’ whereas ‘disagree’ meant ‘unclear’). This question was used to operationalize the subjective view of museum professionals on deaccessioning regulations.

The descriptive statistics of the independent variables appear in Table 14 and the correlation matrix in Table 15. There is a predominance of “public-oriented” backgrounds and experiences, among respondents. However, for education, experience and ownership, the private sector is also well represented in each case (at least 24.81%). Post-1900 museum are more represented, in the sample, but there is a fair proportion (37.07%) of pre-1900 museums too. Most respondents find deaccessioning regulations rather unclear to rather clear, with a majority of them opting for ‘rather clear’. Few respondents think that regulations are very clear or very unclear. Finally, it can be noticed that there are few correlations among independent variables, except between the professional experience respondents and the establishment year of their museum, on the one hand, and the ownership of respondents’ museum, on the other hand. The respondents with a professional experience in the private sector tend to work in private-owned museums. In addition, younger museum tend to be private-owned.

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<sup>12</sup> In the second group, respondents have an education background in art practice, art history, history, religious studies, philosophy, literature, languages, social and political sciences, psychology, journalism, communication, public relations, law, education sciences, pedagogy or teaching or “other”.

**Table 14.** *Independent variables of the regression analyses – Descriptive statistics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>
Education background	Public-like	75.19 %	97
	Private-like	24.81 %	32
Professional experience	Public sector	68.22 %	88
	Private sector	31.78 %	41
Ownership of the museum	Public	61.24 %	79
	Private or hybrid	38.76 %	50
Establishment year of the museum	<1800	1.60 %	2
	1801-1820	2.40 %	3
	1821-1840	8.00 %	10
	1841-1860	4.80 %	6
	1861-1880	5.60 %	7
	1881-1900	15.20 %	19
	1901-1920	7.20 %	9
	1921-1940	10.40 %	13
	1941-1960	4.00 %	5
	1961-1980	20.00 %	25
	1981-2000	17.60 %	22
Subjective view on the Clarity of regulation	Very unclear	2.533 %	3
	Rather unclear	11.63 %	15
	Nor clear, nor unclear	17.05 %	22
	Rather clear	57.36 %	74
	Very clear	11.63 %	15

*Source: own elaboration.*



**Table 15.** *Independent variables of the regression analyses – Correlation matrix*

	<b>Museum ownership</b>	<b>Clarity of regulations</b>	<b>Educational Background</b>	<b>Establ. year of the museum</b>	<b>Professional experience</b>
<b>Own.</b>	1.00				
<b>Clar.</b>	-0.04	1.00			
<b>Educ.</b>	0.10	-0.03	1.00		
<b>Estab.</b>	0.21*	-0.11	-0.04	1.00	
<b>Prof.</b>	0.21*	-0.10	0.03	0.09	1.00

*Source: own elaboration.*

The factor scores were analyzed with linear regression models (Fox, 2008; Kohler & Kreuter, 2005) that appear in Table 16. First of all, I examine whether regression assumptions were respected or violated. In the models, the residuals are not heteroscedastic (p-value of all Cook-Weisberg test  $> 0.10$ : Cook & Weisberg, 1983), but the distribution of studentized residuals is not perfectly normal (p-value of Shapiro-Wilk tests  $< 0.0001$ ). Hence, robust standard errors were used. Despite a significant correlation between some independent variables (Establishment of the museum and Ownership of the museum), variance inflation factors are never higher than 1.28, which is very far from the classical cut-off value of 10 (Hair et al., 2010) or even from the stricter norm of 4 (Pan & Jackson, 2008). Hence, there is no problem of collinearity in the models.

Then, I look at the average quality of individual predictions by the models. On the one hand, the studentized residual of a prediction indicates how far the predicted value of the dependent variable is from the observed value of the dependent variable. When this value falls outside the interval of  $[-2;+2]$ , it indicates that the model fails to predict the real value of the dependent variable too much. There should even be more concerns for studentized residuals falling outside  $[-2.5;+2.5]$  or  $[-3.00;+3.00]$  (Chen et al., 2001). In this research, there is no studentized residual falling outside the  $[-2;+2]$  interval, indicating few failures of the models to predict individual scores of the factor Items.

On the other hand, there should be concerns about models in which a few number of observations exert a too strong influence on the parameters, compared to the majority of other observations. Such an influence or “leverage” is measured with the Cook distance, a statistic that should not be higher than 1 or even not higher than  $4/n$ , where  $n$  is the size of the sample (in fact, the Cook distance combines an assessment of the leverage and residual of the observation). In this research the strictest cut-off value is equal to  $4/129 = 0.03$ . In my models, the maximum number of observations with a cook distance higher than 0.03 is 9 (6.98%) in Model 1: for those observations, the cook distance is comprised between 0.04 and 0.06, i.e. very far from the classical cut-off value of 1. In the other models the number of observations with a too high cook distance is lower and their cook distance is not higher than 0.06. I conclude that there is no leverage problem in my models.

For each factor, first of all, the effect of covariates is examined (Model 1) and compared to the null model (Model 0). Then I look at the effect of the establishment year of museums (Model 2), the background and professional experience of the respondents (in private-sector versus public-sector organizations: Model 3), as well as their perceptions of the clarity of regulations on deaccessioning (Model 4). Finally, a ‘best’ model is assessed (Model 5).

To interpret the overall efficacy of each model, several fit statistics are used (Fox, 2008; Kohler & Kreuter, 2005). First of all, the F statistic (and its significance test) allows to determine whether, in a model, the set of independent variables that are introduced is “statistically useful”, compared to a model that does not use such set of variables. The F statistic is particularly sensitive to lower sample sizes, but there are other fit statistics that allow to assess model qualities in such context. For example, the coefficient of determination (noted  $R^2$ ) is defined as the proportion of the total variation of the dependent variable explained by the model.  $R^2$  is always comprised between 0 and 1, with 0 meaning that the model does not allow to explain any variation of the dependent variable and 1 meaning that the model explains the total variance. The adjusted  $R^2$  is a conservative measure of  $R^2$  that compensates for lower sample sizes. Finally, two fit statistics allow to compare different models with each other. On the one hand, the Likelihood Ratio Test (LRT) compares the likelihood function of two models, i.e. their respective probability that the sample data will be observed, given the parameter estimates. The likelihood ratio compares good and less good models and its significance test allows to decide whether a model is really (i.e., statistically) better than another one (Neyman & Pearson, 1933). On the other hand, the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) is based on the same idea, but on the ground that science is made to simplify complexity, the BIC also penalizes the models

according to the number of parameters that they include to attain such a level of likelihood. Better models have lower BIC indices (Schwarz, 1978).

To interpret the effect of specific independent variables, two measures are used. First, classical significance tests (t tests) will be used. Basically, t tests relate the value of coefficient with the value of standard errors. When the range of possible coefficient values inferred from those estimates is sufficiently far from 0, the effect of the variable is “significant”. The significance increases when the range of possible values is farther from 0. However, like F tests for models, t tests for variables are sensitive to lower sample sizes. Another interesting perspective is to look at the value of coefficients. When they are standardized (like here), a common rule (Cohen, 1988) allows to determine whether the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable has a ‘small’ size (standard coefficients around 0.10), a ‘medium’ size (standard coefficient around 0.30) or a ‘large’ size (standard coefficients around 0.50). These values are conventional: they originally result from an arbitrary choice but are widely used nowadays as common research standards (e.g., Hox, 2002). According to Cohen (1988), medium-size effects are of a magnitude that would be perceptible to the naked eye of a reasonably sensitive observer, small-size effects are noticeably smaller than medium but not that small as to be trivial, and large-size effects mark the practical upper limit of predictive effectiveness.

To sum up, I adopt a “conservative” attitude justified by the innovative nature of the concepts and hypotheses used and tested in this research. This means that I rely on prudent statistical methods (adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, robust standard errors and a set of various, complementary fit statistics). One consequence of such a conservatism is to decrease my chances to detect significant effects. Another consequence is to give much more confidence in such effects when they have been detected.

**Table 16.** *Regression models for the factor Items*

<b>DEPENDENT VARIABLE</b> <b>Attitude towards deaccessioning</b> <b>(for item-related purposes)</b>	Model 1 Only covariates		Model 2 Establishment year		Model 3 Private/public		Model 4 Clarity of regulations		Model 5 Best model	
	Standard coefficient	Robust S.E.	Standard coefficient	Robust S.E.	Standard coefficient	Robust S.E.	Standard coefficient	Robust S.E.	Standard coefficient	Robust S.E.
Establishment year			0.07	0.08						
Exp. in priv. (vs pub.) sector					0.18*	0.08			0.18*	0.08
Priv./hyb. (vs pub.) ownership					0.17*	0.08			0.16*	0.08
Educ. back. priv. (vs pub.)					0.04	0.07				
Clarity of regulations							-0.18 <sup>+</sup>	0.09	-0.16 <sup>+</sup>	0.09
<b>COVARIATES</b>										
Gender	0.00	0.09	0.00	0.09	0.14	0.09	0.00	0.09	0.11	0.09
Age	0.02	0.09	0.04	0.09	0.06	0.09	0.05	0.09		
Educational level	0.14	0.09	0.14	0.09	0.10	0.09	0.10	0.09		
<b>CONSTANT TERM</b>	-0.00	0.09	-0.01	0.09	-0.12	0.09	0.02	0.09	-0.09	0.09
<b>FIT STATISTICS</b>										
Number of observations	129		129		129		129		129	
F statistic	0.77		0.77		2.41*		1.49		3.99**	
R-squared (adjusted)	0.00		0.00		0.06		0.02		0.10	
BIC	382.16		386.20		384.63		383.32		373.76	
Likeli. ratio chi <sup>2</sup> (null model)	2.36 (M0)		0.82 (M1)		12.11** (M1)		3.69 <sup>+</sup> (M1)		15.62** (M0)	

Standard coefficients are computed with the OLS regression method. Standard errors are robust. \*\*\* p < 0.001 \*\* p < 0.01 \* p < 0.05 <sup>+</sup> p < 0.1.

*Source: own elaboration.*

The effect of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents on their attitude towards deaccessioning (for item-related purposes) is examined in Model 1 of Table 16. As indicated by significance tests as well as the coefficients of the variables, but also the fit statistics of the model itself, socio-demographic characteristics do not exert a key influence on this attitude towards deaccessioning. The effect of the establishment year of the respondent's museum on his or her attitude towards deaccessioning is examined in Model 2. Again, the coefficients, t tests and model statistics are not significant. The BIC increase suggests that the introduction of this variable is counter-productive. Compared to Model 1, the LRT test confirms that this models is not significantly better.

The effect of respondents' background and experience in private-sector organizations (versus public-sector organizations) is scrutinized in Model 3. The F test of this model is significant and the increase of  $R^2$  is noticeable (0.06). In addition, the LRT shows that those variables are significantly useful, compared to a model with only the covariates. In fact, these results are mainly related to the effect of the professional experience of respondents as well as the ownership of their museum (rather than their education background). In other words, when museum professionals have had an experience in the private sector and/or currently work in a private-sector museum, they are significantly more inclined to support deaccessioning practices than when their past experience was mainly in the public sector and/or when they are working in a public-sector museum. Those effect have a small-to-medium size.

Finally, in Model 4, the effect of respondents' perceptions on the clarity of regulations is examined. The effect of this variable is slightly significant: when respondents think that regulations on deaccessioning are rather clear, they tend to be less supportive of this practice. The size of this effect is between small and medium. However, it is not sufficient to make the F statistic significant. The LRT test suggest that the introduction of this variable significantly improves our prediction of respondents' attitudes but, quite paradoxically, the slight BIC increase suggests that this improvement is not completely worth the introduction of a new variable.

As several variables demonstrate some effect on the attitude of museum professionals towards deaccessioning (for item-related purpose), a next step of the analysis involves the search for a "best" model, i.e. a model that explains as much variation of the dependent variable with the lowest possible number of independent variables. Such search is primarily guided by the willingness to find the lowest BIC index – indicating a model predicting the dependent variable the best with the fewest number of variables (Fox, 2008). Automated stepwise

procedures do exist, in statistical programs such as Stata, but I preferred a manual process offering more suppleness. The best set of explanatory variables for museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning appears in Model 5. The F test of this model is clearly significant. It explains a fair proportion of the variation of the dependent variable and, despite the sample size, even the adjusted  $R^2$  equals 0.10.

The best model includes the effects of the past professional experience of respondents, the ownership of their current museum and their view on the clarity of deaccessioning regulations. Interestingly, the model must also include the gender of respondents for this set of three variables to show its full efficacy. This is probably related to the high correlations between gender and two independent variables: the past professional experience of respondents (-0.39) and the ownership of their current museum (-0.20). In other words, when respondents are women, they have much less chance to have a past professional experience in the private sector and much less chances to work in the private-sector museum. This model also reveals a positive (but insignificant) effect of being a woman on attitudes towards deaccessioning. In other words, male respondents tend to be less favorable whereas respondents working in the private sector tend to be more favorable to deaccessioning. Introducing gender helps the model understanding why this last effect is less important than could be, because male respondents are more numerous than female respondents in private-sector organizations.

The effect of the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, as well as the independent variables, on their attitude towards deaccessioning for museum-related purposes was also examined. None of the models, however had statistically interesting fit indices. Not only their F test is insignificant, but the coefficient of variation was weak or even null, when adjusted. Despite small-size effects suggested by some of the estimated coefficients, they did not allow to fit models that showed significance or lower BIC indices than the null model. For these reasons, I do not provide the tables that related to this analysis.

## 4.2. Qualitative results

In order to get complementary insights into the complex issue of deaccessioning, five qualitative interviews were conducted with museum professionals. This allowed to get a deeper understanding on some particular aspects of deaccessioning practices, on the one hand, as well as to grasp with more nuances the opinion of museum professionals towards deaccessioning. The findings resulting from those interviews are presented in the two following sections.

### 4.2.1. Deaccessioning practices in UK museums

Interviewees were first asked a range of questions concerning the deaccessioning practices in their museum. Sometimes, they also answered to those questions from a national point of view, providing information on the deaccessioning procedures at stake in England, Scotland and Wales respectively. The present section is separated in main themes such as the deaccessioning process, the use – if there are any – of proceeds, and the codes and guidelines followed by the institution.

Deaccessioning practices have been described as very limited and restricted by the interviewees. Amongst the most common reasons to deaccession stand the state of deterioration, storage issues, and health and safety concerns related to the items. Sometimes, transfer also occurs in order to place the item in a more relevant institution in terms of collections. Health and safety issues related to items are not rare as the following examples demonstrate: one of the interviewee states that they had to deaccession “a large collection of material which was from botanical section [and] could be dragged up as drug. We transferred those to the National Botanic Garden in Scotland. If we had kept them, we would have need to get license to hold them so it was more efficient to offer them somewhere else” (Interview 2). At times, transferring the items is not an option and they have to be destroyed. This was the case with a collection of taxidermy specimens poisoned by arsenic (Interview 3) and historic chemistry collections (Interview 5).

Only one of the five interviewees stated that no deaccessioning at all had been ever practiced in his museum. He explained it by two different things: the fact that the collection be quite recent and, therefore, had not amassed a lot of pieces through time; and the fact that a good follow-up of the stored items is ensured: “because the collection is relatively new, the collection is all well provenanced and [...] the collecting policy has been used quite effectively”. Furthermore, “the collections [are] assessed every year or so and everything that is in vital need of conservation we will send them for conserving” (Interview 4).

Those two characteristics ensure the museum not having to cope with storage concerns or deterioration which are amongst the most common reasons behind deaccessioning. However, those concerns also depend on the type of museums at stake. To deaccession a collection of coins, for instance, would be “pointless” in order to free up space in storage (Interview 3); on the contrary, for industrial collections, there might be a “great willingness to do it at least because of the size of the collection, and issues like storage problems” (Interview 5). Furthermore, the type of museums can explain that the institution put extra efforts in setting up a solid deaccessioning policy: “the scale of acquisition in the years since the museum was founded and the realization that we cannot keep everything” (Interview 5) is particularly relevant for industrial collections which are composed of bulky items.

As far as the deaccessioning process is concerned, it experiences a few variations amongst the museums. Often, the proposition comes directly from a curator which makes his case and exposes the reasons why a particular item should not be retained. The director then has to agree and pass it to the board for ratification. The decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and the process (duration, stages) depends on the type of items and the reasons behind its deaccessioning. Furthermore, one common step in the deaccessioning procedures is to publish a notice in the *Museums Journal* in order to inform other accredited museums that could be interested in taking over the deaccessioned item. In total, the process can take from a couple of weeks to about one year, depending on the object to be deaccessioned, the reasons for its deaccessioning, and the regularity of the board’s meetings.

When transfer is possible – i.e. when the object is not too deteriorated – it will generally go to another accredited museum. If no accredited museum is interested, then the call will be widened to non-accredited museums, starting from local ones. As stated by one of the interviewees, “It doesn’t have to be, but we would prefer it to go to another accredited museum because we would know the status of that museum and we also prefer to go somewhere where we know the public access is good” (Interview 5). And another interviewee to add: “you never ever go to a private individual unless you’ve got to the point that you had no other solution than to sell it” (Interview 3).

The preferred channel for deaccessioned items is therefore clearly museums benefiting from the accreditation of the Arts Council of England. But not all the items are appealing: “sometimes, one interviewee said, it can be quite hard to get rid of, because you find that nobody particularly wants them. You know it’s like obscure things that we should never have had in the first place” (Interview 5). This touches on one of the factors presented in the literature to



explain why museums resort to deaccessioning: the accumulation of items that were not always well looked upon when they were donated or bequeathed to, or even purchased by the museum. “In the 70’s but particularly in the 1980’s, one interviewee said, a lot of objects and things were coming to the museum pretty quick [...] and we’re probably still dealing with the 1970’s collecting practice even now in terms of recognizing duplications, having a catalogue of our big archives collection... so that’s still ongoing” (Interview 5).

Two situations might occur when transferring an item to another museum. First, it can be an item that has never been accessioned but donated or bequeathed to a museum for it to find the most coherent place possible to be exhibited. Second, an item can be properly deaccessioned to increase the coherence of the collection of the sender museum and find a more relevant place for the item to be exhibited and properly taken care of. This is the case with the botanic collection deaccessioned mentioned hereinabove or with the case of a museum that was given a number of works that were not coherent with the geographical radius taken over by the museum: “they were not relevant for our collection because they are not Cornish: there was nothing Cornish about them” (Interview 1).

When it comes to the process of deaccessioning items, often discretion is required. Indeed, “the public always sees the wrong idea when you’re doing something, one interviewee said. So it had to be done in secret in that sense [even if] the specimens had to be destroyed” (Interview 3). Another one added: “[deaccessioning] is a controversial issue and they are very much under the public eye about why we dispose of that particular collection”. He further mentioned a current controversy that takes place concerning the transfer of a collection: “that is not as if it being sold off or shipped over-seas, nothing like that. It’s being transferred in another museum in the UK, in London. But that has caused a lot of controversy if nothing else”. (Interview 5). Transparency is therefore not always the easiest option for museums as they have to cope with major public scrutiny.

To help them through the process, museums rely on their own policies but also refer to the Museums Association’s guidelines, as well as regional and national bodies such as the Museums Archives and Libraries Division (MALD) of the Welsh Government and the Arts Council of England; and finally, for national museums, to the National Heritage Act that requires museums to behave in a certain way when it comes to deaccessioning decisions and procedures.

On the four museums that practice deaccessioning in the sample, four have had proceeds resulting from the sale of items. However, nuances apply. For instance, the sale of items is not

always synonym with deaccessioning. One of the interviewee stated that they have never had proceeds resulting from a deaccessioned item. However, “sometimes, we will get money from the sale of unaccessioned items”, one interviewee said. “Often we have things bequeathed to us, left in their will and in the last couple of years we had three or four low-value paintings [that were sold and generated proceeds]” (Interview 1). Unaccessioned items are not recorded in the accession books of the museum: this temporary situation allows museums receiving items to judge of their coherence with the existing collection and, when appropriate, pass them on to more relevant institutions.

Furthermore, when it comes to the use of proceeds, interviewees do not agree with each other. When three of the four interviewees working for deaccessioning museums stated that all potential proceeds needed to be invested in the acquisition’s funds, this is not always as limited. Indeed, “there is one example, said one interviewee, where proceeds from the sale were going to be injected in the storage for the remaining items and that is what we did so that is a positive outcome. Again, some people would be like ‘Oh my god, you can’t possibly do that’. But I think there can be limited cases where actually it can be a very positive thing according to how you handle it, you manage it” (Interview 2).

#### 4.2.2. Attitudes of UK museum professionals towards deaccessioning

The qualitative interviews also allowed to bring another perspective on the opinions of museum professionals towards deaccessioning. Depending on the interviewee, the attitude is quite different: it ranges from “totally against it” (Interview 3) to deaccessioning seen as “a critical part [...] of an active collection management policy” (Interview 2).

The concerns of opponents to deaccessioning are multiple. First, there is the fear of losing accreditation if rules are not properly respected. The Arts Council England’s accreditation opens doors for different sorts of support: you can apply for “grants for projects and for trainings” and it allows smaller, regional institutions to “approach regional institutions from all over Britain to loan works” and, therefore, “to show works that would never be shown [...] otherwise” (Interview 4). Second, the question of trust towards the public and towards donors, came out several times, one interviewee stating that it would be “totally unethical” to give away items that have been once donated to the institution (Interview 4). “Whatever you do, one interviewee said, never destroy the trust of the public because the museum relies on that trust in order to happen” (Interview 2).

Amongst the more favorable to deaccessioning, this is a much nuanced position that comes up with interrogations about the best way to act for the museum's and public's benefit: "I don't really agree with selling items, one interviewee said. But you can understand both sides of the arguments because if you've got a painting that is worth a million pounds but your building is falling apart around it, then you can't look after that painting in this building but if you sell the painting to renovate the building then what the people will come to see: a new building that no longer has a painting in it" (Interview 1).

Something that might explain the relative willingness to deaccession is the existing channels for doing so: "[some]thing that in some way explains why it can be easier for our museum is because of its subject: railways. There is a very active railway preservation movement in the UK. So what it does mean, for example, is that if we dispose of an object, there's often a home that they can go to so it's not as if we say we're disposing a thing and they're going to get lost for posterity because many of these organizations are willing to take those objects so I think in some ways that takes the pressure of" (Interview 5).

Finally, attitudes are also determined by organizational settings. One of the most cautious interviewees stated: "there is no part of the collection you get rid of that wouldn't make your collection poorer". "[With deaccessioning] you can give away the entire soul of your museum and destroy your museum in the process". Nevertheless, he further recognizes that "if we had to deal with financial cuts that would be a different situation" (Interview 3). This means that deaccessioning attitudes vary a lot depending on the type of museums (involving variable conservation, and storage costs) and on the financial situation that the museum is ongoing at the moment a deaccessioning decision has to be made.

### 4.3. Test of the hypotheses and discussion

In this section, I will first discuss the attitude of museum professionals towards deaccessioning in general, before turning to the systematic test of my research hypotheses. Generally speaking, the analysis has shown that there are discrepancies between the existing literature and the empirical results, as well as between the quantitative results and the qualitative results. First of all, while the literature suggests that museum professionals are rather opposed to deaccessioning, according to the quantitative results, they are rather favorable. More specifically, the results of the survey indicate that museums professionals are more favorable towards deaccessioning than visitors when deaccessioning is motivated by reasons related to the items themselves (e.g., provenance, interest, etc.). In contrast, museum professionals are less favorable towards deaccessioning than visitors when it comes to museum-related reasons (e.g., infrastructures, services, etc.). Still, on average, museum professionals remain more favorable than opposed to deaccession items.

The qualitative results provide a slightly different picture of professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning. According to the interviews conducted with UK museum professionals, they are not opposed to deaccessioning. However, they consider deaccessioning as an ultimate solution, whatever the motivation lying behind this practice. As far items are concerned, for example, they agree to deaccession items of lesser interest but only if there is no other tolerable solution anymore take proper care of it (conservation and curatorship). As far as the museum infrastructures and services are concerned, they may opt for deaccessioning, but only if they consider that there is no other solution left to finance infrastructures and services that are judged crucial for the sustainability of the museum.

In the remainder of this section, the hypotheses presented in the theoretical framework (Section 2) are systematically discussed. The first hypothesis suggested that respondents more aware of the rules and of the negative consequences in case of non-compliance with those rules (withdraw of accreditation, loss of status, etc.) are less favorable towards deaccessioning. The regression analyses demonstrate a slight but significant, negative effect of museum professionals' perceptions about the clarity of regulation on their attitude towards deaccessioning (Table 16, Model 4). This provides some evidence on the validity of the hypothesis 1.

In the qualitative interviews, this also comes out: one of the main concerns interviewees express is the one of losing accreditation if the rules are not respected. The consequences are far beyond losing prestige: in practice, the accreditation allows smaller, off-center museums to

be part of a network for loans, hosting famous exhibitions and bringing masterpieces into rural areas that would never have been considered if the museum was not accredited. As a result, people very aware of those rules are more reluctant to consider deaccessioning. In addition, if they do sell items at times, the proceeds are likely to be reinjected to the acquisition funds in order to avoid any trouble with accreditation schemes. Of course, the interviews also revealed some cases in which proceeds are used for slightly different things than acquisition (e.g., storage for the remaining items). It is inherent to qualitative research to reveal such nuances. In addition, those nuances remain closely bound to collection preservation. Overall, the results of both quantitative and qualitative research validate the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis stated that museum professionals belonging to a public museum are more reluctant to deaccession items than respondents from private (or hybrid) museums. Regression analyses confirmed this hypothesis: when museum professionals have had an experience in the private sector and/or currently work in a private-sector museum, they are significantly more inclined to support deaccessioning practices (Table 16, Model 3). Amongst the interviewees, four belonged to public museums and one to a private-trust but funded by local, public authorities. No particular conclusion can therefore be drawn on that basis. However, the effect identified by the quantitative results is very significant and its size is substantial. Hence, this evidence is very sufficient to argue that the second hypothesis is confirmed.

The third hypothesis suggested that museums founded more recently would deaccession less than older institutions. This hypothesis is not supported by the quantitative results: the regressions show that there is no significant effect of the establishment year of the respondent's museum on his or her attitude towards deaccessioning (Table 16, Model 2). In the interviews, there was no specific relations observable between the establishment year and the fact to be more or less in favor of deaccessioning. The third hypothesis is therefore not validated.

The fourth hypothesis stated that museum professionals will tend to be favorable to use the proceeds of deaccessioning for the betterment of the collections. The primacy of Item-related reasons on Museum-related reasons tends to confirm this expectation, as highlighted by the factorial analysis. Indeed, museum professionals are more favorable towards deaccessioning when it comes to the items of its collection. This is confirmed within the interviews, either because the ethic codes and laws (National Heritage Act) compel the museums to allocate any proceed into acquisition funds or more basically because the interviewees consider having a moral duty of doing so, be it for acquisition or for the

preservation of remaining items. Both quantitative and qualitative results therefore confirm the fourth hypothesis.

The fifth hypothesis proposes several expectations related to the degree of acceptability of deaccessioning according to the conditions in which it occurs. The first one (a1) concerns the existence of duplicates: museum professionals would be more willing to deaccession items when copies or close substitutes exist. It was noticed that professionals are more favorable towards deaccessioning for Item-related reasons. The item “substitutes” (Table 11) is part of this set of item-related reasons that make professionals particularly supportive of deaccessioning. This suggests that the existence of substitutes is a good incentive for museum professionals to be more in favor of deaccessioning. Admittedly, this is not a formal test, but this gives a very strong indication that the hypothesis is valid.

The second expectation (a2) suggested that museum professionals are more favorable towards deaccessioning when it comes to increase the coherence of the collection. While the quantitative analyses are not able to draw any conclusion as the item “out of theme” do not belong to the factor Items, the qualitative interviews tends to confirm it. Indeed, be it for unaccessioned items donated to the museum or for deaccessioned items, the relevance of the item into the collection is of primary importance, both for the museum it originates from and the recipient one. This has been shown by examples in the Section 4.2. This therefore tends to confirm the second theoretical expectation.

Still in the fifth hypothesis, another expectation (b1) was formulated regarding the future visitability of the collection as an incentive for museum professionals to be favorable towards deaccessioning. In accordance with this expectation, the public visitability of items is a reason that makes, on average, museum professionals rather favorable towards deaccessioning (see “open to public” and “open to public 2” in Table 8). The comparison with visitors casts doubts on this conclusion: the public visitability of items is a factor that makes professionals far less favorable towards deaccessioning than visitors. However, in qualitative results, several interviewees mentioned the importance of preserving the future access to the deaccessioned items. Overall, this evidence suggests that the theoretical expectation was valid.

Finally, it was expected (b2) that museum professionals would be more inclined to deaccession items when the procedure was transparent to the public. This expectation was not confirmed: neither in quantitative results where the item “transparency” does not belong to the factor Items; nor in the qualitative interviews. In contrast, some of the interviewees mentioned

the necessity to be very discrete: even with the best intention, the public opinion is very prompt to condemn the deaccessioning – and the transfer – of items.

According to the sixth hypothesis, on the one hand, museum professionals with an experience in the private sphere would be more favorable towards deaccessioning. On the other hand, it suggested that museum professionals with an educational background in business or economics would be more favorable towards deaccessioning. The first dimension of the hypothesis is clearly confirmed by the quantitative results. Indeed, the regression analyses demonstrate that museum professionals with a past professional experience in the private sector and/or currently working in a private-sector museum are significantly more inclined to support deaccessioning practices (Table 16, Model 3). In contrast, the educational background of museum professionals does not have a significant influence on their support to deaccessioning (Table 16, Model 3).

To conclude, this research relied on a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Those methods allowed to demonstrate that museum professionals are rather favorable towards deaccessioning. This attitude is more pronounced when deaccessioning is motivated by item-related reasons than by museum-related reasons. In line with this finding, the expectations of the fourth and fifth hypotheses were confirmed when they referred to factors related to items and collections (e.g., existence of substitutes, coherence and betterment of collections or their public visitability) to explain the favorable attitudes of professionals towards deaccessioning. In contrast, the transparency of procedures (fifth hypothesis) is not a key driver of deaccessioning, in professionals' minds. Rather, they push for some discretion, in deaccessioning procedures. Further, the more aware of (the complexity of) deaccessioning regulations professionals are, the less they are willing to deaccession items (first hypothesis). Finally, there seems to have a strong effect of professionals' experience in private-sector organizations, which makes them more open to deaccession (second and sixth hypotheses). The hypotheses suggesting an effect of museums' establishment year (third hypothesis) and professionals' educational background (sixth hypothesis) were not confirmed.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Summary of the findings

This research has looked at practices and attitudes of UK museum professionals towards deaccessioning. The inquiry has confirmed how controversial this practice remains. In addition to the literature as well as the variety of answers to the questions of the web survey, the emails exchanged with some of the respondents (See Appendix 6) made clear that deaccessioning is looked on with suspicion, with some museums even stating that no individual opinions would be made on that subject. This feeling of distrust may also explain why extra efforts had to be made to reach a sufficient sample size. The findings have also confirmed how crucial museum professionals can be in deaccessioning processes and decisions. More specifically, the importance given by museum professionals to deaccessioning as well as their knowledge of this practice is more variable than expected.

To look at deaccessioning practices and attitudes, the research has relied on a set of mixed methods: a review of the existing literature, a web survey as well as interviews. The choice of mixed methods allowed to enrich the results of the web survey with the data from the qualitative interviews that shed light on issues that were not raised within the close-ended questions of the survey. Interviews also allowed to go more in-depth for some specific points.

The enquiry has led to various findings. First, deaccessioning is a much more complex practice than it might sound. Indeed, while deaccessioning might be reduced to the sale of items, at first glance, the literature review as well as the qualitative interviews have actually demonstrated that this notion encompasses a wider set of practices, including transfer, disposal, destruction of items, etc. Furthermore, the reasons that lie behind deaccessioning decisions may be very diverse. Indeed, as the literature review showed, numerous reasons explain why museums resort to deaccessioning, including imperfect acquisition practices, storage and collection care concerns or legal obligations, etc. Proceeds are therefore not the only reason that pushes museums to deaccession items, and deaccessioning does not automatically involve proceeds.

Second, the literature review suggests that deaccessioning is used moderately, but still, substantially, especially as a management tool. However, the results of the web survey suggest that the sale of items is, everything considered, very limited. The data collected suggest two alternative explanations to this surprising result. On the one hand, codes of ethics, guidelines



and accreditation schemes are very strict regarding the practice of deaccessioning, most significantly when it comes to the sale of items. In that case, any proceed should be used for collection improvement's purposes. If museums do not comply with those standards, they might view their accreditations; subsidies and privileges withdrawn. On the other hand, museum professionals' enthusiasm for that practice is rather negative. This is particularly striking when their attitudes are compared to the Italian visitors' attitudes (Vecco, Srakar, Piazzai, 2016): based on the factorial analysis, the comparison between the results of the present research and the one on Italian visitors suggests a greater acceptability of deaccessioning amongst museum professionals for patrimonial reasons (item-related) whereas visitors primarily look at the accessibility of collections and the general management of museums (museum-related). Furthermore, the negative attitudes of museum professionals have been clearly observed during interviews: the interviewees remained very careful towards deaccessioning practices.

Whatever the explanation accounting for the limited use of deaccessioning, in museums, it suggests that museum professionals' attitude towards this practice is crucial. Given this, the web survey was used to investigate the institutional conditions as well as the individual factors that make museum professionals more or less favorable to deaccessioning. This investigation has led to two main findings. First, a "cultural" factor seems to play a role at the individual and institutional levels. Indeed, museum professionals who have an individual professional experience in the private sector, as well as those working in a private museum, are more inclined to support deaccessioning (for item-related reasons) than those who have a public-sector experience or work in public museum. This finding is interesting for museum practitioners and policymakers because it suggests that "something" can be done, at the cultural level, to influence museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning, as well as the use of this practice.

Second, the analyses suggested that museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning are more negative (or less positive) when they have a clear (subjective) understanding of codes and guidelines related to this practice. This result seems to confirm our findings that such rules do not only pressure the way of doing deaccessioning: they also act as obstacles against deaccessioning. When professionals are aware of how dangerous the non-compliance to the rules may be, they prefer not to deaccession any item at all.

## 5.2. Practical implications

Nowadays, museums around the world have to face new challenges. One of them, and not the least, is the budget cuts that urge them to find innovative ways towards financial sustainability. Not only public institutions have been hardly hit by the economic downturns of the mid-2000: governmental support has decreased but together with it, private and corporate supporters also reduced their contribution into the cultural world. More and more, museums need to act as financially competent and manage their assets similarly to business companies. However, this is sometimes difficult when external advisors push in a way that clashes their fundamental mission of preserving the cultural heritage in a region, the history of a civilization, or the artworks of a nation.

This research has shed light on the controversial practice of deaccessioning, a subject of debate within and beyond the museum world. The main findings reflect all the nuances that color the arguments for and against deaccessioning. However, some general conclusions can be drawn. Museum professionals are mostly in favor of deaccessioning, especially for item- and collection-related reasons: enhancing the collection, bettering the care of remaining items, etc. When it comes to museum-related reasons, such as the improvement of infrastructures and services, museum professionals are less favorable toward deaccessioning than for item-related purposes, but they are still rather favorable.

Practically speaking and despite the controversial nature of the practice, this means that a majority of museum professionals do not disagree in principle that deaccessioning can be an appropriate solution for improving collections and museums. Still, they need “good” reasons to do support a deaccessioning decision (as shown by the interviews). In addition, the quantitative data analysis only provides a mean result and there is a significant number of museum professionals that are rather opposed to deaccessioning. Further, those opponents may hold key positions in decision processes. But this research suggests that deaccessioning practitioners have to convince a loud minority of opponents rather than the majority of silent supporters.

Museum professionals seem quite reluctant to opt for transparency when deaccessioning items. This is surprising. Indeed, transparency towards the public and public trust preservation are underlined in all guidelines and codes of ethics as extremely important. However, since deaccessioning is still a very controversial matter, museums prefer to take the chance to proceed discretely rather than being exposed to high public scrutiny. Sometimes, this works fine but if the public discovers the plans afterwards, this can badly corrode public trust. In that sense, if some latitude was given by the associations of the field to the museum, this kind of issues might

be avoided and museums could work more transparently and efficiently, saving time by not having to systematically defend the reasons of deaccessioning.

Related to transparency, the regulations seem to an obstacle for museum professionals to deaccession items. Deaccessioning regulations should not necessarily promote the use of this practice. However, when there are “good” reasons to deaccession an item, regulations seem to be a “bad” obstacle. Efforts of communication could be implemented for museum professionals to be sure that they know everything they need to know to deaccession items of their collection. Efforts of pedagogy could be made by museum associations and public officials to make sure that the guidelines and rules they enact are perfectly understood by the targeted professionals.

The research has also highlighted the attitudinal differences existing between the museum professionals having worked / working in a private-sector organization and a public-sector organization. To deaccessioning practitioners, this suggests that there are differences in practices, opportunities and constraints between those two types of institutions. This does not only require further research, but dialogue and exchanges between public-sector and private-sector institutions could be promoted for museum professionals to better understand the attitudes of their colleagues towards deaccessioning practices.

For deaccessioning to be a good managerial tool requires to reach an equilibrium between the different parties at stake, keeping in mind the center of discussion: museum collections. Museum professionals and museum associations need to work hand in hand to find the best situation that will benefit the greatest number: the public but also the museum staff and the very particular “asset” at stake: cultural heritage.

### 5.3. Limitations and avenues for future research

This research has several limitations that suggest avenues for future research. First, museum professionals’ attitudes have mainly been examined with respect to the sale of items. The qualitative interviews as well as the emails exchanged with some respondents, however, showed how the sale of items is only a very limited part of the entire range of deaccessioning practices. Future surveys should therefore include questions on the whole set of deaccessioning practices. I speculate that such surveys would allow museum professionals to report more nuances in their attitudes or, at least, would lead to different results.

Second, some results of this research have suggested that managers have different attitudes towards deaccessioning from visitors. Those results are based on the comparison between the descriptive statistics and the factorial analyses of the survey conducted in this

research and the survey conducted by Vecco, Srakar and Piazzai (2016). However, the first survey was conducted amongst UK museum professionals whereas the second survey was conducted amongst Italian visitors. Future studies could compare museum professionals' and visitors' attitudes from one same country.

Further research could also look at museum professionals of more than one country at the same time. Including more countries would allow to reach a higher number of museum professionals. In this research, the results of the survey have suggested that some factors examined might have an effect on museum professionals' attitude (see the value of the regression coefficients), but the sample size did not allow the analyses to demonstrate the existence of those effects (statistically speaking). Higher sample sizes would fix this problem.

Finally, many academic studies ethically discuss the advantages and downsides of deaccessioning practices as a managerial tool. However, most of them look at deaccessioning alone. It could be interesting to look at the practices of and attitudes towards deaccessioning as a managerial tool in comparison with a broader set of managerial practices. While museum professionals often maintain a skeptical view on deaccessioning (according to this research), deaccessioning could rather be seen as the "least worst" practice, compared to other managerial decisions such as a limiting cares to collections, reducing opening times, or lay-offs.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Statutory provisions governing deaccession from National Collections

Manisty, E. & Smith, J. (2010). The de-accessioning of objects from public institutions: Legal and related considerations. *Art, Antiquity and Law*, 15(1), p. 71-74.

### Deaccessioning of Objects from Public Institutions

#### Appendix

#### Statutory Provisions Governing Deaccession from National Collections

Institution	Relevant Statute	Disposal Rights
National Gallery	Museums and Galleries Act 1992 <sup>i</sup>	S.4.(3): Disposal limited to cases of transfer. <sup>ii</sup> S.4.(7): Money accrued to be spent on acquisitions.
Tate	Museums and Galleries Act 1992	S.4.(4): Disposal limited to: (a) cases of transfer <sup>iii</sup> (b) works considered unsuitable for retention that can be deaccessioned without detriment to students and other members of the public (c) damaged works. These subsections are without prejudice to any trust or condition (express or implied) prohibiting sale. S.4.(7): Money accrued from disposal or transfer to be spent on acquisitions
National Portrait Gallery	Museums and Galleries Act 1992	S.4.(5): Disposal limited to: (a) cases of transfer <sup>iv</sup> (b) duplicates (c) works where the sitter's identity has been discredited (d) damaged / deteriorated works: in this case the object may be disposed of notwithstanding 'a trust or condition (express or implied) prohibiting or restricting the disposal'. S.4.(7): Money accrued from disposal or transfer to be spent on acquisitions.

- i. An Act to establish Boards of Trustees for the National Gallery, the Tate Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Wallace Collection.
- ii. Ibid S.6 and Schedule 5. The Schedule outlines the institutions that may transfer objects and have objects transferred to them. These are the Armouries, the British Library, the British Museum, the Imperial War Museum, the Museum of London, the National Gallery, the National Galleries of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland, the National Maritime Museum, the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, the National Museums of Scotland, the National Portrait Gallery, the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum, the Tate, and the V&A. The National Library of Wales, the National Museum of Wales, the Ulster Museum, and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum may receive, but not themselves transfer objects. The right of transfer is exercisable in a manner inconsistent with a trust or condition if the donor or his personal representatives have consented to this exercise of the power (S.6 (3)).  
If a work is subject to a trust or condition, the conditions of the trust or condition must be observed by the transferee body (S.6 (5))  
S.5 outlines the National Gallery, the Tate, and the National Portrait Gallery's rights to lend which are exercisable in a manner inconsistent with a trust or condition if, (a) 50 years have elapsed since the property became vested in the museum, or (b) if the donor or his personal representatives consent in writing (S.5 (3))
- iii. *Ibid.*
- iv. *Ibid.*

Institution	Relevant Statute	Disposal Rights
Wallace Collection	Museums and Galleries Act 1992	S. 46: The Board 'may neither add any object to their collection nor dispose of any object... in their collection'. <sup>v</sup>
Imperial War Museum	Imperial War Museum Act 1920 <sup>vi</sup>	S. 2(1)(c): Disposal limited to: <sup>vii</sup> - duplicates. - works unfit or un-required for retention. <sup>viii</sup> S. 2(1)(d): money accrued from disposal to be spent on acquisitions or "in defraying any expenses" of the museum.
Victoria and Albert	National Heritage Act 1983 <sup>ix</sup>	S. 6(3): Disposal limited to: (a) duplicates (b) works considered unsuitable for retention that can be deaccessioned without detriment to students and other members of the public (c) cases of transfer within s. 6 of the Museums & Galleries Act 1992 <sup>x</sup> (d) damaged/deteriorated works: in this case the object may be disposed of notwithstanding 'a trust or condition (express or implied) prohibiting or restricting the disposal of the object' S. 6(5)). S. 6(6): Money accrued from disposal or transfer to be spent on acquisitions.
Armouries	National Heritage Act 1983	S. 20(3)(a)-(d): Subject to the same conditions as in case of the V&A (see above), save only a trust or condition prohibiting or restricting disposal can never be disregarded. S. 20(5): Money accrued from disposal or transfer to be spent on acquisitions.
Science Museum	National Heritage Act 1983	S. 14(3): Disposal is subject to the same conditions as in case of the V & A (see above). S. 14(6): Money accrued from disposal or transfer to be spent on acquisitions.

- v. The terms of Lady Wallace's bequest stated that the collection should be 'kept together unmixed with other works of art'.
- vi. An Act to make provision for the management of the Imperial War Museum.
- vii. The consent of the Lord President of the Council is needed in this instance.
- viii. *Ibid.*
- ix. An Act to establish Boards of Trustees for the V&A, the Science Museum, the Armouries, and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.
- x. See above, note ii.

Deaccessioning of Objects from Public Institutions

Institution	Relevant Statute	Disposal Rights
British Library	British Library Act 1972 <sup>xi</sup>	<p>The relevant provisions are contained in the Schedule to the Act. Save as indicated they only apply to items transferred under S.3 (1)(a) of the Act from the British Museum to the newly created British Library.</p> <p>Para 11.(4): Disposal limited to:                      (a) duplicates; (b) works printed post 1850 of which a photographic copy remains in the collection; (c) works considered unfit for retention that can be deaccessioned without detriment to students; (d) cases of transfer within S.6 of the Museums &amp; Galleries Act 1992.<sup>xii</sup></p> <p>Para 11.(5): Where there is a relevant trust or condition:                      (a) works shall not be disposed of in any manner inconsistent with the terms of trusts/ conditions save as permitted under S.6 of the Museums &amp; Galleries Act 1992,<sup>xiii</sup>                      (b) works will be subject to the same trusts or conditions in the hands of the recipient</p>
British Museum	British Museum Act 1963 <sup>xiv</sup>	<p>S.5.(1): Disposal limited to:                      (a) duplicates; (b) works made post-1850 consisting substantially of printed material of which a photographic copy remains in the collection; (c) objects unfit to remain in the collections that can be deaccessioned without detriment to students.</p> <p>None of the powers of this subsection are exercisable if disposal is inconsistent with the terms of a gift or bequest.</p> <p>S. 5(2): Badly damaged/deteriorated works can be destroyed.</p> <p>S. 5(3): Money accrued by disposal or transfer to be spent on acquisitions.</p>
Natural History Museum	British Museum Act 1963	S. 8(3): Same conditions as the British Museum. (see above) <sup>xv</sup>

xi. The Act (S.3) provided for the transfer of the British Museum Library from the British Museum to the British Library Board. The Trustees of the British Museum were able to transfer any article to the British Library notwithstanding any trust or condition (express or implied) prohibiting or restricting disposal, and also notwithstanding anything in the British Museum Act 1963 (S. 3(4)). Any transferred material remained subject to applicable trusts and conditions (S. 3(5)).:

xii. See above, note ii.

xiii. This applies to the entire collection, whether transferred from the British Museum or not.

xiv. The British Museum Act 1963 provided for the separation of the Natural History Museum from the British Museum, and made new provision for the regulation of the two Museums and their collections. The British Museum Act 1963 (Amendment) Bill 2009 sought to permit wider transfer of artefacts from the British Museum, but did not proceed.

xv. For example, numerous duplicates were sold at Christie's, lots 225-245, 15 Oct. 2009.



Institution	Relevant Statute	Disposal Rights
National Galleries of Scotland	National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985	<p>S.8.(3): Disposal limited to:            (a) duplicates; (b) works unsuitable for retention that can be deaccessioned without detriment to students; (c) cases of transfer;<sup>xvi</sup>            (d) cases approved by the Secretary of State when the transfer is to a body not being within Schedule 5 to the Museums &amp; Galleries Act 1992; (e) damaged / deteriorated works.            S. 8(5): Subsection (3)(e) applies notwithstanding a trust or condition (express and implied) prohibiting or restricting disposal.            S. 8(6): Money accrued from disposal or transfer to be spent on acquisitions.</p>
National Maritime Museum	National Maritime Museum Act 1934 <sup>xvii</sup>	<p>S. 2(3)(b) and (e) Disposal limited to:            - duplicates; - works that are not 'required' for the purposes of the Museum;<sup>xviii</sup> - transfer to another government funded institution.<sup>xix</sup></p> <p>Disposal is permitted only if not inconsistent with conditions attached to a bequest or gift.<sup>xx</sup></p> <p>S.2.(3)(c) Money accrued from disposal or transfer to be spent on acquisitions.</p>

xvi. See above, note ii.

xvii. The National Maritime Museum Act formally established the National Maritime Museum.

xviii. The consent of the Lord President of the Council is needed in this instance.

xix. *Ibid.*

xx. The Museum has a 'Collections Reform Programme' which is designed to evaluate works considered for deaccession.

## Appendix 2: The most acceptable reasons for deaccessioning (comparison)

Stephens, H. H. (2011). All in a day's work: How museums may approach deaccessioning as a necessary collections management tool. *DePaul Journal of art technology & intellectual property*, 22, p. 156.

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	AAM	AAMD	MoMA	MMA	Guggenheim	TNM	# of Codes Approving
Inconsistent with mission or collecting goals	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Duplicate/redundant object		X	X	X	X	X	5
Unable to provide care	X	X		X	X	X	5
Violation of law		X		X	X	X	4
Refine/improve the collection		X		X	X	X	4
Authenticity/attribution questioned		X	X		X	X	4
Restoration impractical		X	X		X	X	4
Poor quality		X	X			X	3
To acquire superior works						X	1

Table 1: Acceptable reasons to deaccession, by professional or institutional code of ethics

### 2. Acceptable Authority to Approve a Deaccession

No clear profession-wide guidelines emerge from this review regarding who should have the authority to approve a deaccession. All the museums reviewed herein require Board-level approval for deaccessions, though some make exceptions for low-valued objects. For organizations requiring Board-level approval, some permit a committee to make the decision and some require full-Board approval. Of the museums reviewed, only MoMA permits a

## Appendix 3: Email used to share the survey and invitation to forward it

*Research project on deaccessioning - Erasmus University Rotterdam*

*To Ms./M. XYZ or whom may be concerned*

Dear Ms./M. XYZ,

My name is Anne-Catherine Denies. I am a student at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam (The Netherlands). In the context of a Master in Cultural Economics, I am doing my final thesis on deaccessioning practices in UK museums as perceived by museum professionals. The aim of the research is to understand the nature of museum professionals' attitudes towards deaccessioning as well as the factors that determine them.

In the context of this research, I would like to conduct a survey amongst UK museum professionals (a very short list of close-ended questions) to better understand some specific issues related to deaccessioning practices. Respondents do not need an in-depth knowledge of deaccessioning practices and policies given that parts of the survey are only about attitudes. On the contrary, this is interesting for my research that a broad range of people express their opinion so that I can have a bigger sample, more representative of the UK museum professionals.

Here is the link to the survey:

<https://tools.uclouvain.be/limesurvey200/index.php/135539/lang-en>

I would really appreciate if I can rely on your support for conducting my research, for example if you can fill in the survey and share it with the rest of your museum staff.

Hereafter, you can find an invitation email providing information on the research and the context in which it takes place as well as the link to the online survey. This email can be directly forwarded to the mailing list of your museum staff as well as at any of your contacts in the UK museum world if you agree to support my research.

Once the thesis process completed (Mid-July), the results of my research will be shared with all museums and associations.

If you have time, I would be glad to give you a call and we can discuss more in details of my research and of deaccessioning practices in your institution.

If you need any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me at the following email address: [anne-catherine.denies@hotmail.com](mailto:anne-catherine.denies@hotmail.com).

Thank you very much in advance for your reply!

Best regards,

Anne-Catherine Denies

[anne-catherine.denies@hotmail.com](mailto:anne-catherine.denies@hotmail.com)

*This is an invitation to an important survey for UK museum professionals*

The last years, new regulation has been promoted in Europe in order to allow museums to sell or dispose items of their collection to other public institutions or, more rarely, to private collectors. This practice is called deaccessioning. In the United Kingdom as in many other European countries, museums possess many items that are never exhibited, often due to a lack of space and resources. On average, only 10% of the collections are actually displayed to visitors. Deaccessioning can be used as a tool to manage collections and museums more efficiently.

The present survey aims at a better understanding of actual practices of deaccessioning from the perspective of museum professionals, which is rarely examined. This survey is conducted for a thesis realized in the context of a master's in Cultural Economics & Entrepreneurship at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. The survey is fully anonymous and does not take more than 10 minutes. You can fill in the questionnaire by clicking on the following link:

<https://tools.uclouvain.be/limesurvey200/index.php/135539/lang-en>

If this link does not work, you can copy-paste it in the address box of your browser.

I would be very grateful to your participation in this survey: it will not only improve our understanding of deaccessioning regulation and practices but it will also allow me to realize my master thesis. At the end of the thesis process (Mid-July), the results will be sent to all museums.

Would you like to know more about this research or about me? Feel free to make contact with me at the following email address: [anne-catherine.denies@hotmail.com](mailto:anne-catherine.denies@hotmail.com). I would be glad to answer your questions.

Thank you very much in advance for your cooperation.

Best regards,

Anne-Catherine Denies,  
Master student at Erasmus University Rotterdam

## Sector surveys

### Survey: admissions charging

The Association of Independent Museums is commissioning a major survey into charging for museum entry. The survey is being run by DC research and supported by ACE and the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division in Wales. AIM is seeking responses from both charging and non-charging museums and galleries and hopes to build a picture of the effects of a decision to charge. It will particularly explore the effect of charging on visitor spend and on the diversity of audiences, the effects of a venue switching from one model to another, and the impact of annual passes and free entry for children. Findings, case studies and guidance will be published in the summer. The closing date for the survey is 11th April. AIM is particularly keen to get more responses from beyond the independent museum sector. [AIM](#)

### ACE relaunches flagship study into private philanthropy in arts and culture

ACE is relaunching the Private Investment in Culture Survey, and invites all arts and culture organisations in England to take part. The survey had been conducted by Arts & Business for 30 years until it was discontinued in 2012 and was the main source of information on how the private sector engaged with the arts and culture sector, collecting information on business investment, individual giving and income from trusts and foundations. With the relaunch of the survey, ACE aims to not only shed new light into the current state of play, but also bridge the gap in terms of data on how the sector has developed since the 2011/12 survey. The survey takes 15 minutes to complete and participants are entered in a prize draw for Amazon vouchers. [ACE](#)

### Survey: Museums University Partnerships

Share Academy and the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement are running a survey to explore partnerships between museums and universities in England. This is part of the Museum University Partnership Initiative (MUPI) project funded by ACE. The survey seeks to discover how museum university partnerships are structured, their impact and challenges. It is anonymous and takes a few minutes to complete. [Survey](#), [NCCPE](#)

### Survey: Welsh apprenticeships programme

MALD is considering making a bid for funds for a strategic apprenticeship programme to bring a younger and more diverse workforce into the heritage sector. First however it needs to assess views from sector bodies. It therefore invites staff from Welsh museums and galleries to complete a short survey. The deadline is 13th April. [MALD](#)

### Survey: De-accessioning in UK museums

Research is being conducted into the attitudes of UK museum professionals to the circumstances and practices of de-accessioning objects from museum collections. The research seeks to understand when, why and under what conditions museum professionals do or do not support this practice. An online survey, compiled by Erasmus University researcher Anne-Catherine Denies as part of her Masters in Cultural Economics, is now open. [Survey](#)

## Appendix 5: Interview guide

### Introduction

1. What is your role in the museum?
2. What is your background?
3. When was founded the museum? Was it founded as private or public owned? Nowadays, how the organizational structure of the museum looks like?
4. Who does make the fundamental decisions within your museum?
5. Does your museum do deaccessioning? If yes, when did it started?

### “Deaccessioning museums”

6. Are you aware that some people are working on deaccessioning issues in your museum?
7. Are you aware of any type of guidelines existing to provide insight on how to practice deaccessioning?
8. If yes, by whom are those guidelines provided (museum itself, museums’ association, government bodies)?
9. Are the deaccessioning decisions taken on a case-by-case basis or according to previous deaccessions?
10. What do people working on deaccessioning issues in your museum do to militate in favor (or against) deaccessioning?
11. Do you have any idea of the process of deaccessioning?
12. Do you know how many deaccessioning have taken place since you are in the museum?
13. What is the average time spent on the deaccessioning of one item?
14. What are the channels for the deaccessioned items (other museum, private collectors, auction houses)?
15. What is the destination of the proceeds?
16. In your opinion, should museums practice more deaccessioning? Why?

### “Non-deaccessioning museums”

6. Are you aware that some people are working on deaccessioning issues in your museum?
7. Are you aware of any type of guidelines existing to provide insight on how to practice deaccessioning?
8. If yes, by whom are those guidelines provided? (Museum itself, museums’ association, government bodies)
9. Do you think deaccessioning decisions should be taken on a case-by-case basis or according to previous deaccessions?
10. Deaccessioning’s proceeds might be used to different purposes: the improvement of the collection, the space management (storage vs exhibited items), the collection management (enough time and money for curatorship of the items owned). How do you deal with those aspects as your museum does not deaccession?
11. Would you be in favor of deaccessioning for your museum?

## Appendix 6: Emails demonstrating the delicate character of deaccessioning in UK

### Email 1

Dear Anne-Catherine Denies,

Thank you for your email requesting information on deaccessioning practices which has been passed on to me by our Archive Enquiry Service.

At the National Portrait Gallery, there is a strong presumption against the disposal of Collection objects and the Gallery will not undertake disposal motivated primarily by financial considerations. The Museums and Galleries Act 1992 outlines the circumstances under which the Trustees may dispose of an object by way of transfer, sale, exchange or gift. These include where the object is a duplicate or where the Gallery's collection of a specific sitter includes multiple portraits, where the identification of a sitter has been discredited (and a portrait no longer meets the Gallery's acquisitions criteria) or where the object has become useless by reason of damage or deterioration. Any decision to dispose of an object would be taken by the Gallery's board of Trustees only after full consideration. Factors including public benefit, the implications for the Gallery's collections and collections held by galleries and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields would be considered and the views of all relevant stakeholders (including artists, funding bodies, sitters and benefactors) would also be sought.

Once this decision had been taken, priority would be given to retaining the object in the public domain and it would be offered to other Accredited Museums / Galleries or to institutions listed in Schedule 5 of the Museums and Galleries Act 1992. Arrangements would be made for the preservation of documentation relating to the items involved in accordance with SPECTRUM procedures and the Museums Association's Code of Ethics. In cases of disposal by sale, any monies received by the Trustees from such disposals, less any grants repayable to an external funding organisation, would be applied to the purchase of objects for the collection as laid down in the Museums and Galleries Act 1992. The proceeds of a sale would be ring-fenced so it could be demonstrated that they were spent as required by the Museums and Galleries Act 1992. The Gallery's full acquisition and disposal policy can be viewed here: <http://www.npg.org.uk/about/corporate/gallery-policies/acquisition-and-disposal-policy.php>.

In practice, the Gallery has not sold any portraits from the collection since before the Second World War. It does however occasionally transfer portraits to other institutions where this is appropriate. For example, in 2014, portraits of the Fairfax Family (formerly NPG 754), an unknown woman (formerly NPG 612) and Thomas Woolney (formerly NPG 1664) were

transferred to Tate, where they had been on loan since 1958. At the same time, two objects from Tate's collections, which had been on loan to the National Portrait Gallery were transferred to the permanent collection here.

Regarding your interview request, curators receive a very high number of requests for interviews from students and trainees and due to busy diaries we are unable to give individual interviews in person or over the telephone. However, I will be happy to circulate the link to your online survey to my colleagues to complete.

With best wishes for your research,

X

## Email 2

Dear-Anne Catherine,

Thank you for your e-mail and your enquiry about attitudes to de-accessioning and disposal in museums.

The National Gallery of Scotland's related policies are set out on our website, and I think you will find the information very clear. It includes the principles we observe; relevant legislation and ethics; control measures and related NGS policies, all of which you will find on our website.

In drawing up and subsequently managing our De-accessioning policies, we have also taken note of the following:

2003 NMDC (National Museum Directors' Conference): Too much stuff. Disposal from museums

2008 UK Museum's Association: Disposal Guidelines and Disposal toolkit

2011 Freda Matassa: Museum Collections Management: A Handbook

2012 UK Museums Association. MA Effective Collections: Achievements and Legacy

2014 Arts Council England (Heather Lomas): A guide to selecting a review methodology for collections rationalisation

2015 Janet Ulph: the Legal and Ethical Status of Museum Collections. Curatorially Motivate Disposals

and on-going developments by Spectrum and the Collections Trust

I am sure you will also have looked at the deaccessioning policies of other UK museums, among which we found useful approaches, phrases and terminology in documentation from the



following institutions: Horniman Museum, London; Leeds Museums; National Museums of Scotland; Royal Commission of Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS – now merged as Historic Environment Scotland); Tate Gallery; Victoria and Albert Museum.

As we state in our De-accessioning and Disposal policy, we recognise that responsible collections management today includes appraising and reviewing our collections and our Collecting Criteria to ensure that they ‘remain manageable and sustainable and retain long-term interest for the public. Only our Board of Trustees may a) agree b) authorise any disposal (including exchange, gift, destruction, sale). The Board’s decision will be based on research, due diligence, collections management, ethical and legal justifications, and a formal recommendation from the Director General and the Senior Management team.

We do receive a number of requests like yours each year. Our policy is to direct people to the information on our website. We do not arrange interviews with staff. The website information is comprehensive and I am sure you will find a good deal of material there to include in your thesis. If any of the above is not clear, however, please let me know, and I will be happy to clarify points for you.

With best wishes for your on-going research,

X

### **Reply (by myself)**

Dear X,

Thank you very much for your reply. This information is useful. However, my research focuses on the personal opinion of UK museums managers (for example, your own opinion). To facilitate the collection of opinions, my research is based on a complementary tool that allows a variety of museum professionals to easily provide their opinion about deaccessioning. This tool is a web survey available at the following link:

<https://tools.uclouvain.be/limesurvey200/index.php/135539/lang-en>

Some information about the context of this survey appears below. I underline that this survey is fully anonymous. I would be very grateful if you would be so kind to fill in the questionnaire and to forward this survey to the directors, managers, and other employees of your museum. This is really crucial to the success of my thesis and my master studies.

Thanks you very much in advance for your time.

Best regards,

Anne-Catherine Denies

**Reply (NGS), after having sent reminders to the mailing list previously contacted**

Dear Ms Denies,

Colleagues at the National Galleries of Scotland have forwarded to me your recent email below.

We have corresponded about this earlier, and I am writing to state again, very clearly, that **staff at the National Galleries of Scotland do not give personal opinions** about our deaccessioning policy or processes.

All our policies are very clearly and publicly stated on the website, and everyone in the institution recognizes and adheres to these.

You have already received an explanation of our position, and a clear response to your enquiry.

It is not appropriate to send the same enquiry to others in the institution, asking them the same question.

After reading Museum Codes of Ethics in the context of your studies, I am sure you will be aware that this approach is not transparent and not acceptable.

I realise that it will be a disappointment to you that you are not able to include in your statistics on deaccessioning, personal statements from staff at the National Galleries of Scotland. However, you will understand that we are consistent in our response to this and all related enquiries: **it is not our policy to give personal statements about our deaccessioning policies or processes.**

**Please do not send any further survey requests to the National Galleries of Scotland.**

With best wishes

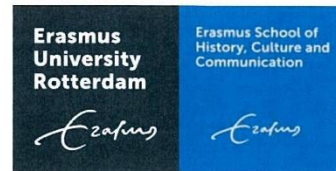
X

## Appendix 7: Informed consent forms

[Katie Herbert](#)

### Informed consent form

Consent request for participating in research



For further questions about the study and any other inquiries, please contact **Anne-Catherine Denies**: [anne-catherine.denies@hotmail.com](mailto:anne-catherine.denies@hotmail.com)

#### Description

You are invited to participate in a study about deaccessioning practices. The purpose of this study is to understand **museum professionals' perceptions about deaccessioning** in UK museums.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to **be interviewed**. The questions of the interview are related to your professional background and to deaccessioning practices and policies.

Unless you prefer that no recording is made, a **tape recorder** will be used for the interviews. You are always free not to answer any particular question. As far as I can tell, there is **no risk** associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information (such as your position in a specific museum) in the study or not. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified by measures such as the use of a pseudonym.

I will use the material from the interviews **exclusively for academic work**.

#### Time involvement

Your participation in this interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

#### Participants' rights

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

#### Signing the consent form

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. If you prefer to stay fully anonymous, you can consent orally.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name	Signature	Date
KATIE HERBERT PENLEE HOUSE GALLERY & MUSEUM		1 APRIL 2016

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study:

Name	Signature	Date
KATIE HERBERT PENLEE HOUSE GALLERY & MUSEUM		1 APRIL 2016

Two copies should be made for each subject: one for the subject to keep and one for the student's records.

Informed consent form  
Consent request for participating in research



For further questions about the study and any other inquiries, please contact **Anne-Catherine Denies**:  
[anne-catherine.denies@hotmail.com](mailto:anne-catherine.denies@hotmail.com)

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I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name Diane Gwilt Signature DIANE GWILT Date 4/4/16

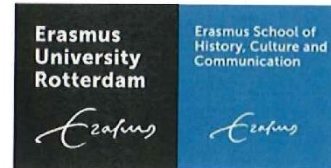
I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study:

Name DIANE GWILT Signature Diane Gwilt Date 4/4/16

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I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name	Signature	Date
	 M MCGINNES	7/APRIL/2016

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study:

Name	Signature	Date
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Two copies should be made for each subject: one for the subject to keep and one for the student's records.

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### Signing the consent form

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. If you prefer to stay fully anonymous, you can consent orally.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name IAN JONES                      Signature Jones                      Date 6/6/2016

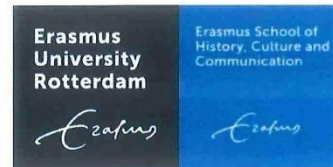
I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study:

Name    Signature    Date

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If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. If you prefer to stay fully anonymous, you can consent orally.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name **ED BARTHOLOMEW**

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ed Bartholomew', written over a horizontal line.

Date

**22 APRIL 2016**

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study:

Name **ED BARTHOLOMEW**

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ed Bartholomew', written over a horizontal line.

Date

**22 APRIL 2016**

Two copies should be made for each subject: one for the subject to keep and one for the student's records.

## Appendix 8: Interview transcriptions

### Interview 1: Katie Herbert

*Deputy Director of the Penlee House Gallery & Museum (Cornwall, England)*

Hello!

*Hi!*

So this is Anne-Catherine Denies.

*Yes!*

So I'm doing my thesis about deaccessioning practices in UK museums.

*Right, yeah*

And I'm doing that in two steps: the first step is to interview some people so I can have a qualitative insight on deaccessioning issues; I already have done a documentary research by searching on the website of associations but also of the museums themselves and the second step is to do a survey amongst museum professionals.

*Yes ok perfect.*

So what I would need is a bit of your time to do the interview if you agree with that.

*Yes that's fine.*

Also what would be really nice is if you can share, forward my survey which is just finished with all the comments of my supervisor and this is an online survey.

*Right.*

It takes approximately ten minutes to fill in.

*Okay.*

And it's composed of informational questions but also questions about deaccessioning practices and finally questions more of perception of deaccessioning so what I think about deaccessioning, in what conditions I think it's acceptable, etc.

*Yeah okay.*

And so I can send you an email already with, an email that you can simply forward to museum employees, so everything is already prepared with the link for the survey in the mail and you just have to forward if you agree with it.

*Okay, and do you want me to forward it to other museum because there is nobody else in my museum that it would be relevant to?*

Oh yeah, it would be really nice. I already took some contacts with other museums but not everyone has replied of course and help from the inside would be really welcomed.

*Okay. We are quite a small organization and there is only the director and myself which do curatorial work and for none of my other colleagues it would be relevant to.*

Okay, perfect.

And maybe if you see the survey, you will see that there are set of questions that are specifically for people taking actually care of deaccessioning and also some questions only appear when your knowledge of deaccessioning is relevant enough to be able to answer those questions, and



other questions appear also when you don't deal with deaccessioning but for having an opinion then.

*Right, okay, yeah.*

Okay, perfect. So after the interview I will send you the mail with the survey link and so if you can forward it to your people and also to other people in other museums it would be really nice.

*Okay.*

Perfect. So first I have some introductory questions, the first one is: what is your role in the museum?

*Well I am the curator so I am technically responsible for all collections' care but also organizing all the exhibitions that we've made. And behind the team there are volunteers that also work with collections.*

Okay, perfect. Then what is your background?

*Well I did a degree in history of art and then did volunteer work in one or two museums the year after I left before getting in post and I happen to be here for eighteen years working my way up from three years in the post of museum assistant to the post I'm in now.*

Okay, perfect. And are you in the museum for a long time?

*Hum... Basically, this is my first and only job straight from university.*

Okay, perfect.

And can you tell me when was founded the museum?

*Hmm, the museum collections were founded in 1839: they were based on the Penzance Natural History and Antiquarian Society Collection. But the building we are in now was purchased back in 1946 as a War Memorial and the museum is now the heir.*

Okay. And was it founded as a private or public-owned museum?

*Hum, public, it is local authority.*

Okay, perfect. And you say this is a small structure; how the organizational structure of the museum looks like?

*Hmm... we are more a gallery than a museum. We have a museum area but the gallery is the main body of the building. But basically we have the director and then myself as curator-deputy to the director. Then we have an education officer, a technical officer which work for the technicity of the exhibitions and sort of IT. We have a front-of-house security officer, and then we have a part-time administrator which is in charge of the shop system.*

Okay. Perfect. And so you do the, you make most of the decisions in your museum together with the director?

*With the director, yes, and then obviously we also refer to the whole committee.*

Okay. And the director then is more from the business side or also an art historian?

*Hum she is also an art historian but now is more management.*

Okay. So you really take care of the all artistic part and she takes care of more administration, business administration?

*Yes.*

Okay, perfect. Then the main question of my research: does your museum do deaccessioning and since when?

*Hum, we have done some minor deaccession but nothing of any of value, not high-value items. It's mainly... Basically, our collection got a very small realm so we only collect things that were made, or used or related to Penlee which is basically about fifteen miles radius.*

Okay.

*So basically things that have been in the collections for a long time, we have deaccessioned a few of those but it's mainly because they are too old.*

Okay. So it's more when it's too damaged or when it's not relevant anymore for your museums

*Yeah. But you define deaccessioning as including disposal and transfer or not?*

Actually for me deaccessioning includes different things: the first one is more like disposal; so that occurs when the pieces became too old or too damaged or you have copies of them and then you have the sale of items *per se* which are sold to other museums or other organizations or more rarely to individual collectors.

*Yeah*

And in my study I try to focus on like the sale because it's the subject that is the more, let say "tricky"...

*Yeah*

In press releases for individuals, either in academic world or in museum world, it's really something that has a lot of opponents and I try to see what is the opinion of museum managers and employees towards that practice.

*Yeah, well we also transfer items to other museums but free of charge so we don't sell items: we transfer items if they were museums more relevant for that item.*

Okay

*So it's deaccessioning but it's not sale.*

Yeah, of course. But that's interesting to know. Okay. And so you are mainly the person in charge of working on deaccessioning issues in your museum.

*Yeah.*

Okay. And are you following any type of guidelines existing to...?

*Oh yeah, we follow the museum code of ethics and others related-policy from Britain, we follow the code of ethics of the Council.*

Okay. So it's both like guidelines provided by associations of museums and also by your museum itself.

*Yeah.*

Okay. And are you taking the decisions on a case by case basis or maybe according to previous deaccessioning(s)?

*Hum. No basically the main rationale is that if something is not relevant we would look to deaccession or transfer but we wouldn't deaccession... well we don't really have items to sale so it's not really... so it's hard... we have to take it case by case because everything is different.*

Yes.

*We wouldn't just, you know, dispose everything that comes from a particular place or just getting rid of the object because the object is not relevant.*

Okay. And do you know how many deaccessioning have taken place since you arrived in the museum?

*Hum I have to look that... Mainly it was sort of a... We only had one, in 2009, we looked to dispose over about twenty, twenty-five, no, it was in 2006 we looked for twenty-five items but that was all domestic items.*

Okay. And is it a long process like when you decided "okay, this item is no longer of any relevance for our museum, for a bench of reasons...

*Yeah, all you have to see is that we **have to put records and consider where it came from, to make sure it's not relevant.** And then obviously, **in an ideal world you would contact with people who donate** if they don't want it back but you know when it has been too long they're no longer around then you know we have to look upon to the Council. Yes if we want to deaccession we try to contact the donor if possible then we would **publish a notice in the Museum Journal** so that any accredited museum can come forward and then if we got not much interest from that we can widen out to non accredited museums but we also look to propose them to other local museums.*

Okay. So there is really a step by step process, you first see if you can reach the original donor then if not other museums and if not...

*Yeah you know often museums are local, maybe wider museums nationally.*

Okay. Perfect. And when you try to see if it's actually non relevance for your museum, do you do that yourself or do you like call some external expertise maybe?

*Hum no it's more... Hum I mean generally those items are really things that you could not work out for yourself so you basically try to find original paper works to see where it comes from, who it belonged to, but you know in some cases it might be difficult.*

Okay. So most of the time the destination of the item is another museum.

Yes, yes.

Okay. And so you don't have proceeds from deaccessioned items, it's only like transfers or do you sometimes have money from it?

*Hum, we sometimes, we'll get money from the sale of unaccessioned items so we've never sold anything that belongs to ours. But often we have things bequeathed to us, left in their will and in the last couple of years we had three or four low-value paintings that have been left for the friends and charity because they were not relevant for our collection because they **are not Cornish**: there was nothing Cornish about them. Indicated this, I will contact the estate to see whether we can sale the paintings and then the proceeds of the paintings are going to our acquisition budget*

Okay. So when you have proceeds from deaccessioned or sold work of art, it's only for like your acquisition costs.

*Yes it's only for acquisition budget to buy something to add to our collections.*

Okay. Perfect. And may be finally in a more like 'opinion question', do you think that maybe bigger museums should practice more or less deaccessioning in the sense of selling items?

*Hum... I don't really agree with selling items. But there have been some cases in Great Britain the last few years where you can understand both sides of the arguments because if you've*

***got a painting that is worth a million pounds but your building is falling apart around it, then you can't look after that painting in this building but if you sell the painting to renovate the building then what the people will come to see: a new building that no longer has a painting in it.***

Yes...

*It's really a tricky one. But I still disagree with selling.*

Okay. Perfect. Then I've quite finished with the more interview questions. I don't know if you had anything to add?

*Hum... No for me the difficulty is knowing whether you're talking about disposal or deaccessioning or transfer but transfer is deaccessioning even if it's transferred to another museum because it's relevant for them. But if I don't have a museum in mind that it would be relevant to I would probably get contact with the museum directly and engage with them through the whole deaccessioning procedure. And as I said there are also unaccessioned items so that are never accessioned, or sometimes people bring things in to us and say "I don't want this, can you do something with this?" And we'll say "we'll pass it on to a relevant museum", we will look at where is the best place but it's not technically out anyway. Disposal... I would only dispose if it was in too bad state to repair, if it couldn't be conserved.*

It's interesting to see the more I search for deaccessioning issues and challenges and this is a tricky question and it has also many aspects and you raise some extra questions and interesting ones like okay transfer is also a way to maybe consider deaccessioned items but in a more maybe intelligent way in the sense that you say okay if we use the proceeds from deaccessioning to renovate buildings but then we have nothing to show anymore okay what is the balance? And preserving like the public character, the visitability of the paintings by transferring them may be one of the solutions to that phenomena of deaccessioning so that's really interesting.

*Something I didn't say, it's probably not relevant to you but, pretty much every museum in the UK has the same kind of domestic items, they've all got sewing machine, or this or that and you know there are some of those things that I know will never come in my museum because it's not relevant and anyone else could get one. But with deaccessioning if all museums thought that way, then in twenty-year' time you might discover that no museums have those things anymore and they're really rare and unique. So it's not that simple to think that one other museum will take care of it and you get rid of yours.*

Absolutely. Well, thank you very much for your time.

*You're welcome, no problem.*

I would like to know if you agree with that use our interview for some additional information in my thesis, if I can take a written form out of it and if you agree I will sent you a consent form by email and you can send it to me by a scan or something ?

*Yeah, okay.*

Perfect. Then in my email I will transfer you the link for the survey online, the mail to forward it to your colleagues and other people in other museums and finally the consent form.

*Okay. And when is the deadline for the survey, when you need it back right?*

I will let the survey open for three weeks.

*Right.*

And so I will let two weeks and then send a reminder to all.

*Yes, and then another one and then another one!*

Yes!

*And what rate do you expect, for the survey, the responses?*

I hope to get like one hundred and fifty answers to the survey.

*Right. And how many have you sent now?*

So I sent it to other museums in UK, more, some bigger, some smaller and I also count on people like you that offered me to like transfer it to other people they know in other museums and that's how it will work, hopefully!

Yes

And I will also send you the results of my thesis by Mid-July approximately.

*Great!*

So I also have mentioned that in the survey so people can see that there is actually something taken what they took the time to do.

*Yes, brilliant!*

Perfect. Thank you so much for you time and I will send you an email with all the stuff.

*Perfect, I was happy to speak to you and good luck for the rest of it!*

Thank you very much!

*By-bye*

Bye

## Interview 2: Diane Gwilt

*Keeper of Collections services for the National Museum Wales*

Hello

*Hi. How are you?*

Fine, thank you, and you?

*Very fine.*

So I'm doing my thesis about deaccessioning practices in UK museums and I interview some people in addition to the online survey as to get some deeper insights on specific issues and points that cannot be treated in the survey. So if you agree we can start the interview and you can send me the consent form once you filled it in?

*Okay. That's lovely.*

Perfect. Thank you very much. Okay, so first I have some introductory questions. I know that you are in the curatorial department of the museum but what is your role exactly in the museum?

*Okay. My role in the museum is... My exact title is keeper of collections services and I'm responsible for acquisitions, collection management, including documentation and photographic services, and intellectual copyrights and for the whole National Museum Wales which is seven museums in one storage.*

Yeah, okay.

*So that's my job.*

Okay. Perfect. And what is your background?

*My background is I'm a conservator by training.*

So you did some art history classes?

*I did archeological conservation, that's my background.*

Okay. And can you tell me when was founded maybe then one of the museums, the art museum of Wales?

*The national museum of Wales was founded in 1907 and it had a royal charter that's mean that basically it's composed as a national museum. And if you look on the national museum of Wales website, you're able to find the documents about it.*

Yeah. Okay perfect. So then this is a public-owned organization – *Yeah* –, okay, and nowadays how the organizational structure of the museum looks like?

*Well it's quite a big organization. But essentially there is a director general, besides the chief executive, and he is supported by a board by five, wait a minute, let's get this right, by four other directors and then underneath them, there are the others departments and then it stands like that.*

Okay. And so you have... Your own job is for all the museums?

*My own job, yes.*

Yes. And are there other jobs that also count for the different museums?

*Well, there are some jobs for example with conservation jobs and curatorial jobs and jobs working directly with collections like that are... tend to be managed in the two larger museums*

*and operate across the whole, the rest of the organizations. So in the National museum Wales there are two very large organiz...museums which are the National Museum in Cardiff and... excuse me... the National History Museum and then all the other organizations are a lot smaller whereas this museum I speak to you from today is about three-hundred staff and the other employs about a hundred-fifty staff and all the remaining staff, some of them have thirty staff some have twelve staff so it's not the same scale. So the smaller museums, the focus is much more on opening to the public and having exhibitions, doing a lot of front-of-house activities, so run event programs, rather than having the kind of expertise on each type that has to do specifically with the collections sections with no curator themselves so we centralize everything. Does that make sense?*

Yes, absolutely.

*Yeah, good!*

Thank you very much. Then a question that is more focused on my subject research: does your museum then maybe the biggest ones do deaccessioning?

*Hum. **Deaccessioning is done by individual curatorial departments but there are rare**; in the museums there are no departments... There's the department of natural sciences, then there is the department for social history and archaeology which includes industry so items are collected by individual curators in each department and decisions to accession things are made in that, are generally made at a departmental level and then if there is something we intend to purchase, then that generally depends on how much it is but once you get to a certain value the decisions are made at a corporate, organization-wide level. But a lot of accessioning, a lot of our collection grows from either seized work for archeology or national park collections or through donations for the natural history and industry collections. So collections are generally managed on a departmental level **but when things cost many tens of thousands of... then it would be made differently. So the departments have a sort of delegated authority for taking up works up to a certain value**, all the management part also but once you get higher than that value, it's managed at a different level.*

Okay. And is it the same for the disposal and the sale of items?

*Well the process for disposing of art, **departments will make recommendations about items for disposal but also, regardless of their value, it has to be approved by the board of trustees.** Our board of trustees meet three times, hum sorry four times a year and during those meetings we are able to submit any items that we wish to dispose. We don't dispose of items very often. **Actually I must say we are much better at acquiring things than we are at dispose things** and generally when we dispose things we do it through other accredited museums and then some of our industry collection which are large stuff, we have disposed some to railway society, specially trust groups but we very rarely have disposed anything through sale.*

Yes. And when it happens, do you follow like specific guidelines to...?

*Yes. Yes, we follow the **Museums association's guidelines** for disposal so, and **a notice is placed in the Museum Journal** and so it's really tight and to see whether anyone would be interested in it. I would only present for the trustees to approve once they got through the processes.*

Okay. So the deaccessioning decisions, you propose a list of items that should be disposed and the trustees look at it and decide, hmm – *Yeah* – but is it taken more on a case by case basis or according to previous deaccessions or specific criteria for example relevance of the item or maybe it's too damaged or maybe you think of other museums that it could be good for to have it?

Generally it's a **case by case basis** – Okay – and things, because things have become dangerous so for example large items we would like to dispose of because it has become too difficult to keep, hum but I mean, **we dispose a handful of items each year**, I mean... We very rarely dispose. I've worked for the museum since twenty years and I have only a single instance of when we actually deaccessioned something, a large collection of material which was from botanical section that could be dragged up as drug. We transferred those to the National Botanic Garden in Scotland. **If we'd kept them, we would have need to get license to hold them so it was more efficient to offer them somewhere else** with a bigger collection and where they could be nicer shown but essentially we always take case-by-case basis. We never had in the last twenty years or so any major programs where we've got "Right, we're going to die down our industry collection and you know make strategic decisions of what we're going to keep and what we're not going to keep.

And having said that, we are in the process of **rewriting our development collection strategy** for the moment so it's possible that some changes might happen and the other thing that is happening in Wales, developing in Wales, is the idea of Collection Wales which is developing distributed national collections so if you look at, for example, national science collections where there is no curatorial expertise in any local museums in Wales any longer what you do is you look at how you use the expertise to the national museums to find that, to establish that there are other collections that could manage it more strategically for all the Wales and so that kind of thing might lead to some disposal as well even if the purpose is not disposal but around try to reinforce the value and consistence of both collections so that it become a useful resource.

Okay. Perfect. And so when you deaccession items, it's for other museums.

Yes, to other museums, yeah.

Okay. And you don't get any proceeds of them?

No.

Okay. And so you say that the board of trustees meet four times a year?

That's right yes

Then the process of deaccessioning, I mean, in the average, the time spent on the deaccessioning of for example one item does it take one year then or ...

Hum it takes a long time, I'd say it takes a minimum of twelve months from the curatorial decision to deaccession something, also looking to disposing of something to pass through all channels, also advertise... So I would say **on average probably about a year**. Then another issue that quite often happens, if you go through the process of actually deaccession an item, but then for it to actually leave the building, I mean we have industrial collection, a lot of industrial items for which we started a deaccessioning process but actually we still got them for three years in our line. So deaccessioning is on paper, but actually getting rid of it is a totally different matter.

Okay. Perfect. Hmm, I think I have everything that I needed.

Okay.

I don't know if you have anything to add about deaccessioning in general or I don't know if you have anything to add to it?

Well I think that deaccessioning is seen as being a sort of... **I think a lot of people still regard deaccessioning as really bad thing to do but I think deaccessioning is a critical part of a kind of an active collection management policy**. We don't know... Things can change overtime and every organization should periodically review their trust and their activities and what they want



to achieve and how they want to achieve it. So I think deaccessioning should be seen as a positive element of collections' management rather than as a negative element of collections' management. **I think the issue in the UK though is coming that because of the way the government is managing budget and make some cuts and things.** We're in a position where we have a certain number of museums to which you can actually offer stuff because all museums, museums public, because museums are all under pressure to save money and in fact quite a lot of museums certainly will ration stuff but they just don't collection them longer so even if we had some staff that's pretty good in collection policy and that we were able to take care of, but that we think it would be much better if you had them they actually wouldn't have any, they wouldn't be able to have the money to taking on those collections. So I think deaccessioning by rotating collections around museums is getting increasingly difficult because local authorities in particular are trying, they don't want collections so actually at the moment Wales is certainly a collections' country but has extraordinary number of museums but the risk is that a lot of organizations might start looking at the National Museum Wales and actually try to transfer their collections to us even if they're not strictly part of our collection realm. But because we're directly funded by the government we find ourselves coming under pressure to actually not say no when people would want to move or transfer things to us. It can be harder and harder for deaccessioning things because. We would be obliged to dispose of them because there is nowhere else where we can put them or I guess we could offer them to several, to private collectors but you know there are a lot of things around that and a lot of things we would not have funds anyway so to that is for one sort... The other sort is that, I know this is why you study, it's selling collections. There are a lot of issues, financial issues about those disposals. I think it has to come down what's the outcome of that: what happens to the money that you raised? I used to be a member of the Arts Council's Accreditation panel. At the time the Art Council and the Museums Association were doing their work around financially-motivated disposals and I actually chaired quite a high number of meetings where we were looking at specific financially-motivated disposals so disposals for financial reasons and in general, we found the proposals not particularly well sorted out in the sense how the money raised would be used and the remaining assets of the organization.

There is one example where actually **proceeds from the sale were going to be injected in the storage for the remaining items and that's what we did so that's a positive outcome. Again, some people would be like "Oh my god, you can't possibly do that"** but I think there can be limited cases where actually **it can be a very positive thing** according to how you handle it, you manage it. **But whatever you do, never destroy the trust of the public because the museum relies on that trust in order to happen.** That's an interesting debate and I think in the UK with all the budget problems of public museums, there is a massive debate of museums been put under pressure to sell their collection but interestingly that has never happened. So when museums are under pressure are closing and that's it. Local authorities have recognized that they have a duty of care to look after and save jobs, selling at loss, or something.

This is really really interesting. I think there is of course a lot of ethics behind the problem of deaccessioning.

Yes

And also the question of what it is the best to like exhibit only a certain percentage of the collection or maybe to deaccession them and being able to best manage the rest in a sense.

*That's right, yeah*

So yes, it's really an interesting issue that is a bit under look by researchers at that time so I'm really glad to be able to do research on it, it's really challenging because it is a lot of aspects, law, ethics, and then public opinion in a sense because the press is also doing a big part of all

the debates around deaccessioning so, yes, I think it's really insightful what you just shared with me.

*Oh thank you! Well I think it was also very interesting and if you want to email me anyway, if you want to email me or speak to me again then just send me an email and we can arrange another talk.*

Perfect! Thank you very much!

*That's okay! Good luck with your research!*

Thank you very much, have a good day!

*Thank you! By bye!*

Bye!

### Interview 3: Michael McGinnes

*Collections Manager at the Smith Art Gallery and Museum (Stirling, Scotland)*

Hi! Good morning! I don't know if you have seen, I just sent you a consent form for the interview?

*Yes I got it. Do you want me to print it out, scan it and then send it back?*

Yes, if you can sign it, this would be perfect.

*Okay I will do that*

Yes, perfect. Great. So, if it's okay for you, I have some questions about you and deaccessioning practices and regulations in UK and in your museum?

*Yes no problem*

Okay perfect. So, first I know that you are collection manager but what is your role in the museum?

*Well we have only two professional staff, the administrator direct all the sort of administrative, political, money issues and I look after the building and all the collections.*

Okay.

*It's not just, I'm not just the collection manager.*

Okay.

*So essentially we all have to do lots of different jobs. I also manage the exhibition and I have to do with computer stuff since we are an extremely small number of people.*

Yes, okay. And your background is more in history or is it also with some management or?

*No my degree is geology and I'm a geologist by training but I've been here 37 and a half year so I've learned all the other subjects only by experience. So again when you work in a small museum you just have to do other things.*

Yes, okay. And when was founded the museum?

*1874.*

Okay. And is it a public or a private-founded museum?

*It's a private trust which is funded by the local authority so we are in between but we do have, we have a trust board of sixteen which includes four councilors from the local authority, and therefore it's part of the public.*

Okay. And so you mentioned two main like important people in your staff, how the organizational structure of the museum looks like? So you are in charge of the collection, all the building management and then there is another person in charge of...

*So the director is in charge of everything but she tends to deal with all despicable matters: legal and management issues of the house. She's the person who works with the trust.*

Okay.

*And under that, we also have an administrator who deals with all the mostly assist the director but also all the online resources. He does this with Twitter, all the website.*

Okay.

Okay. And so you mention in your email that your museum doesn't really do deaccessioning *per se*, more like disposal of items when it's for example damaged or stuff like that, and do you know when it started? Is it a long time ago, since the beginning of the museum because you mention...

*Oh yeah yeah... I've deaccessioned items in the past because essentially they're weren't here, they simply disappeared, they've been destroyed for one reason or another and then there is the story of the book stolen from that library in England...*

Yes

*And accessioned a year, we had to deaccession it through all the procedures because it was part of our collection so far and it was not just destroyed so we had to do all the procedure of deaccessioning and eventually turn it back to a library in England from which it came. It was quite an important book because it was signed by Darwin. So it was quite important that it came back from where it came from.*

This is really an amazing story I think.

*Yeah... So that's the sort of thing... Because we don't have a huge collection and we don't need to deaccession a lot of it is about Stirling or Stirling area or about people from Stirling. So we don't really have works here that are not directly related to Stirling or at least Scotland. So we don't have need to really deaccession things at the moment because there is simply not a real need to do so.*

Okay. And when you need to, you are in charge of deaccessioning issues and like procedure or is it also the board involved?

*Yes all has to go to the board. **It will go through the director, then to the board when an item needs to be deaccessioned and then we have a set of procedures that we must follow because of accreditation in the UK** which means we have several standards we must follow so we have to follow that procedure about offering the object to another registered or accredited museum and conserving another home in a public institution and it's only in very last resort that we sell things. It's always possible... **If we had to deal with financial cuts that would be a different situation** but for the moment, we don't know about that so...*

Okay, and so if you had to, you'd be following then national guidelines like the Museum association guidelines – Yes, and you also have your own museum collection and acquisition policy?

*Yes, we do, yes.*

So it's like a mix of all those sources to respect procedures and stuff like that.

*Yes, yes, but all that is acquired, for collecting, and for uncollecting so to speak. That's all in place.*

And so when you have to dispose of one item, you take always decision on a case by case basis or is there a like previous deaccession that comes into account?

*No, it's always a case by case basis.*

Okay.

*For either reason, it was done at one time.*

Yes.

And does it take a long time like when you decide “Okay, I think, or maybe a curator thinks that this item needs to be deaccessioned”, then it has to pass in front of the trust board and then the management; how long does it take in average?

*It's not too bad. **It depends on the trust board meetings. They meet every 6 to 8 weeks** so once we've put it on the agenda it wouldn't take too long. It will depend on the reason. I mean, we had to deaccession taxidermist specimens which were in a very bad state.*

Okay.

*But because **most of taxidermist specimens were pretty damaged we had to dispose them** so technically we had to get rid of them. So to dispose them, I actually had to spend six months negotiating with the local authorities over disposal procedures and we had to get testing dozens of them and to find out if there were poisons which of them was. And so they had to decide where to dispose those waste. So once you've done with all that, it goes to the board but they know it had to go and we had to be very careful of ethical consideration because we didn't want the public to see us as disposing them. **Because the public always sees the wrong idea when you're doing something. So it had to be done in secret in that sense.** But the specimens had to be destroyed, without anybody knowing that we've done it because otherwise they would just have been negative and as a matter of fact the specimens hadn't be seen for fifty years anyway and they were actually quite in just, they were in very very bad conditions. Still, we still had to be aware of public opinion.*

Yes

*If not, you're going to be involved in another 6 months where you explain why you're doing this so it was all done through authority and collection could be disposed of. But that sort of things is sort of odd. It's not the agreement of the trust, when we do one meeting.*

Okay

*Because obviously the objects were in such a poor state that it was simply not feasible anymore.*

So most of the times when you deaccession items, it's because of their bad condition, but in the case this is done for another reason does it go to other museums or like private people or?

***It never goes to private people, never. We're not allowed to because the objects were given to us in trust** so we're looking after and we're holding them. So we cannot give them off to private people because that would not be what the donors wanted: they want it in a public institution. So we then cannot hand in them over to a private person. This is something not acceptable. And you have to check, **you have to keep them in public-owned trust, preferably in another registered museum.** Then you may open it to other institution, which means it can be a private museum but falling under the condition that it would never sell it for a private acceptor. You've to have an agreement but you never ever go to a private individual unless you've got to the point that you had no other solution than to sell it. But the money you get from that we have to put it back in the collection again.*

Okay.

*Yeah but we've never been in the situation, we've never done that. We had nothing to take... we want to get rid of, that's worth anything.*

Yeah. Okay!

*But also we don't have many pieces of high value... The national museums yes they have incredibly expensive objects but local museums tend to have objects that are incredibly historically important, that wouldn't necessarily have a big financial value.*

Yeah. Okay and your opinion should museums in general practice more deaccessioning because we know that, for example, in average, for the biggest museum only ten percent of the collection is actually exhibited and there is a big percentage of collection's items that are in storage, so **would you think deaccessioning represents a good solution for this issue or maybe not?**

*No, absolutely not. This is completely the wrong idea. You shouldn't sell to have dedicated resources. You'll never keep twenty books on library shelves but sell the rest of them off, because the twenty books is all we need to know. And following that, you never know what you're going to put on display and a lot of the collections are not collected for public displays. They're here for scientific research or for historical research. And they're not objects that make good public displays items, particular coins, small items, things like jewellery, some items of textiles that you can never put on display because they're too fragile. But you'll never get rid of them because they're so important. You cannot tell now what is going to be important in the future and research to be done on it. That's why the collection policy to try stop collecting for the sake of collecting because then you have problems. Humans like to collection things they like and that's worth for museum curators as well. So if you're trying to stop that, then the items collected will be really important to the museum, they would be collected either for display purposes or for scientific or social research.*

Yes.

*So you have completely the wrong idea. Deaccessioning has nothing to do with that. Deaccessioning is the last method when you have no choice...*

*Or if you have one situation where something is completely inappropriate recorded in the book, that do not need to be in your museum because it has nothing to do with your collection and look a better place for it and so your transfer to the better place, a place that makes more sense. **But simply to just, the number of objects, to just see the percentage, it's really pointless.***

Okay.

*Because a lot of objects, you never display because they simply don't lend themselves to display, they're collections to be studied not to be displayed. So the British Museum got twenty five million items. But you'll never tell the British Museum to fling their collection on because it represent the most ancient coin collection in the world. And you couldn't say it's sparing storage because it's so tiny and you just destroy main scientific knowledge in doing so. **So my advice is that there is no part of the collection you get rid of that would make your collection poorer in a long way. You can only target certain things that would be better somewhere else** or if you get in such financial situation that you have to downside the building, you have to get smaller store. In that situation it might be possible to look at the things that we could transfer somewhere else but wouldn't be lost to the public. You could decide that some pieces would be better in a National Britannica Collection so it might apply to some pieces but...*

*It depends on... Every collection is different and some collections have got gigantic objects, industrial collections, other museums have got lots of very very small objects and to save any space, you should get rid of most of the collection so it doesn't make any sense.*

Okay. It's really insightful, thank you very much. For me, I have finished with the questions I wanted to ask; I don't know if you have anything to add but I think you said plenty of interesting things about deaccessioning and conditions, context...

*I mean, I think that nowadays collections might be in stored space but I am a big believer of... Museums have got a big role to play in society because the objects are real. They're not virtual, they're not in the internet but real things.*

Yeah

*And human psyche needs real objects, ones on the internet don't work, don't function. There's nothing better than being worth it. The real objects are really really important... Having said that, sometimes you have no choice and with modern technology we can now show almost the entirety of the collection, if it's all photographed, digitized. We can show that, so the fact that this is in store doesn't really matter. Here, we have about eight thousands images, all types, not just photographic content but those objects are important for the content, not for the object itself so... the content is essential. And that content can be made worldwide available.*

*And there is many parts of the collection you can do that with, that you would never displayed like coins... There are almost invisible but digitally you can show the beauty of it. But this does not mean that we don't need to see that object, at one point you need the real object. So that's why museums are so important: it's the object side of it, it's the emotional... We have international connections with emotions. Museums try to excite people to their personal emotions. And this come when you see something that you've always wanted to see, always wanted to hold. So that's what we do. We try to get people as close to museums' objects as we can. So we try to that as much as we can. And we also try to be as much online as we can: on Facebook, we try to get people in the community. **Our big problem is we need to do research on the collections, we have those collections stating there but we've never had the resources to get them into good order and to research them and to put them on display. So the big problem is often not that you don't have enough space to put them on display, this is more that collections are not on a state to go on display or you don't have done enough research to make them exciting.***

***With deaccessioning, you just lost that.** I don't know if you know Stirling Castle and you have the Stirling Heads, - Yeah -, which are medieval wooden panels done by Flemish, French and Scottish carpenters, woodcarvers, probably it's a better word. They were here in this museum. People gave pennies to this museum and the museum bought these. They were here but in the 1960's, the local, the museum here was struggling, he had no money, buildings were in a very poor state and the trustees – a lawyer, a counsellor, - decided that the curator was not able to look after these objects so gave them away. 50 heads, each one is now worth between 1 and 4 million pounds.*

This is crazy...

*That's what happens when you give collections away. Before you think about... Because there's no feeling for history and no understanding of what museums were, they give away the absolute essence of a museum and there is no way to do so because they were bought by people of Stirling for museum, not for the local authority. **So that's the problem with deaccessioning. You can give away the entire soul of your museum and destroy your museum in the process.***

Yeah, it's really insightful all you say, and very interesting for me to research because there are so much debate.

*If you want I mean if you want to talk to other curators in Scotland, the best thing to do is to contact Edinburgh to the Museums and Gallery Scotland.*

Okay.

*Museums and Gallery Scotland it is called. It's a kind of lead body in Scotland.*

Okay.

*And just say what you are doing. Say that you've already done that with me.*

Okay

*And I tend to suggest, I mean Glasgow museum is probably one of the better ones to do because they have done work with the Blackfoot objects in Canada about repatriation. Because the law in England and Scotland is different. In England, they cannot legally give away collections, in Scotland we can so we can repatriate objects in certain conditions if the conditions are beneficial to the museum. So we can give back objects to other cultures as long as we get something back in return. So because of the trust, you mustn't lose. So you have to get something in return, objects that are important but not as important as the objects that was going back.*

Okay.

*In England, you cannot do that. That's why they cannot give back the Elgin Marbles because they're legally forbidden to do so which people in the press do not get. It's difficult, legally, for them to do so. And that would be breaking the law if they'd do that. So that's all issues of repatriation because you're also giving away your history by doing so. I mean, Stirling was a military city and a lot of collections come from the war. And we wouldn't want to get rid of that objects because they tell stories of people here and people there. So I'm not a strong believer of returning things to return them.*

Yeah

*And the Blackfoot in Glasgow, politically, they were forced into it... I'm not a big fan of giving back things just for the principle but when it was stolen, it's obviously... it's important...*

Well, thank you very much for your time and I will contact the Edinburgh Museums and Gallery in Scotland, this is the name of the organisation, correct?

*Museum Gallery Scotland, that's a sort of government body that looks after museums in Scotland.*

Okay!

*They should be able to give you the email addresses of the curators to go to. They should be able to put you in contact with four or five Scottish curators who have done deaccessioning.*

Oh that's perfect. Okay, well, thank you very much for the advice, thank you again for your time and I will let you know the results when it's completed!

Okay

Perfect.

*Bye, thank you.*

Bye, thank you.



## Interview 4: Ian Jones

*Museum Officer at the Oriel Ynis Môn (Isle of Anglesey, Wales)*

*Hello!*

Yeah, hello Mister Jones? This is Anne-Catherine Denies.

*Hello how are you?*

Fine thank you, and you?

*Yes very good, thank you! So how is the weather in Rotterdam, is it a nice day over there?*

Oh no, oh no, it's terribly rainy... Okay, well, thank you very much for your time.

*It's okay, anything to help!*

So I have a little interview guide here with some introductory questions and some specific questions about deaccessioning...

*Okay*

So the first question is what is your role exactly in the museum? So I know you're a museum officer but what is like the activities you do?

*Okay, I'm responsible for the collections for the museum.*

Yeah...

*And that means things like accessioning collections, cataloguing, organizing the stores, and it also extends to display as well. I'm involved with putting together the temporary exhibitions.*

Okay. And so your museum is a small or big organization?

*So, we are a very small organization. It is one building and this is ran by the local authorities, the local council. And because it is so small, I have to be with all the collections from the fine art to the archaeology to the social history collections as well. So there's no separated department here.*

Yes, but you have different kinds of specialties I would say?

*Well, yeah. My specialities is dealing with the arts collection, works on paper, mostly.*

Okay. And your background is in art history or?

*Well my background is in environmental studies.*

Okay.

*Since I've been working in the museum, I did museum studies, a master's at university of Leicester. So that's my academic background. So I'm very keen in the art and history side, drawing and that sorts of thing, that's where I come from.*

And you've been working in your museum since a long time?

*Since 1998.*

Yes. Okay. So you have a clear overview of what happened in the last past years. Okay, great. And the museum, when was founded your museum?

*In 1991.*

Okay. And was it founded... So it's public-owned, I guess, since it's ran by the Council?

*Yeah yeah*

And you said it's a small structure so you are in charge of the collection, and then there is like maybe another person in charge of more the business administrative matters I guess? Or?

*Yes, that's correct, yes.*

Okay. And how does it work in practice I mean when you have to set up an exhibition: are you the only person in charge or is it decided with the board or

*We have a small exhibitions' team.*

Yeah

*So that's three or four of us that gather and discuss exhibitions*

Okay.

*And we choose items from the collection and you know this takes a few months because you have to prepare things for display and all the marketing, so that's how it works here.*

Yes! And you have to get the agreement of the business side of the museum? I guess?

*In what sense? What do you mean then?*

Like when your exhibition team comes up with like an idea of okay we would like to put those items together and to do an exhibition that would cover this subject, do you have to have the agreement of the director or business or maybe marketing people more?

*Did you say purchase?*

No no just for exhibitions...

*Yeah, it's mostly it's the, you know, a year or two in advance, except if there's a special event, a celebration or something... So at the moment for example, we're working on our next exhibition that will be opening in July.*

Okay.

*We had some government funds for that. We have a couple of in-house exhibitions as well and based on certain local artists and we got an ever-changing program of exhibitions and we try to use as much as our collections as possible. We do sometimes grow and loan objects from the institutions, or from private individuals. But it tends to be expensive because there are all the transfer costs and the organizing.*

Yes, and also the assurances I guess?

*Well, most of it is covered. At the moment we have an exhibition of an artist called John Piper.*

Yes.

*And it's from the National museum of Wales and it's a big grant, a National Lottery Grant exhibition and the insurances is covered by government indemnity. So we're a venue for that exhibition.*

Okay. That's great, okay. And so does your museum sometimes do deaccessioning because of items are too damaged or because I guess as it's a very diverse collection, you say that you are putting together items for temporary exhibitions and to make it more maybe coherent in a sense and does your museum have ever practiced deaccessioning for too damaged objects or maybe to transfer it to museums that will be more relevant?

***Because the collection is relatively new, we have it very tight. Yeah, there has not been a lot of dust that has been collected over the decades without provenance. The collection is all well provenanced and it has been collected, the collecting policy has been used quite effectively.***

Yes, this is really interesting because all the other people I had the chance to interview until now are more from older museum in a sense...

*All right, okay, yes.*

And so it's interesting to see that, given that your museum is younger in a sense, it has more adopted all the acquisition policies that are quite recent actually.

*Yes. Yeah, that's true, yes.*

Yes, it's really interesting. And when you have like to maybe reflect about deaccessioning, do you have specific policies or guidelines or do you follow the ones provided by the National Museums association or other bodies?

*We would consult, in Wales, we got an organization called MALD, it's Museums Archives and Libraries Division of the Wales Government. So we would take advice from them.*

Okay. Yes I see.

*Yes, because deaccessioning is a very risky thing to do, isn't it?*

Yes absolutely, it's really interesting to have opinions of museum professionals because there are more and more policies that come out and say, "Okay, let's do deaccessioning for the improvement of the collection management" – *Yeah yeah* – but still it remains very tricky and very delicate because of the items which are works of art or history items and that are really also important for study purpose so it's really interesting to get the opinions of people working in museums for years, for me it's really interesting because I have a background both in art history and in management.

*Okay, good*

So I also can like get the opinions of both parties in a sense.

*Yes, yes*

And I think it's really interesting yeah to get those people and those opinions together and to see how do... how can we do the best for the works of art and the works that are testimony the history and the civilization of countries and regions and it's really interesting.

*Yeah oh good, yeah... But one issue we have had here being a local authority and budgets are being cut seriously, they've been going down from the government, isn't it, budget cuts, and this has hit the museum, and this has hit it quite badly **and there are certain councillors within the Council who are not museum people, there are not people with a cultural background and they want to sell some of the art collection to raise funds for public services.** So it's a really tricky situation over there in the recent years of budget cut.*

Yes. And did your museum was particularly concerned with those willing to sell items?

***We're totally against it. Our job is to protect them and to keep them for the future so... So far we've been able to put away any fears, you know, put them of.***

So you were never forced to deaccession or sale item?

*No. A lots of the items in the collection, especially the fine art collection has been purchased with grant money from the, back in 1981, the local authority purchased a massive collection of works by Charles Tunnicliffe and it was funded mostly by the Victoria & Albert purchase fund.*

*And parts of the... And the stipulation for the grant's money was that it was never to be sold and if so, then they would want money back, if you understand?*

Yes, absolutely.

*Yeah.*

And did you also have maybe donors or bequests from people?

*Yes, yes, many.*

So I guess that this is the same problem if there's deaccessioning then it might be problematic you think, or ethically not fair for donors and...

*No no, totally unethical. And recently, people who have donated items, the threats from certain individuals to sell items..., that **they actually stipulate in the paper that the item is never to be sold and is to remain in public ownership.***

Okay. So you have contracts when people donate items – *Oh yes, yes* – that prevent the item to be deaccessioned or sold in the future?

*Well, it would never be considered a thing... We have museum documentation, the main document is the accession form which is basically a transfer of ownership from an individual or an organization to the local authority so the museum service so, as this is a transfer of ownership, people are always worried and they want to remain the donation part of the museum collection. And that happens during the accessioning process.*

Okay.

*Yeah. Does that make sense to you?*

Yes absolutely. I was wondering since the collection is pretty recent as you said, have there been cases where items are maybe too old or damaged and you have to put them either on storage or to dispose them ?

*Hmmm we've been lucky, there are one or two works on paper that were in pretty bad condition and luckily these ones have been sent away for conservation. So that's always... **So we have the collections assessed every year or so and everything that is in vital need of conservation we will send them for conserving.***

Yes.

*It's mostly when items are requested for exhibitions so people decide and until they are required... because we work months in advance with our program being conservation into the project.*

Yes. And do you have like your own conservation team or does it work with the council that, I don't know, has for each museum, there is a certain number or a budget for conservation or?

*Well, we have a care collection budget. And we use external conservators to work on the collection.*

Okay. Perfect.

*Yeah.*

Hmmm. For me I asked what I had to ask, but I don't know if you have anything to add about deaccessioning and the fact that there are this policy willingness to sort of encouraging in a sense deaccessioning to get proceeds and to cope with those decreasing funds from the government, from the local authorities?

*Yeah*

And this is of course a very problematic issue for museum professionals that hear that and I don't know if you have anything to add about this issue?

*Yeah... One thing that I see in museums in Britain, items that are sold and deaccessioned are mostly to raise funds for those projects and their museum accreditations is then at risk. So sometimes, the Museums Association will withdraw its accreditation status because of deaccessioning.*

Yes, I heard some cases like in The Museum Journal notably of those museums that lost their statues from the association and I was wondering... So this accreditation, what does it offer for the museum besides in prestige and recognition; do you have a specific help from the association for some particular points?

*Yes. Umm, deaccessioning process is controlled by... ultimately by the English Arts Council and in Wales it's governed by MALD of the Welsh government, so it's a highly recognized status so it means that we are fully supported by MALD. And also it allows you to go on for a number of grants available.*

Okay.

*So once it's accessioned, it's a very high... It's the highest status you can get outside of a national museum in Britain.*

Okay. So besides the prestige and the recognition you also have the possibility to apply for specific grants and supports.

Yes

Okay

*Grants for projects and for trainings.*

Okay

Yeah

Okay, great.

*And also it allows us, here in Anglesey, because Anglesey is very rural and a very big distance away from Cardiff and London, having full accreditation and security and a full specification. It allows us to approach regional institutions from all over Britain to loan works.*

Okay, that's it. It's like being part of a network...

*Yeah, correct. Yes. And a couple of years ago, we had a large Venice exhibition, we had Canaletto paintings here and a painting by Monet, and great Venetian artists so it allows Anglesey to show works that would never be shown here otherwise.*

Yeah Okay. This is very insightful, it's very interesting.

*Yes, it brings national collections to people from Anglesey.*

Yeah.

*Yeah. Not only art but major archaeology as well.*

Absolutely. Okay. Great. Umm, well thank you very much for your time, it's really helpful for me to contextualize a bit more the results of the survey and I just sent you a consent form on your email address.

*Yeah it just has come through.*

And if you can complete it for, a couple of days it's okay, I don't need it right now because I only submit my thesis in a couple of weeks but it's really nice to have some extra context from museum professionals and to be able to understand better what is behind those accreditation, deaccessioning and opinions it's really nice. Thank you very much.

*That was good!*

Thank you very much!

*Do I sign this form and send you a PDF back?*

Yes, it would be great if you can do that!

*Okay no problem... All the best with your research!*

Thank you very much! And I will of course share the results once I get it!

*Oh, fantastic I look forward!*

Thank you very much, have a nice day!

*You're welcome, okay!*

Bye

*Bye bye!*

## Interview 5: Ed Bartholomew

*Senior curator at the National Railway Museum (York, England)*

Yeah, hello, this is Anne-Catherine Denies.

*Hello, how are you?*

Fine, and you?

*Okay, thank you, yeah. So you have some questions?*

Yeah, absolutely. I have a couple of questions in my interview guide and yeah if it's okay I can just ask and then we can discuss about deaccessioning a bit more and disposals.

*Okay.*

Perfect. So my first question is more like introductory: what is your role in the museum and what is your background?

*Okay. Hmm So I'm senior curator with responsibility for significant proportion of the collections, not all of them but it cover all objects which aren't vehicles. We have a separate curator that looks after vehicle collection. And also the image collection, so we have a large photographic collections, large poster collections and painting collections. So I've worked in museums for about over thirty years and I've been in the National railway museum for over than twenty years.*

Okay. And at first you were like more into industry or more into like art curating or?

*Yeah originally I've worked in different kinds of museums. I've worked within two military museums previously and initially in the education side actually and moved into being a curator, particularly in image collections actually then that grows quite beyond one way or another and I've sometimes responsibility for most of the collections here, except for the art collection personally.*

Okay, great. Then do you know when was founded the museum and was it founded as a private or a public-owned institution?

*So, the museum was founded in 1975. We're part of the Science museums' group so it's a spin-off from the science museum which has his origins just over a hundred years ago so it was founded in 1975. So first the national museum it wasn't located in London and you probably know this kind of things, but the last couple of years, there has been this trend not to have all the museums in the capital city.*

Yes

*But also, although this museum only began in 1975, there was another railway museum in York prior to that. We ended up taking over those collections which were originally owned by the railway. So we have a status of national museum so it's a state museum but in 1980's in Britain there was an act, a couples of acts of parliament specifically related to certain museums that rather than having direct control through government department, they would give us trustees and governing bodies as to make the decisions. So the board of trustees...*

Yes

*But, that said, the money still comes from, in the UK, it's called the Department of Culture, Media and Sports. So we're still tiny bind, government-funded.*

Okay. And so you are in charge of the major part of the collection and for the business administration side and for the collection side who makes like the fundamental decisions in particular when it comes to like disposal or deaccessioning of items?

*Okay. So what we do, individual curators can make a decision but the way we work here... It may be remind shortly but the way we work here, and in the other museums of our group is we are a collections' group. So that group is composed primarily of curators but there are other staff as well such as exhibition curators as well as people that work with collection areas.*

Yes

*So there are people from our education team, we have a monthly meeting in which we discuss our new acquisitions so typically a curator comes and says "we should have it..." and "why we should have it...", that kind of things. So that meeting takes place once a month and if there are major acquisitions or purchases, we have to make it through the director of our group. We had a meeting last week and we had to do this because it overcame a certain amount of money. So a curator can make a decision but the director has to come and say "I approve". The reason it's done that way, decisions about acquisitions are made by one curator that has a particular interest in acquiring things and not to duplicate other things and I think that probably for most of the museums this is how it happened in the last years... Especially for what the NRM is concerned, in the 70's but particularly in the 1980's, there was a lot of closures, there were a lot of archives material, a lot of objects and things were coming to the museum pretty quick and fast, very quickly, you know there was a lot of acquisitions during that period and we're probably still dealing with the 1970's collecting practice even now in terms of recognizing duplications, having a catalogue of our big archives collection so that's still ongoing.*

*So you asked about our disposal process. So we have a process we call it our board of survey and that's because we have to compel to the legal requirements of the Cultural Heritage Act. Because they are quite strict about why we should dispose and obviously big national museums are under the scrutiny of the public eye when we make disposals. So the board of survey's meeting that we have is... again it's composed of curators. What we usually do is have a curator of another museum in our group who doesn't know our collection that well, who can act as an observer, give an outside perspective on why we should dispose our item. We probably have one of these boards about once a year so again it's similar to the legal things required.*

*A case is made, a curator access it so yes, this is sort of depending on... A lot in fact is involved in why we should keep an object: public demand for it, whether we're the best home for it, whether it's really relevant to our collections, whether we could look after it in some cases so we will have this discussion, a decision is made. And usually the decision is made: one, am I going to dispose it and two, is there a museum towards we might dispose? Typically, we would offer it to another museum or a comparable institution first, rather than, you know, go straight to sell it. And I mean many of those cases are relatively complicated. We have a great deal of opposition. Certain disposals that go very straightforward, very easy. Sometimes, on the contrary, they can be quite controversial. And ultimately, the approval for disposals has to go to our board of trustees and that's a legal requirement and director need to know what's happening, and the director decides and then it goes to the board of trustees for ratification because again, you know, it's a controversial issue and they are very much under the public eye about why we dispose of that particular collection.*

*If you want to look at something that is on the way on the moment that is really a controversial disposal, it's the transfer actually between two national museums. If you want to take a look in the British Press at the whole Photographic Society Collection of the National Media Museums of Brandford which is part of our group, there's a proposal to transfer that collection to the Victoria & Albert Museum in London and that has caused a lot of controversy. And if*



you look in the British newspapers, I would suggest the Guardian, you find quite a few articles about that, very pertinent to what you're doing at the moment. **And that's not as if it being you know sold off or shipped over-seas, nothing like that. It's being transferred in another museum in the UK, in London. But that has caused a lot of controversy if nothing else. Because it's moving from a city in the North to London, and this is "why should everything be in the capital city?" and it was a great asset to have it here.** So have a look at that one because it's quite, it's very pertinent to what you're investigating, particularly within our museum group and that hasn't happen yet but this has caused a lot of controversy and, you know, certainly on some of the newspapers you can read people's comments below the lines, both, some are in for and others plead that's a pretty bad way for museum to work.

So we have this disposal meetings, for ourselves a lot of things go through relatively without controversy. I had another case, a year or so ago, two years, which was this disposal of a large number of photographic negatives which were badly deteriorated. But that x 60times so it's a big number but because of the degree of deterioration and having being assessed by a project and looked by conservators that thought there was no way of rescuing them, the only possibility was disposal. The images we were disposing were not wonderful works of art, for example. That caused no controversy whatsoever.

What might do sometimes, because there's this conservation movement in the UK, and there are a lot of people very enthusiastic, quite supportive of particularly vehicles for example, when we dispose our vehicles. Generally speaking, we would passed them on to another museum or self-preserved railway in the UK and some vehicles it's quietly enhanced actually, their conservation because we hadn't any great plans for them or wish to run them, wish to exhibit them anyway not necessarily well looked after because priorities of our conservation and limits of budgets and we sometimes pass them on the volunteers groups who completely restore them and they do kind of a great conservation job. So that can be controversial but that can also be a really good new story in terms of making objects accessible and always available towards the public

Okay. And so when you have to dispose items, so the case is you mentioned are more of like either deterioration (too much deteriorated), and then you cannot restore them properly or because you don't have the time and the resources to curate them properly if I'm right?

Yeah, yeah.

So when you have to dispose of those items, is there a particular process? I guess you follow the guidelines provided by the National association?

Yeah. The Act itself is not particularly detailed on that, you know, there are not specific mentions, what you have to do to dispose... What we do is, it's... It happens in July every year, but typically, we would try to have this board of survey at least once a year in each of the museums and I think increasingly in recent years, that was the case. Especially when I started to work here some museums wouldn't have one for years. So we have one of these meetings, made of staff, initially curatorial staff but it might then go for, to the head curator of the Science museums who would review that and probably then would go to a sub-committee of our trustees. There is one trustee that knows what is happening and he can make his case for his colleagues. **You can imagine that some cases are relatively controversial and each one has special commitments, you know, some might be more interested in fine arts, some in the financial help of the museums rather than for individual objects so some might make the case and then it would go to the board of trustees for ratification. And after that, after they giving approval, then the disposal process starts, for real.**

*Sometimes, prior to the final approval, we would have spoken of potential home for it to exhibit but we cannot let you have it before it's fully signed off. Once that happens, the object to dispose of, in some cases it can be very easy and go quite quickly, literally within a few weeks so decisions being made, everything being signed off. **Sometimes, it can be quite hard to get rid of, because you find that nobody particularly wants them. You know it's like obscure things that we should never have had in the first place.** And this might be a reflection of not even what was collected in 1975 but things that were acquired by the predecessor museum that I mentioned, many years ago. **So sometimes it can take a while to actually dispose a thing but you know, it really depends on what the object is.***

Okay. And did you have... I know that many cases that made a lot of noise because of all the Nazi's art that was seized during the war and that museums now have to return them and I know that some museums in UK, some people I interviewed, mentioned to me cases where they had more ethnic pieces they had to return, I don't know if you also experienced that in your museum?

*Um, generally not, because of the nature of our collection, you know, it's a technological, it's primarily, most entirely focus on railway. So we don't run into issues like human remains for example, that's not really a problem with us, or ethnographic materials again. It's possible that the science museum might have that issue because they... although... Actually the primarily ethnic collection that belongs to the trust. So we don't have that. And for war-time spoliation, because of the nature of our collection which is primarily British or which was before the British Empire and British Commonwealth, because of that, it tends not to have been subject to, you know, control by Nazi's Germany for example. So we tend not to have that problem.*

*And other issues... Potentially there are things with ivory in it so things like that might come into play. But that's not to say that we don't pay attention to those things because we don't have to. It's a part of our procedure for both acquiring and disposing material that we look at international convention and we take due diligence to check what to acquire and what to dispose of. But generally speaking, because of the nature of our collection, it's not a major concern for us. Most of the time, you can just follow the rules of provenance and get a pretty good idea of where things come from even if you don't know for certain whereas they'll be appreciate in a certain museum.*

And from the moment you've worked in the museum, so you mentioned 20 years, Yeah, did you see like really big evolutions concerning both acquisition and disposal policies in your museum?

***Yeah, I think there have been.** I think here, the acquisition and disposal has been certainly since that started it has been something that is taken seriously. We have rules and policies and procedures in place; you know **I think that that's partly because when you got an act of parliament that tells you what to do, there's no escaping the fact that you need to act in a certain way.** I think yes, there have been procedures and actually, here is the first time I've approached what we call our board of survey, the disposal meeting. I had never attended one previously in the other museums I had worked in. But I think also it is true, I think I've mentioned it, **we've always been quite good here at deciding that there were certain objects, certain collections that we shouldn't retain.** So when I first came, one of the tasks I was heavily involved in was in collections: evaluating what we should have, and what we should retain, and what we should dispose. So it was quite early on. But I think in recent years, we've become more efficient and more effective in disposing of items. **But I think across our group, there has been a great willingness to do it at least because of the size of the collection, issues like storage problems. One of the things we had hanging over as a group which is in the future is a big store in West London, which is pretty close to central London which is shared by three of the big National museums: the Science Museum, the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert***

Museum. **The government want to sell that.** It's a prime-development land. If they sell it for housing, it will make that super fortune. So they're keen to sell that and that means that they will be transferring our collections that are there to another storage facility in the West of England. The place is called Blythe B-L-Y-T-H-E. Again if you look at Blythe Heights museums store, **it was in light in government papers that there gonna be disposal.** So anyway, this is a major disposal and **I think that, particularly, will drive reassessment of the collection, evaluation of what we should keep, and more disposals because there is no point that... this is obvious.**

And by evaluation you mean also monetary valuation or just aesthetic and historical value?

It will be "worth" to the museum in terms of aesthetic, capability to display it, availability for research, that kind of thing. It won't be monetary-based. But that might happen because if you're creating new stores, why create new storage for things that aren't working. **Another thing that has driven disposals is, particularly for the science museum, in recent years, is health and safety issues.** So for example there are **historic chemistry collections**, some of them have been evaluated on health and safety terms... But also, you know, **why keep certain dangerous chemicals when they never going to be used by a chemist?** There is nothing particularly special about them in terms of... They are part of the collection but because of the danger they pose, they've been disposed of. So there has been some of that. Quite minor in terms of importance, minor collections but sometimes things have been added to the collection, accessioned in terms of inventory of objects even though they are just chemicals. There has been some... **Radioactivity is another one as well.** That's been another example where objects have been disposed of because their low value in terms of research, potential for being exhibited, and understood and interpreted but pose potentially quite high hazards in how to keep it.

Yes. I also heard from another interview about some arsenic issue in their collection.

Yeah

Yes, it's interesting.

You get this in for example in stuffed animals, taxidermy.

Yes, absolutely.

Yeah.

And do you think that maybe, you said your museum group is quite good at deaccessioning and I mean more disposal and acquisition policy, do you think it might be explained by the fact that this is a quite recent museum?

Hmmm The national railway museum hmm it could be, yes! I think also, the other thing that might possibly explain it is **the scale of acquisition in the years since the museum was founded and the realization that we cannot keep everything.** I think it has come from a realistic appraisal of what the museum wants to do, understanding the way that we want to develop, what we want to exhibit. So I think that has influence here. So yes, **I think also the other thing that in some way explains why it can be easier for our museum is because of its subject: railways.** It's a subject that a lot of people... We got a lot of proportion of the public interested in what we do, we often got opinions on what we do which... you know, that can make it quite difficult to negotiate this kind of issues about what we display, what we preserve but **there is a very active railway preservation movement in the UK.** So what it does mean, for example, is that if we dispose of an object, **there's often a home that they can go to so it's not as if we say we're disposing a thing and we got to sell them or that we're going to... they're going to get**

*lost for posterity because many of these organizations are willing to take those objects so I think in some ways that takes the pressure of if you like, in terms of...*

Public opinion?

*Yes, public opinion, what the future of these objects might be.*

Yeah. And do you have particular network of museums you work a lot with? I know that there is a lot of transfers in order to preserve the public character of the items that have to be disposed either because you cannot take care it probably in one museum and better in another and maybe you have a collection you know in another museum where the item would be much relevant; do you have a particular network which you work with?

*Yeah, we do. And there is an active organization called the Heritage Railway Association for example that covers all the heritage railways in the UK but we have a lot of active participation in those museums not least because... Quite a few we lend objects to as well so it's not just a story of disposal, it can be loans as well. So I think like a lot of organizations, some of them are very easy to work with, we have preferred partners, actually we have one partner we intend to open another museum with.*

Okay!

*Some are difficult: you get into the politics of these organizations which can be quite tackling. But generally, there are a lot of organizations we use to work with them and we do relatively easy dispose. Another thing that does happen is, sometimes we have objects on loans to other museums and we just convert, on occasion, knowing for well that we have several objects in the collection here, sometimes it's a question of converting a loan into a transfer, a disposal process. Because you know it can be quite onerous to check on loans but anyway, this has more local significance than national significance.*

And the fact to be accredited by the Museums Association, does it play a role in those kinds of transfers and these loans?

*Yeah, and actually, this is a point because we... It doesn't have to be, but we would prefer it to go to another accredited museum because we would know the status of that museum and we also prefer to go somewhere where we know the public access is good, people can see it, at least five days a week, you know, that kind of things... So that does play a part in our decisions.*

Okay! And did that happen that you didn't had public channels to dispose the items and you had to make them private by selling it to or by giving it to private collectors or?

***Yeah. That has happened, yes. Either private collectors or sometimes private organizations.** One example, which is still going on, so I think it's not in the public eye yet... So for example we had issues, where we had railway vehicles with high levels of asbestos in it so we decided not just for that reasons but for interpretation reasons and research reasons we decided not to keep this particular vehicle. We passed it to another organization which isn't formally a museum because actually the costs of dispose, the costs of disposal are high because you have to make that special things, because there are legal reasons, you need to meet certain requirements before you can be passing on so yes, we have done that on occasions. We have occasionally transferred to private individuals but actually, you look into transfer with high liability in terms of managing it so **that can be cost-effective if we give it away: we can save money because you don't have costs related to that item anymore so that has happened.** Generally we'll go public first. Occasionally, we have transferred to private individuals and private organizations as well.*

And did you ever get proceeds from those disposed items, when you transfer them to private organizations or collectors?

***Yeah it has happened and because of the legal requirements we invested that money into the museum acquisition's funds.***

Yeah because you are compelled to do it by the affiliation to the Museums Association, right?

*Also the things that go ahead of the Museums Association which, our museum also recognized museum association but **the National Heritage Act requires some of the national museums to behave in a particular way** which is slightly different from the museums association approach. But of course the Museums Association in the UK in recent years has become much more open to disposals through suitable means than they were ten or twenty years ago.*

Okay. And you said earlier that the cost of disposal is high, what...?

*They can be, yeah.*

Yeah... And like what costs for example?

*Well, I mean, usually we could expect that the institution that takes it covers these costs but if there are things that require management, that happened for example when we had to repair it before disposal, so that has been costly. But if we kept or disposed, the costs would still apply so, it still has to be done but, you know, it kind of has an impact in that way yes.*

Okay. And so the time you said for, the time spent on the disposal of one item is very different from an item to another, is it really decisions taken on a case by case basis or do you sometimes take decision according to previous, to precedents like "okay, we dispose that two years ago so this is an argument to dispose this item which is very similar in that and that and that"?

*Yeah. The time... Yes some objects indeed, it takes a long time to dispose in terms of making the case, potentially managing repairs, finding somebody to take it. **Some things happen quite quickly but this differs a lot from case to case.***

Okay, great. So, in your museum you practice really disposal as a collection management tool? It's really my impression after all you said *Yeah...* And so for you disposal when it's done well, is it a good management tool?

*Yeah, it is. I mean if you take this in philosophical, conceptual tool in terms of... because you're thinking of "why do you want that object and what use can it be for your museum?" but yeah it is very much a collection management issue and they, there's no doubt that this is an important part of what we do. **I think this is an increasing part of collection management because of the pressures on storage, costs of conservation, and that kind of things, yeah.***

Okay. And do you have many items in storage where people like curators and conservators are working on it or...?

*Yeah I mean we have here, we have an open store so it's accessible to anybody who comes to the museum. It's actually part of the museum displays. But we also have storage elsewhere. We have storage in our basement. I'm talking here about objects, archives, but we also have a storage facility that we share with our museum group, in the Western England so there are a lot of objects there, yeah.*

Okay. And do you have enough funds? I guess it's also from the government to research those items because I know this is also one argument that people in favor of disposal often say "okay, well there is too many stuff in storage and there is no money for people to work on it", for you is that a problem?

*Yeah I mean this is an issue I mean to some degree we're addressing the conservation issue by providing a better storage. So rather than treating individually each item or so... The storage makes it kind of overall makes it easier to preserve objects. And then conservation tends to be on a priority-basis. The other thing that drives it is the public program, so the exhibitions. What we need to put on display. So there is a kind of priority in that sense so some objects might not be treated until they're required for an exhibition and the other thing is that we do it for our loans so we will get enquiries: obviously nowadays with the main collection being available through database, being accessible online, people know a lot more about what we have so we do get quite a lot of demand for loans so we will conserve with priority for loans, for example.*

Oh yeah. Okay.

*In our museum, we don't necessarily do conservation with our own conservation team, we do use external conservators.*

And those external conservators, do they also work for your museum group or is it really like independent workers and...?

*Umm. It tends to be independent, local, anyway. I mean sometimes yeah, our conservation department is part of the group department, so if we need, they could treat objects for each other particularly where somebody has got a particular expertise in a particular area.*

Okay, great... Okay. Well I think I've finished with my questions but I don't know if you have anything to add?

*Oh no... I'm just interested in... So you're doing this as part of your post-graduated study or?*

Yes. So I have a particular background let's say; I did... Hum, I am from Belgium.

*Yeah*

I did a bachelor in Literature, in French and Italian Literature then I had the opportunity with a minor I did in musicology to do a Master in Art History So I did that and after that I wanted to add something more practical and also, to be completely honest, to find a job on the job market in Belgium it's very very hard for art historian, so I did a Master here in Belgium also in Management sciences so this was a one year master for people that never did management and like marketing and strategy...

*Hum hum*

And I did that more because I had to more than by really choice and passion and surprisingly I really enjoyed it a lot and I had the opportunity last year to do also a thesis on the strategy, the management strategy of two museums, one in Belgium, the Brussels Museum for fine arts and one in Chicago, The Art Institute, so I interviewed a lot of managers to see whether I could compare the methods of managing museums in US and in Europa so it was really really nice and I wanted to do that more you know like applying managerial and economic topic to the cultural reality which I find really important nowadays given also the decreasing governmental support. Particularly in Belgium where the situation of museums is absolutely awful so I really wanted to do something and I looked at studies in UK and in the Netherlands about like arts management and cultural economics and I found a couple of post-graduate masters that were offered and I chose for the Erasmus University in Rotterdam where I do a Master in cultural economics and so we are really applying all the economic and managerial tools and theories to like current challenges and issues in the cultural world and how we can deal with that and well so and this is my master thesis this year.

*Okay. That sounds really interesting! I'm just thinking actually I could give you the name of a colleague of mine who's responsible for some of the collection management issues across our group if you like to email and he could chat with you if he has time...*

Yes, this would be great!

*Hopefully, what he will say will not contradict too much with what I said because I was talking from the particular perspective of our museum and what has happened in the past and he, you know, this whole issue of management of collection, efficiencies, is very much on his radar as well. I'll send you his details and see if you can get in contact with him and yeah hopefully that will help as well;*

This would be really great and if I may, I will also send you the consent form for me to use your interview for my thesis and I will send you that straightaway send my back, when you have time of course, the form signed and maybe the contact of your colleague it would be really really great.

*Okay. I'll do that and you know if you come up with further questions I would be happy if you want to exchange an email or something...*

Yeah, thank you very much! This was really insightful to have more opinions and the... what actually happens in UK museums because it's interesting to do a survey to have quantitative data ... but I really like interviews because we can really get deeper and in a better understanding of what happens and what are the current challenges so this is really great, thank you very much!

*Okay, thank you, well, good luck with your study!*

Okay thank you, by!!!!

*Okay Cheers then! By bye!*

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