

Project Report - Nýsköpunarsjóðs námsmanna og styrkþega: Grisjun safnkosts og hringrásarhagkerfið

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The administrative office of Tæknimínjasafn Austurlands has been hosted by Múlaþing (a municipality in eastern Iceland) after the landslide, Seyðisfjörður.

Introduction

In December 2020, a landslide hit the town of Seyðisfjörður, located in the East of Iceland. The natural disaster left behind unprecedented damage and a collective trauma for the people living there. Luckily no lives were lost, but many buildings and houses were swept away. Tæknimínjasafn Austurlands (Technical Museum of East Iceland) was one of many buildings that were damaged or destroyed. This damage brought to light a series of issues that museums are facing all over the country: collections are simply too large to be properly stored, cataloged, and preserved, and there is often not sufficient space for new acquisitions to enter a museum collection. Another layer of issues adds up if we consider the impact that environmental preservation, risk preparedness, and natural hazard management have on museum administration and steering at a national level.

Furthermore, the collections of small cultural heritage museums such as the Technical Museum in Seyðisfjörður are “flooded” by non-unique objects that can be found in most of the other regional or local museums in the country. Additional concerns regarding the latter have arisen, with viewpoints from some of the experts who deem that one of the viable solutions would be unifying all regional museums and sharing central storage spaces, and that addressing collections policies would be beneficial.



The former entrance of Tæknimínjasafn Austurlands before the landslide hit the building. Here Zuhaitz Akizu, former director of the museum, opens the door to let us in, Seyðisfjörður.

This project's focal point was indeed to create a handbook for deaccessioning in Icelandic museums, but the challenge was to consider all of the abovementioned issues in the grand scheme of things. In the handbook, a general framework was created which is customizable depending on the specific situation of the museum who uses the guidelines to progress in their deaccessioning work.

The project work has been supported by relevant theories and literature which combines sustainability, deaccessioning, and circular economy in the museum context. Fieldwork has been undertaken in the East of Iceland, where museum professionals both in Seyðisfjörður and Egilsstaðir provided valuable insight into the daily operations of the regional museums and their administration and place within the local community. Visiting the storage and premises of the Technical Museum has helped us put things into perspective and reminded us to consider the powerful force of nature and, by extension, the artificial consequences of its exploitation.

This report includes all the challenges we encountered, as well as valuable inputs that came from experts in the field, our collaborators, our supervisors, and during brainstorming sessions. The interest and support that this project has received have been beyond our expectations: a clear message that the aim of the project is an extremely sought-after and relevant goal for Icelandic museums today.



The new entrance of Tæknimínjasafn Austurlands under construction, Seyðisfjörður.

The material produced in connection to this project, namely the Deaccessioning Handbook and this very report, has been presented in a panel during the FÍSOS Farskóli, which took place at Hotel Hallormsstaður on the 21st -23rd September, 2022. The FÍSOS Farskóli is an annual professional conference for museum professionals in Iceland, and the 2022 theme/title was “Söfn á tímamótum” (Museums at a Crossroads).

Timeline & Project Overview

This project is a collaboration between the Safnafræði department at Háskóli Íslands, Tækniminjasafn Austurlands, and Þjóðminjasafn Íslands. The respective supervising parties are project coordinator (umsjónarmaður verkefnisins) Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson, Professor of Safnafræði at Háskóli Íslands, Jónína Brynjólfsdóttir and Elfa Hlín Pétursdóttir, the Directors (safnstjóra) of Tækniminjasafn Austurlands, and Ágústa Kristófersdóttir, Collections Manager (framkvæmdastjóri safneignar) at Þjóðminjasafn Íslands. The project is funded through Rannís, The Icelandic Centre for Research. The project was undertaken by Francesca Stoppani and Kathryn Teeter, museology students at Háskóli Íslands.

There were three initial areas of focus for this project: creating a transparent and practical process for the evaluation of deaccessioning practices in museums, analyzing the ideas and processes of circular economy and sustainability concepts through a museological approach (with emphasis on finding new purposes for deaccessioned items), and creating a tool for museums and cultural institutions to combine theory and practice in relation to the practical application of deaccessioning. As work on the project progressed, we soon realized that the scope of focus needed to be expanded to include a wider discussion on collections management.



An original furnace, part of the *Tækniminjasafn Austurlands* premises, *Seyðisfjörður*.

After conducting interviews, fieldwork, and research, we strongly feel that in order to feasibly discuss and begin deaccessioning in museums, the first steps must ultimately be taken in expanding collaborative and communicative efforts between museums, and individual museums clearly defining their goals, collections policies, and deaccessioning practices. Deaccessioning must be a part of a museum's collective policy to maintain a healthy collection, ensure proper care of artefacts, and allow for future collecting to continue in a sustainable way. This report will show the expanded areas of focus and discuss the issues we feel still must be addressed before this report and accompanying guidebook can be properly utilized. The ultimate aim of the project was to create new knowledge in the field of deaccessioning and the management of cultural heritage collections. The end results of this project are intended to be utilized by museums and cultural heritage institutions in Iceland, while providing a helpful case study for institutions abroad.

The idea for this project arose from a unique situation faced by Tækniminjasafnið after the landslides in December 2020. With a sizeable part of their collection either lost, destroyed, or damaged in the landslide, it became apparent that not only was the initial collection too large, but practical deaccessioning tools and work practices were also not in place to deal with the task of sorting through the remaining objects. This job of 'sorting' was done in partnership

with Þjóðminjasafnið, and it became clear to these museum professionals that Icelandic museums are currently ill-equipped to deal with the potential devastation that natural disasters can bring. For Iceland, the most common natural disasters include landslides, avalanches, volcanic eruptions, and flooding, but climate change will bring additional hazards and potential disasters to other countries (and museums) around the world. In addition to this, museums across Europe (including Iceland) are currently dealing with a reduction in funding, which further affects collections management policies. This all worked to highlight the importance of deaccessioning for museums, both for general deaccessioning needed by museums across the country and as part of a preventative preparation for the fate of artefacts affected by natural disasters.

The work for this project consisted of a combination of research methods, fieldwork, and discussions. We spoke with museum directors, curators, archivists, and collections specialists in a number of museums around the country. We also visited the storage facilities and archives whenever possible. The majority of museums we were in contact with were cultural heritage museums, but we also met with professionals from art and natural history museums. Fieldwork was conducted at Tækniminjasafið in Seyðisfjörður, where we examined the current storage situation, sorted through some of the remaining containers, toured storage and museum facilities, and spoke at length with the former director. This allowed us to gain practical hands-on insight into the enormity of the task at hand, and to feel out how the decision-making processes were happening.



The inside of Tæknimínjasafn Austurlands premises are also under construction, Seyðisfjörður.

Finally, research was conducted on the topics of deaccessioning, collections management, circular economy, sustainability, and the place and responsibility of the museum in regard to natural disasters and cultural heritage.

The project has been undertaken over a period of three (3) months from June to August 2022¹. Each month corresponds to a specific phase of the process. Below is a visual timeline highlighting the main goals for each month and the respective deliverables.

¹ Some of the original timeline deliverables have been adapted to the formal deadlines, which is why the report has been submitted in September. Additionally, the WordPress page (grisjun.hi.is) will be continuously updated beyond the formal deadline as an extra modality for disseminating the results. The website was not a requirement for this project and represents a voluntary extra workload on our behalf.

June - Orientation & Research Phase

- Preparation - Intensive reading about sustainability applied to museums, circular economy, deaccession practices, climate change in the museum context
- State-of-the-Art - writing on existing theories and forming the basis for the empirical research
- Consultation - Discussions under the form of interviews with key stakeholders such as museum directors and professional, various experts on circular economy, conservation practices, sustainability and collection management

July - Practical and Tangible Knowledge Production On Site (Seyðisfjörður)

- Fieldwork – In-depth discussions, visit to the storages and premises of the Technical Museums in the East, looking through damaged objects, non-accessioned objects and objects to deaccess
- Brain storming - Discussion with the museum professionals in Seyðisfjörður
- Draft(s) of model suggestions for museums - Draft versions of handbook and report presented to supervisors

August - Final Products of the Project Prepared and Finished

- Handbook for museums (submitted in August) - Guidelines for deaccessioning with consideration to all options and variables
- Written report (submitted in September) - Discussing the issues, results and phases of the project including its limitations and breakthroughs
- Dissemination – Adaptable handbook promoted through a Wordpress page within the domain of the University of Iceland (grisjun.hi.is) and preparation for presentation at FISOS conference

For the purpose of this project, we found it necessary to have a conversation first and foremost with the museum professionals of Tækniminjasafn Austurlands in Seyðisfjörður. At the same time, they have been able to advise and guide us through the key issues that they were and are facing in regard to the process of putting the pieces back together after the 2020 landslide. Notably, we focused on their process of putting in place a deaccession strategy for the many objects that cannot be stored efficiently in the storages in the landslide risk area. The deaccession policy of Tækniminjasafn Austurlands is the first to have been approved by the National Museum of Iceland and the Museum Council of Iceland among the various accredited museums in the country. An “emergency” policy had been created right after the 2020 events and it has been standardized through the years leading up to 2022. In fact, the “emergency” policy was very vague and there was a need to narrow it down in order

to produce valuable insight and concrete possibilities for acting toward the registered and unregistered objects' overflow. The problem of registered versus unregistered objects has also been one to be confronted with.



Stacks of containers filled with more or less damaged objects and categorized in objects to keep and to deaccess, *Tækniminjasafn Austurlands*.

This denotes perfectly how an effective and precise collection policy greatly benefits all steps of the objects' presence and life within the museum. The immediate response of professionals from accredited museums has overall been very helpful at individuating a series of issues faced by not only *Tækniminjasafn Austurlands*, but also the entirety of local small heritage museums in Iceland. Our conversation with the directors and projects coordinators of *Seyðisfjörður's* museum has been our point of reference, and as we have gone further researching the topic and undertaking interviews, we have seen that it was a reality that easily

applied to the other directors and professionals we spoke to. Concerning the relationship of museums with the local community, we have learned how co-dependency can be both a help and a hindrance face when making decisions when it comes to museum objects and what they mean to the locals. Tækniminjasafn Austurlands is committed to showing respect and understanding towards the previously donated objects whether they may be registered or unregistered. The small heritage museums shorten the distance between the local history and the local community, which has emotional responses to actions that may be affected by the mere following of rules and guidelines. It is not possible for local museums to coordinate all these different facets while strictly adhering to guidelines that are not specifically adapted to them. In the *Fieldwork & Interviews* section, we will explore and discuss the proceedings of what museum professionals all over Iceland perceive as the issues which relate to collection management and deaccession policy.



A container filled with objects damaged by the 2020 landslide, Tækniminjasafn Austurlands.

State of the Art

The literature we used as support for this project's research combines various fields and issues applied to the museum context. Sustainability, natural disaster and risk management, deaccessioning, and circular economy are the main concepts we have based our discussion section and reflections upon. The inter-disciplinarity of the aforementioned concepts is at the core of their applications to the "real world" and empirical instances we were confronted with during the development of the project.

According to the definition proposed in the report "Our Common Future" published in 1987 by the World Commission for the Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) of the United Nations Environment Program, "sustainable development" means a development capable of ensuring "the satisfaction of the needs of the present generation without compromising the possibility of future generations to realize theirs" (WCED,1987, p.43).

Sustainability studies are today widely interdisciplinary (Wood, 2012). Complexity is at the core of this subject to comprehend the numerous facets of the biosphere, which includes both natural and social mechanisms that constantly influence each other (Wood, 2012). We may distinguish three aspects of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental, and they must be concretely balanced in order to work together (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). The social dimension views society's growth as a means of inclusion for all; the economic dimension seeks a fair global distribution of well-being while preserving material and human capital from irresponsible exploitation; and the environmental dimension seeks to preserve biodiversity and the atmosphere for future generations.

Culture is the bedrock upon which the three dimensions of sustainable development are built (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). The impact of sustainability theories can thus be found within the cultural sphere, and so in the museum context both from a social and environmental perspective. The concept of sustainable culture was born in 2015 when 193 UN member countries signed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, "an action program for people, the planet and prosperity" (Wiktor-Mach, 2020). Specifically, Agenda 2030 is a text that provides 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030 not only in the environment but also in the economic and social spheres. In this new context, in fact, the

terms sustainability and sustainable development are linked to a new idea of well-being that considers the quality of life of people.

During the 26th ICOM General Conference held in Prague on August 24th, 2022, the ICOM Extraordinary General Assembly approved a new museum definition, after an 18-month participatory process. The updated definition reads:

“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”

Specifically, museums and cultural policy aim to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage, support research and learning and allow cultural participation for all. This is an extremely important role from the point of view of social sustainability. From an environmental point of view, however, museums are aware of the large use of energy and the amount of waste they produce and must take measures to solve these situations.

From a social standpoint, museums can work as indicators and makers of change through sustainable education models as discussed by Kristinsdóttir (2017) where museum professionals behold the necessary monetary and visibility empowerment to be able to enact these sustainable practices in the museum's administrative and organizational structures. It is often mentioned how the lack of resources is a determining factor in the sustainable museum equation. On the other hand, from an environmental standpoint, cultural heritage museums in Iceland are unable to sustain their *modus operandi* efficiently on a long-term basis. It is important to look at the practical implications of both a sustainable collection and deaccession policy which needs to be designed strategically and built to last. Alcaraz et al. (2009) already mentioned “a need for fundamental change in the mental modes and attitudes assumed in the management of the sector, in particular the need for more effective and appropriate marketing strategies” referring to the adaptation of museums within the general sustainability framework.

Sustained economic growth based on a linear production model is, however, not feasible on a planet with finite resources and a limited capacity to absorb waste (Bonciu, 2014). Despite attempts to solve the ecological issue since the 1960s, pressures on the world's environment

have been steadily increasing, and some planetary boundaries have already been breached (Valdivielso, 2008). Circular economy (CE) is viewed as an alternative in this situation that may have positive effects on both the economy and the environment (EC, 2014).

There is a dearth of scholarly literature on CE, and both conceptual debates and the formulation of useful implementation strategies are still in their infancy (Korhonen et al., 2018). Practical strategies refer to the measures that should be taken to execute a CE system, whereas theoretical strategies refer to the economic system. It is difficult to come to an agreement on the definition of an established theoretical framework because of the stark differences between theoretical approaches to the CE notion (Bocken et al., 2016). Given that the majority of the research papers considered in this study were published after 2006, CE is a novel idea in the scientific community. The three common theoretical strategies under the CE paradigm are:

1. minimizing inputs of raw materials and outputs of waste
2. keeping resource value as long as possible within the system,
3. reintegrating products into the system when they reach the end-of-life

(i.e. Ghisellini et al., 2016; Elia et al., 2017).



Francesca holding an object with an inscription in Italian, Tæknimínjasafn Austurlands.

Circular economy can be considered within micro, meso and macro level (Elia et al., 2017; Korhonen et al., 2018). In contrast to CE, sustainable development, according to Bonciu (2014), just addresses the symptoms of the problems. In other words, CE is a tool to address some of the causes of these problems, whereas sustainable development establishes goals to be attained in order to remedy the problems and their repercussions.

Deaccessioning within a museum context refers to the official removal of artefacts from a museum collection. ICOM defines deaccessioning as "the act of lawfully removing an object from a museum's collections." (Guidelines on Deaccessioning of the International Council of Museums, 2019.) It is also referred to as decollecting, refining collections, and in some cases, disposal (Museums Association Disposal Toolkit: Guidelines for Museums (2014), Morgan and Macdonald, 2018). The necessity of deaccessioning within museums is not unique to Iceland and is a topic that is being discussed in museums across the world. Deaccessioning is an important tool for museum professionals to use in order to properly manage museum collections, but it does not come without complications. It is important to understand the background of deaccessioning, the difficulties and complications that exist, and the importance of deaccessioning for museums.

Museums are responsible for safeguarding cultural memory, material objects, and information to display and store for current and future generations. Museums around the world are currently experiencing a "crisis of accumulation" (Harrison, 2013), where collections have been allowed to grow to such large extents that they are no longer sustainable. Not only are we living in a world of increased materialism and consumerism, but there has also been a massive increase from the late modern period into today in the categories and numbers of objects that have been determined necessary to keep (Harrison, 2013).

In addition to this expansion of what to keep, the idea that museum collections must be permanent fixtures is a relatively recent concept, emerging with the 19th-century Western modern museum (Lubar et al, 2017, 2). Earlier museum collections were much more likely to have fluidity, often traveling, becoming separated, or being dissolved (Morgan and Macdonald, 2018, 64). The modern attachment to permanence and collecting for collecting's sake has come under criticism within the museology field (Lubar, 2015, Merriman, 2008). These trends help us to understand how we arrived at the current state of museum collections. It is important to note that it is not the fault of any one museum director or

collections management team, but rather decades of overall work practices and attitudes that we now understand are unsustainable.

With collections around the world reaching unsustainably large levels, the discussions about deaccessioning have increased since the 1980s, especially in the United States, Australia, the Netherlands, Denmark, and the United Kingdom (Morgan and Macdonald, 2018, 57). Deaccessioning is still a controversial topic among many museum professionals, but the controversy and hesitancy is decreasing as discussion increases (Brusius and Singh, 2018, Macdonald and Morgan, 2018). A growing number of countries and museums have established their own guidelines, tool kits, and instructions for deaccessioning, alongside discussions on the ethical and moral implications of the practice². While many museum professionals agree that something needs to be done to address the current situation, there are numerous complications that arise in relation to terminology, practical and theoretical application, and attitudes.

Despite the guidelines set forth by ICOM for deaccessioning, differences in attitudes and practices related to deaccessioning are widespread. It is not possible to comprehensively apply the guidelines to every museum in every country, which creates grey areas of knowledge and information. This has led to different countries, scholars, and museums around the world creating their own unique definitions and guidelines for deaccessioning, which further convolutes the discussion (Vecco and Piazzai, 2014)³. The plethora of descriptive words and definitions hint at the parallels of difficulties and complications that museums encounter when beginning to consider deaccessioning.

Museums in Europe are typically described as following either the Latin (or Napoleonic) tradition or the Anglo-Saxon tradition, with some countries falling on a gradient scale between the two (Wijsmuller, 2017, Vecco and Piazzai, 2014). The Latin tradition (comprising France, Spain, Italy, and Greece) has countries that tend to view cultural heritage as inalienable and therefore lacking the possibility to be deaccessioned. Attitudes are more

² For a comprehensive overview on deaccessioning in Europe, see "Museums and Deaccessioning in Europe", 2017. Iceland is, unfortunately, excluded from this discussion, which includes 28 other countries.

³ Vecco and Piazzai also discuss the linguistic translatability of the word deaccession into other languages, which has the potential to cause additional complications.

reserved, and legal codes either restrict deaccessioning or do not provide resources or discussion (Wijsmuller, 2017)⁴.



Containers full of ready-to-be-deaccessioned objects, Tækniminjasafn Austurlands.

The Anglo-Saxon tradition (comprising the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Denmark) has countries that view cultural heritage with a bit more flexibility. There are typically more legal options for museums to deaccess museum objects, handbooks and toolkits are widely available, and many museums have already begun deaccessioning processes. If we look at the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), all of them have some sort of deaccessioning guidelines and legislation in place⁵. Finland has arguably the most advanced system, with the TAKO network (a national network for cultural history museums to collaborate on collections management), a scientific analysis tool to aid in the decision-making process of evaluating collections and objects (published by the Metropolia University

⁴ Many countries following the Latin tradition have laws in place about cultural heritage (and the limitations of moving museum objects) which can be found in the UNESCO Database of National Cultural Heritage Laws: <https://en.unesco.org/cultnatlaws/list>

⁵ For additional resources on Icelandic museums, see Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson (ed.) *Byggðasöfn á Íslandi*, 2018 and *Saga listasafn á Íslandi*, 2019, and Anita Elefsen's MA thesis *Að henda eða afhenda? Um grisjun og förgun á safngripum*, 2016.

of Applied Sciences and the Finnish Forest Museum, Lusto), and the FINNA portal (similar to Sarpa), (Sarantola-Weiss and Västi, 2017).

Deaccessioning is also occurring in museums outside of Europe, predominately in Western countries. In the United States, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) provides information in their "Direct Care of Collections: Ethics, Guidelines and Recommendations" (AAM, 2010). The Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), also in the United States, has its own deaccessioning policy (AAMD Policy on Deaccessioning, 2010). During the COVID-19 pandemic the AAMD relaxed deaccessioning regulations to enable museums to use proceeds from deaccession sales without restrictions (AAMD, 2020)⁶. In Canada, the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) provides extensive guidelines in their "Canadian Museums Association Deaccessioning Guidelines" (CMA, 2020). There are guidelines and regulations set in Australia by Museums Australia (*Museums Australia's Code of Ethics for Art, History & Science Museums*, 1999) and The National Museum of Australia (*Collections – deaccessioning and disposal policy*, (2020), with additional information from regional museum associations. Deaccessioning seems to be discussed most often in Western contexts, in Europe, North American, and Australia. The reasons behind this lie beyond the scope of this report, but discussions on deaccessioning (and its usage) are rising in other parts of the world as well. In Brazil, the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro made headlines when they decided to sell a Jackson Pollock in 2018 in an effort to fund the museum's operational costs – the first time a Brazilian museum deaccessioned an item, and it was done with great controversy from Brazilian museum organizations (Angeleti, 2018). While not every museum or museum professional may agree on the extent of deaccessing, discussions are already taking place around the world, with many museums moving towards a more pragmatic approach. Differences in attitudes and opinions on deaccessioning are still prevalent and can be seen in debates on the ethical and moral implications of the practice.

The ethical and moral issues surrounding deaccessioning are complex. In the case of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, we see multiple viewpoints represented. The museum does not receive government funding, and the sale of a non-native artist's work was able to fund decades of museum operations at a time when they were currently operating

⁶ For an additional overview of the American context, see *In museums we trust: Analyzing the mission of museums, deaccessioning policies, and the public trust* (Tam, 2011).

over budget and were at risk of closing, potentially losing their entire collection. In many European countries, the situation is more complicated, as many museums are fully or partially owned by the government, and stricter regulations apply. As we will discuss in the interview section, opinions on ethics and moral obligations of museum professionals vary widely.

Museum professionals are the guardians of not just the objects themselves but of the cultural history of the country (and, depending on the museum type, its art and natural history). A museum must maintain trust and relationships with the public and governing bodies. Careless deaccessioning, and for some, even the act of selling deaccessioned museum objects itself, risks damaging not only these relationships but also the integrity and reputation of the museum and its employees. The financial aspect of deaccessioning further complicates things. The official guidelines and regulations mentioned previously in this report state that funding that comes from deaccessioning must only be used to care for collections or acquire new objects, and never to pay for any other cost. While it can be tempting for museums that are struggling financially to use funds gained from deaccessioning practices, it is unethical and risks abuse of the usage of deaccessioning. The AAMD did allow museums in the United States to temporarily use funds gained from deaccessioning without restriction during the pandemic, which is an incredibly interesting shift in policy that hints at potential adjustments in not only policy but in attitudes, to come in future years (Note: this was not the case in Iceland).



Zuhaitz and Katie examining some objects to deaccess to find a new usage for them in the circular economy model, Tækniminjasafn Austurlands.

Attitudes towards deaccessioning are changing in both public and private spheres, with negative connotations and skepticism decreasing as it becomes more apparent to many that it is a useful and necessary practice (Morgan and Macdonald, 2018). The public and professional perception surrounding deaccessioning are beginning to shift, particularly in situations where museums have found themselves in extreme financial or natural disaster scenarios. Museum collections around the world are at increased risk due to climate change, natural disasters, and civil unrest (Kersel, 2018). This shift in attitude in the face of disaster was seen in The Detroit Institute of Arts in the United States when the city declared bankruptcy in 2018. Attitudes of museum visitors (and city creditors) viewed deaccessioning positively as a way to help pay off the massive debts of the city, though this was met with resistance from the museum itself (Brjsius and Singh, 2018). The Technical Museum in the Eastfjords is currently going through a highly accelerated deaccessioning process due to the landslide. While the process is not entirely public, there is understanding in the professional sector that it is a necessary function and they have removed massive parts of the collection. Additional difficulties lie in the lack of official guidelines, legislation, and communication between museums and governing bodies (Wijsmuller, 2017). While ICOM provides a deaccessioning overview for museums, they are guidelines instead of regulations. Not every country provides additional guidelines, with countries following the Latin tradition often lacking any additional resources beyond the ICOM guidelines (Wijsmuller, 2017). The desire for better communication between museums, and between museums and the governing bodies, is something we have seen reflected in the Icelandic Museum sector. Many of the museums we spoke to, expressed a wish for more assistance and hands-on guidance from The National Museum and Safnaráð to begin deaccessioning practices.

There are also practical difficulties linked with deaccessioning. It is not an easy or quick process and requires careful planning, extended time, and staff. Many museums are already facing issues with funding, working with limited staff who are already overworked and, in many cases, struggling to find time for additional tasks (Kersel, 2018). Deaccessioning is a lengthy process that not all museums currently have the capabilities of doing. Despite the increased discussion about sustainable museum practices and policies, the reality of sustainable deaccessioning is often still far from sustainable.

Sustainability in museums is an increasingly important topic for discussion. Unchecked growth over extended periods of time is not sustainable, and museums are just one of many areas

that are currently in need of examining their practices to ensure success in the future. The concept of degrowth is not new, and while many definitions exist a particularly helpful one comes from the Research and Degrowth Association: "Sustainable degrowth is a downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions and equity on the planet" (2012). This concept of degrowth has been applied to museum collections and practices (Mairesse, 2010; Ruf and Slyce, 2017; Macdonald, 2006; Merriman 2008; 2015). Applying degrowth to museum collections sees deaccessioning as a type of planned loss that makes it possible for new acquisitions to continue in a more sustainable manner (Merriman, 2008). This would enable museums to continue to meet the needs of future generations without compromising the needs of the current generation.

The application of degrowth and sustainability concepts in relation to museum collections and deaccessioning is an excellent step in the right direction. However, more discussion on the 'greenness' or sustainability of *how* museum objects are removed from a collection needs to happen. One of the most common options for museums to remove objects from a collection is to destroy them. Our interviews with Icelandic museum professionals revealed several potential reasons for this. Many are still uncomfortable with deaccessioning in a public and visible manner and are worried about their relationship with the community and their professional reputation. Others believe that selling deaccessioned items goes against museum ethics (although ICOM clearly allows this option). Another view is that museums do not have the resources, time, or staff to go through each object and try to extend its life cycle, and when faced with an overwhelming amount of work, it is easier to simply throw it away or otherwise destroy it. These viewpoints are understandable but go against the desire for increased sustainability. It will be incredibly important for museums to approach deaccessioning with the circular economy concept in mind.



This box contains pharmaceutical objects. It could be an example of contaminated and/or dangerous material, Tækniminjasafn Austurlands.

Despite these difficulties and complications, deaccessioning is an incredibly important tool for museums. It enables them to properly manage and care for their collections, ensuring the best possible usage and preservation for current and future generations to utilize. Having a manageable collection, strong collections policy, and sustainable practices will allow museums to not only care for their existing collections, but also provide them with much-needed space to acquire new artefacts into the collection. Deaccessioning is though not only about addressing a lack of space; it must also be a part of a broader discussion on the overall purpose and function of museums and their collections, and long-term sustainability within the field.

Fieldwork & Interviews

The work we did for this project entailed speaking with a number of museum professionals and cultural workers across the country in both formal interviews and casual conversational contexts, alongside a 1-week fieldwork period in Seyðisfjörður. Additionally, we were also able to visit many museum storage facilities and undertake our own 'mini-deaccession' experience at The Technical Museum's facilities. The focus of the project and subsequent fieldwork was on cultural heritage and history museums, but we also spoke with archivists and art and natural history museums to ensure we had a proper overview of the Icelandic situation.

We encountered very similar issues in every cultural heritage museum: collections that had grown too large, a lack of staff, time, and/or funding to properly manage these large collections in their entirety, limited (or even non-existent) space for new acquisitions, and uncertainty about what should be done, both within their own museum and on a national level. While the issues were essentially the same and each person we spoke with acknowledged that there was a problem with the current situation, the attitudes of the interviewed museum professionals varied considerably. Opinions ranged from being incredibly in favor of deaccessioning with multiple ways of removing objects from collections, to rarely removing objects and many restrictions in place, with many falling somewhere between the two. Some museums have already begun the formal deaccessioning process and others reported that they do not foresee being able to start any time soon. We also discovered that there is a clear lack of communication between Icelandic museums in relation to collections policies, coordination and collaborative efforts, and the spread of incorrect information about deaccessioning due to incomplete knowledge. This reveals that there is not one general consensus on the acceptability of deaccessioning, what deaccessioning means, or how it can be implemented.

Throughout our consultation interviews around the country, the many similarities concerning issues and challenges that cultural heritage museums encounter repeatedly came up. For many of them, deaccessioning is not only an available option, but a necessity. "They have 23.000 objects, they were taking everything in!", says one of our interviewees (1), referring to past collection practices of a specific local museum. The need for strong and continuous museum education was addressed during the consultation, along with the need for funding

for adapted storage spaces that do not depend on external companies/associations and private individuals.

They continue: "Artefacts that came in before 2018 are not registered under a specific date; it was an informal way of collection. For this reason, guidelines are needed and certain thresholds have been put in place in our new collection policy. Most of the work is volunteer work, so it's hard to determine where the decision-making resides. The policy on what to collect at the moment is very wide and we can't hire additional permanent staff, which results in a general understaffing situation". Another interviewee (2) explained that the storage situation in some museums is not fully realized until "they notice that they need to deaccession when they are lacking space", again due to a lack of expertise in managing museum collections and being spread too thin. They believe that many museum directors do not recognize the professional side of the museum work, and in smaller communities personal relationships heavily influence museum decision-making.

The issue of understaffing is widespread in Icelandic museums, which compounds the problems of managing collections and deaccessioning. Registering objects into Sarpur takes time, as does properly going over collections to obtain an overview and the deaccessioning process as a whole. Interviewee 3 explained "The biggest challenge is the number of unregistered collection items. The museum was built by volunteers in the 1980s and at that point we didn't have the same requirements for registering items. Every year we break down the registering projects into small parts, but at the same time we need to sort the objects somehow and decide what to keep. It is easier to decide what to keep or not when things are not registered". People bring in new donations to them every week, and while they have a collections policy with donations guidelines that are useful when it comes to transparency with the local community, they are still limited by the sheer amount of work against the number of staff available. "More funding is needed to hire new staff and longer extensions to fulfill the requirements for understaffed small museums would be beneficial. It's important to register everything duly so the process goes smoothly and can work in the long run, for future generations". Museum work is highly interconnected, meaning a lack in one area can cause additional stress and work in another.

The additional lack of resources available to museums to manage their collections was brought up multiple times. Another interviewee (4) explained that some of their biggest issues for collections management and deaccessioning were "not enough staff, not enough

time". They also highlighted the intensity of the pressure of being in the position to have to promise a timeline for deaccessioning and proper collections overview, and that they cannot guarantee that someone who specializes in museum collections will be there to be a part of the process. Many museum and culture professionals in Iceland are not specialists in collections management and are overseeing vast numbers of projects. Interviewee 5 explains that "There are too many museums and they are too small, so it's difficult to fill in the positions of museum professionals when there are very few of them". Because of this, the reality of museum work is that it is not always possible for all museums to always "do things formally or by the books". This sentiment was echoed by interviewee 2 in a discussion of their opinion that the National Museum has not yet fully facilitated deaccessioning for smaller museums around the country.

The desire for this facilitation, more information on deaccessioning, and guidance on how to begin were also reflected in many of the discussions we had. Icelandic Museum Law does not make it possible to remove objects from collections easily, though this of course has positives and negatives. Art museums that deaccess a painting from their collection must do so to replace it with a new and "better" painting, keeping in mind that all works of art are unique and that their value can change in the future. "When you look at the storage, it is sad that there is not an easier way to deaccess artworks" states our interviewee (6). They continue: "The people working in the museums are usually very close to the local communities, but most of the artefacts of entire collections are not accessible to the public. The communication level between museums and their practices needs to be improved and become more transparent and available to the public. Iceland is behind communicating museum practices and more information in English for example". Additional issues arise with the need for museums to better use their collections and spaces. One aspect of this is the way that inter-museum loans are processed on a conservation level. "The law is very general, it states that museums should do this and that, but not how. Best practices and guidelines that are adaptable to smaller regional cultural heritage museums are crucial for their sustainable development".

While there is clearly still room for improvement in collections management and deaccessioning, interviewee 2 highlights that there have been improvements in recent years, and an increased discussion within the museum world: "Now we have Sarpur [<https://sarpur.is/>] and better ideas to dispose of the objects. It's really important to have a

strict strategy. There have to be many options and 'destruction' of the object can only be the last option". Strict requirements and legislation can be beneficial, but they must also be realistic and take into account how many staff members museums have, and the time and financial restraints they operate under. "You can't compare the National Museum to the other museums. In my museum, we don't have a finalized deaccession strategy; it has to be worked on and then approved. We are in the process of building new conservation spaces, so this is our focus and our priority. As soon as this is sorted out, we will be able to work on a solid deaccessioning strategy". With only two full-time staff members and a very large collection, this will take time. According to the interviewee, it is important that museums also take part in reusing things, especially when deaccessioning, which perfectly connects to the circular economy model.

While many of the museum professionals and cultural workers we spoke to were open to the idea of deaccessioning, how to best go about this process was not always clear. One interviewee (4) stated that Icelandic museums are not ready for deaccessioning which includes a kind of Marketplace or open sale where objects are sold or made available to the public. They believed that in perhaps another 10 or 15 years with a new generation of cultural workers the process would be more successful, but they are hesitant now because there is the concern of hurt feelings and offending members of the community. In this way, several of our interviewees believe that the sale or public offering of objects to the public is not ethically right. When it comes to the circular economy concept, the flow of borrowing objects should be facilitated between museums and other institutions as an early option in the process. Museums must also think about their image, which is why selling their collection can be ethically problematic. Monetary gain should obviously not be the main reason for selling objects, and this gain must only be used to benefit the current collections in ways of preserving and conserving them.

It is crucial to consider the local communities in this equation, as museums are in place "to serve the people" according to the Icelandic Museum Law (Safnalög). If deaccessioning is done carelessly or irresponsibly, it can negatively impact the relationship between the museum and the community. As one interviewee (2) stated, "Marketplace for items is a very good idea but a vulnerable one. We don't want the locals debating that they should not give something to the museums because museums will give it away". Interviewees 7 and 8 agreed that, while the sale of a deaccessed object was possible, "museum objects go through a

metamorphosis, and selling needs to be done very carefully”, highlighting the implications of selling museum objects that perhaps have gained additional value or importance simply from being a part of an official collection.

Throughout the consultations, ethics, reputation, and relationships were central to the discussions on what should happen in deaccessioning. Another discussion with an interviewee (9) revealed an openness to deaccessioning when necessary, but with limitations on the options available: “If we (museums) took artefacts from people to register, we decided to take care of the object. My opinion is that we should not sell things. We can give objects, but of course, always ask the donor first. This is our (museums) mistake that we took the things.” This sense of responsibility for collections, and for the decisions of previous museum directors, is also reflected in some instances of current collecting.

Interviewees 9 and 10 work closely with their local community and have a positive relationship with the people. While they limit much of what comes into the collection, they are also accepting objects that are perhaps not directly related to the museum: “I feel it is a matter of respect for the people who are living here, the families that have lived here, to take the things they value – the story also matters, not just the things.” Both interviewees agreed that there were ethical concerns for selling objects, but were open to deaccessioning, including other aspects of the circular economy such as working with artists, donating to local businesses, and trying to give objects a new life.

The openness of the vast majority of people to extending the life cycle of deaccessed objects was clear, though there is still a lot of uncertainty, hesitancy, and anxiety about how to actually proceed with this. Interviewee 11 expressed some frustration at this, explaining that “Everyone keeps saying that it’s complicated, it’s complicated” – this is then used as a type of reason to avoid beginning the work, deferring it to the future where it can be someone else’s problem. As this project has approached deaccessioning through the lens of sustainability and the circular economy, we believe that open discussions between museums and cultural workers are needed. The landslide in Seyðisfjorður brought to light an extreme example, and because of the severity of the situation, exceptions were made to allow them to begin deaccessioning with fewer restrictions. The National Museum and Technical Museum implemented an emergency plan that allowed them to remove objects without submitting a list, and provided hands-on assistance from highly experienced museum professionals. This sets an apparent precedent that exceptions can be made and assistance

provided, which could be beneficial outside of the context of natural disasters. The National Museum has in the past referred to the disposal of museum objects as 'extermination', and as we have discussed throughout the report, an important question we are now faced with is the following: is extermination (of museum objects) ethical in today's world? We believe that it is not, and attitudes are slowly shifting into viewing deaccessioning in a more sustainable light – though much work is still required.

Many museum professionals have also expressed the desire to have official support for this process in one way or another. These requests include having a centralized body to coordinate the cooperation between museums, having a more visible "stamp of approval" from Safnaráð and The National Museum on the practice of deaccessioning, and having a person or team to help begin the deaccessioning practice (a person/s coming on location to help take an overview, coordinate policy, and begin the task of going through individual objects, primarily due to concerns of staffing/finances).

Finally, throughout our discussions, talk of emotions came up repeatedly. Deaccessioning is an incredibly emotional practice, for museum staff, individuals, and for communities, for a wide range of reasons. Museum professionals are worried about the potential damage to community relationships, personal and institutional reputation, and legal implications of deaccessioning. These have been described to us as worry, anxiety, frustration, uncertainty, and fear throughout the process, which all contribute to a stalling of beginning the work. Individuals, both museum professionals and community members, can also have an emotional attachment to specific objects which can complicate both collecting and deaccessioning. Community relationships are in some cases fragile, with community members becoming angry, upset, or sad when they feel the museum is not properly representing or working for the community. There are many emotional variables that come into play here, but emotions are not discussed as part of museum work, and support is not given in this context.

Discussion and Key Issues

Climate change threatens many aspects of our world, including our cultural heritage. The museums, works of art, and buildings that give a nation its identity must be preserved by mitigating the effects of a changing climate. Not much is known yet about how climate change

will damage cultural artefacts. In the European context, the project "Climate for Culture" (comprised of damage risk assessment, economic impact and mitigation strategies for sustainable preservation of cultural heritage in times of climate change) studied these effects and developed strategies to prevent them (Leissner et al. 2015). Project partners determined the most serious risks of climate change for historic artifacts in Europe and the Mediterranean.

This was done, for the first time ever, by correlating high-resolution regional climate modeling and simulation tools for buildings. The result is the production of scenarios of future indoor climates in historic buildings. There is not a similar study made within the Icelandic context. It would be interesting to assess the many variables and additional challenges of conservation where it is crucial to come to terms with extreme conditions and natural disasters such as the 2020 landslide in Seyðisfjörður.

Display of objects and cultural heritage can directly foster interest in environmental issues and make museums places of care (Ward, 2018 Newell, 2019). Traditional compartmentalizing museums are no longer useful for raising awareness and shaping the "usworld" (Leinfelder, 2012) made of interdependent nature and culture.

Faced with the emergency linked to the unsustainability of the current development model, the world of culture has the opportunity and the responsibility to play a role at the forefront. It is necessary to promote a system change to evolve the course of things, through a profound cultural transformation. Not only is art a tool for promoting a sustainable culture (the artistic content of a work or the process by which this work is created can convey messages that empower environmental issues), but cultural institutions and businesses can act as concrete environmental communication platforms capable of raising awareness among their public and citizens. At the same time, more and more cultural and creative companies, at the European and national levels, are reaping the advantages deriving from the reduction of the environmental impact, in terms of efficiency and innovation, thanks to the introduction of sustainable initiatives and investments in clean technologies, capable of generating new jobs and services. Finally, reasoning in terms of environmental and economic sustainability allows companies in the sector to strengthen the collaborations between subjects in the supply chain, to dialogue with other economic sectors, to the point of influencing public policies in the most virtuous cases.

The contribution that the world of art makes through the search for new ideas and meanings aimed at achieving greater awareness and involvement of civil society in these issues is fundamental, both in the search for possible solutions and in their implementation. An approach that goes in this direction that is growing today is, for example, that of the construction art movement that asks original questions, to open innovative paths. The value that many cultural and creative experiences put in place has to do with the creation of physical and intellectual spaces that offer innovative experiences of community education and sharing of cultural and ecological knowledge.



This is the first snowmobile of Seyðisfjörður. It is being prepared to be transferred to another exhibition, Tækniminjasafn Austurlands.

Morgan and Macdonald (2021) note that 90% of UK museum objects are in storage. This creates issues of conservation, cataloging and capacity. The question “What to keep?” is to be read between the lines of “What do we value and prioritize as a society?”. As these issues resonate internationally, we found them at the core of the urgency of the whole deaccession policy in Icelandic cultural heritage museums. The rapid change in museums' directorship and thus practices in collecting, supported by the unclear documentation and guidelines on where

to draw the line in accepting donations or not, have been feeding the problem of unsustainable collecting practices in these museums. In the large majority of our interviews, the participants have pointed out in one way or another how the lack of transparency and clear protocols have contributed to the over-flooding of the museums' storages.

Throughout our fieldwork and discussions with museum professionals in Iceland and the United States, we kept returning to the issue of collections management policies. ICOM's Code of Ethics for Museums states that museums must have collections policies, and their Guidelines on Deaccessioning elaborates that this policy must include detailed information on acquisitions, accessioning, and deaccessioning (ICOM, 2017, 2019). We believe that deaccessioning is a part of a strong and functional collections management policy, and this was supported by the presence (and lack of) policies in the museums we spoke with.

The handbook accompanying this report details the ways that deaccessioning and collections management and policies are linked. Deaccessioning is not an isolated museum practice and must be seen in a wider context as a part of collections management. For deaccessioning to work, museums must first create and implement strong collection policies to limit the influx of museum artefacts entering the collection. Without this, even large-scale deaccessioning is only serving to push the overarching issue back, as collections will build up again.

A strong collections policy will allow museums to define their collection parameters, making it easier to decline objects offered to the museum that does not fit the current mission, or are otherwise not desirable to add to the collection. Icelandic museums must have a strategy in place that details their activities, including collecting, registration, preservation, and research, and this must be updated every four years (Safnalög, 2011). All the museums we spoke with had such a strategy in place, but many were very outdated. Some of the museums we spoke with had a specific collection policy, but were unaware of exactly what it was, and reported that it was also outdated (largely to lack of time and staff), or that they were not always actively following the policy. Others have already implemented updated collections policies and are seeing success in what we have determined as the first step of deaccessioning: stopping unnecessary new acquisitions.

The largest issue with collections policy that we encountered is that there is no coordination of policy between museums, on either a regional or local level. There are some who are starting to coordinate policy (for example, Minjasafn Austurlands and Tækniminjasafn Austurlands are coordinating their policies after the landslide), but these are in the minority.

This causes a massive overlap in the type and number of items being collected. Almost every cultural heritage museum we visited had multiple versions of the same types of woodworking and carpentry tools, wool carding tools and spindles, leather horse bridles and reins, and fishing nets. One of the most noticeable examples of this was the *hefill*, with many museums having these in the double digits in their collection. We are by no means suggesting that these items do not have historical or cultural value. Rather, we posit the question that every museum in Iceland needs to be collecting the same objects, and so many of them.

With museum resources already being spread quite thin, it seems that so many overlapping collections could be better utilized and organized through communication and policy coordination. By narrowing collections, museums would be able to use funding in a more efficient way. This would allow museums to better preserve Icelandic culture and heritage. The coordination of collections policies is a massive undertaking that will require extensive work, communication, and collaboration on a national level. This would be an ideal task for the principal museums and Safnaráð to spearhead to foster this collaborative approach and be the leading force in this process.

The discussions with museums in Iceland have revealed that many museums are open to the idea of deaccessioning and feel it would be valuable for them. Some have already started the process, and others are still unsure of how to properly begin. For many of the latter, issues of time, staffing, and finances are some of the biggest hindrances to beginning the deaccessioning process, along with a feeling of uncertainty about the deaccessioning process both legally and in practice. Most of these museum professionals have expressed a desire for official help and guidance from The National Museum and Safnaráð.

Different ideas were floated around in the discussions. These included organizing a team of volunteers to go together to one museum at a time to have a week of group work for the deaccessioning process, having a more proactive approach from Safnaráð and The National Museum in the form of seminars or webinars to discuss the possibilities available to museums, having an expert on deaccessioning come out to museums to help them begin the physical process, being assigned funding to offset the time and staff needs for the process, etc. It is our understanding that discussions on deaccessioning have taken place, but it appears that this information has not reached all accredited museums in Iceland, especially outside of the capital region. There are also unanswered questions or areas of uncertainty that must be addressed.

Our belief is for deaccessioning to best work in Iceland, must begin with a collective collaboration with accredited museums and principal museums. For cultural heritage museums, it would ideally begin with a collective assessment of current collections management policies. This would ensure that there is not an overlap of collecting occurring, as discussed earlier in this report. It would also allow museums to know who should be collecting what, which would make deaccessioning and acquisitions easier. Existing museum objects could be transferred to the relevant museum, and new acquisitions could be directed in a similar way instead of being accepted outright. In order for this to work, however, a huge increase in cooperation and communication would need to occur, as it would mean that many museums may need to change what they are collecting and displaying.



This fridge is also part of the collection. It has no historical value, but it still works in its primary function: keeping things cool. Tækniminjasafn Austurlands.

This is a sensitive issue for many. We have seen a number of smaller regional museums express great pride in the display of their regional heritage and their place in their local communities. The local history and heritage is something to be incredibly proud of, but with so many museums collecting and displaying the same types of artefacts, history and heritage resources are being spread thin, collections are at risk, and museums are repeating themselves, causing a lack of originality and uniqueness in exhibits for visitors. The relationship between museums and the community is also incredibly important, but there is not enough transparency in this relationship in regard to collections management. Accepting items from the community in order to maintain a relationship is unsustainable, and many communities are unaware of the – in some cases – dire status of the collections that they want to continue adding to.

With the monumental size of this task, it would be ideal for Safnaráð and The National Museum to spearhead the project. They could oversee the reworking of collections management policies, foster communication and cooperation, and have the chance to standardize certain aspects of museum policy in Iceland for the benefit of current and future generations. As we have detailed throughout the handbook and report, this must be part of a larger overhaul of the way of thinking about collections management, acquisition, deaccessioning, and the role of Icelandic museums.

A final area of interest that emerged from this project is that of research in Icelandic museums. ICOM includes research as one of the key areas of museum work (ICOM, 2017). This is reinforced in the Icelandic legislation, with Safnalög stating “Söfn skulu leitast við að efla faglegt starf á sínu sviði og standast lágmarkskröfur um söfnun, skráningu, varðveislu, rannsóknir og miðlun” (Safnalög, Chapter V, Article 14). Safnalög also discusses the transfer of objects between museums for research purposes (Ibid). In our discussions we discovered that many of the museums we met with were unable to conduct research due to the same limitations they faced when wanting to begin the deaccessioning process – there is often not enough time, funding, or staff to properly conduct research. This was also recently discussed in Ólöf Gerður Sigfúsdóttir’s article “The state of research in Icelandic museums” (2021). While not directly related to deaccessioning, it is part of a wider look at the current situation of Icelandic museums and the limitations to museum work that they face.

The idea of implementing the circular economy model within deaccession strategies of Icelandic museums would present a great benefit for both communities and museums. The

desirable future for museums all over the world is a space where the least amount of waste is produced. We are not only talking about how to differentiate a collection-worthy object and an object to deaccess. We are also looking at the impact that current collections have when it comes to sustainable and ecologically responsible practices.

In the case of the Technical Museum in Seyðisfjörður, numerous objects have been salvaged and restored after the landslide. Many objects, on the other hand, have been irreversibly damaged and have been thrown away right away, almost as a trauma response, a tentative to wipe out painful memories. However, if we look at this instance in retrospect, we may look at the landslide as interference that has made museum professionals realize that unregulated collection policies are dangerous and risky. The first logical step in managing the risk of a natural hazard is reducing the possible consequences of the event to a minimum. If there is less possible waste then, automatically, the concrete waste will be diminished.

Furthermore, maintaining objects in a museum collection is costly due to energy consumption and storage space maintenance. The circular economy model, in concurrence with a deaccession policy, can thus find alternative ways of disposing of the object to deaccess, as we point out in the multiple steps in our handbook. There are several ways of going from point A and point B, and what our handbook aims for is to suggest a series of in-between points in the linear trajectory from A to B. As the literature on circular economy states, the very core element of circular economy is that it is not a linear path, but an alternative application of a straightforward process (which is not the most beneficial when it comes to producing and managing life and the afterlife of objects).

It was especially brought to our attention that there is often no reason for keeping certain objects in existing collections since they greatly overlap with the same or similar objects that can be found in other collections in the country, sometimes a mere 50km away in terms of distance between premises. We believe that a dialogue with the local community is necessary to highlight the issues that the museum has been facing so far and will face in the deaccessioning process. It has been often mentioned by our interviewees that museums need to serve people and especially the local communities. Without clear communication, however, this is unachievable. Addressing collection policy, deaccessioning and circular economy issues is crucial for external parties to grasp the difficult situation museums in Iceland find themselves in. Workshops aimed at discussing the steps and processes that will

derive from this project would be a logical development to engage locals in a co-dependent advancement toward a more sustainable museum.

As a part of this project, the Museum Marketplace group was created on Facebook. It was to serve as a pilot platform to facilitate the sale and loan of museum objects between museums in Iceland. After its creation, it was determined to not be the current best way forward, and is no longer operational. Alternatives could include Sarpur, though from our discussions we believe another platform is necessary to make it easier to check what other museums are deaccessioning, to better facilitate communication, and to allow museums to coordinate their collections policies to ensure there is no overlap and to know where different types of objects could go.

Conclusion

The landslide in Seyðisfjörður brought to light the storage and collections situation of the Technical Museum earlier than would have likely otherwise occurred. There were many objects in the collection, and a rather haphazard way of storing them. Much of the collection was unregistered, and it was being stored in multiple locations around Seyðisfjörður. This is an extreme example, but serves as an excellent parallel to the situation that many Icelandic museums find themselves in. As we have highlighted throughout the report and handbook, museum storage facilities around the country are nearing or have already reached maximum capacity. This issue is multi-faceted and is much more complex than simply deaccessioning alone. Removing objects from collections is not enough to properly address the issue. This report highlighted the key issues related to the storage problem and deaccessioning in Icelandic museums by applying the concepts of sustainability and the circular economy.

Collections management begins with acquisitions, and we have determined the most critical area here to be the collections policy. This is a two-sided coin: museums must have a strong and focused collections policy to enable them to be more selective in what they are collecting, but they must also coordinate with other accredited museums to ensure that there is no unnecessary overlap within these policies and the collections themselves. The current status is that museums are often collecting the exact same objects, and frequently on an unnecessarily large scale. This spreads resources too thinly, and a coordinated approach

would be more beneficial for the care of collections and long-term preservation of Icelandic heritage and culture.



A rusty tractor lays on the other side of the road from the damaged premises of Tækniminjasafn Austurlands, Seyðisfjörður.

The collections policy issue is one that will require a massive amount of work, as it would need museums to begin working together to facilitate this coordination before deaccessioning practices even begin. We believe that the best way to implement this is to have the principal museums and the Museum Council of Iceland (Safnaráð) organize this process. It will also require a large-scale discussion on what the purpose and role of museums are today, and what they will be in the future. This means large-scale changes, which will undoubtedly be a difficult initial process, but one that has great potential.

The second key issue for deaccessioning is that of available resources in Icelandic museums. As we have discussed, many museums in Iceland are understaffed, under-funded, and do not have the time, specialized knowledge, or additional resources needed to undertake deaccessioning. The current result is that it is quite common for objects removed from collections (registered and unregistered) to be thrown away, which is in opposition to a more

sustainable approach. To properly deaccess with sustainability and the circular economy concept in mind, museums must have the extra time, staff, and resources to go through, categorize each object, and ensure that it is removed in a manner that extends the object's life cycle as much as possible. This absolutely takes time and is another area that will require a shift in thinking and additional educational directives to properly inform museum professionals about the concepts and their utilization.

The final key issue that must be addressed is the current lack of proper communication about collections management and deaccessioning, both between accredited museums and between the principal and accredited museums. While the National Museum has provided information, written resources, and online content, many museums still feel that not enough is being done to properly address the dire situation that many Icelandic museums are facing. With the storages full, many must begin deaccessioning or risk not being able to properly care for their collections, not being able to utilize the collections to their full potential, and not being able to collect for the future. We have highlighted several areas where communication and assistance could be improved, including providing official resources for collaborative efforts to update collections policies (as has been done in Finland, for example), providing more visible support to smaller regional museums that are deeply embedded in their local communities, and providing clearer information and hands-on assistance for museums beginning the deaccessioning processes. This could also be an opportunity for Safnaráð and the principal museums to address other areas in museum work that need attention, such as the lack of research being undertaken in many cultural heritage museums.

Deaccessioning is a necessary and important part of museum work, enabling museums to better care for their collections and serve their communities, present and future. We have seen that the need for deaccessioning is prevalent in Icelandic museums. The vast majority of people we spoke to throughout this project support deaccessioning, though there are still mixed opinions on what should be done with objects that have been deaccessed. We hope that through projects like this one, increased discussion within the field, and guidance from Safnaráð and the principal museums, Icelandic museums can choose a sustainable and transparent way forward. Our goal is for museums to think of not only deaccessioning, but overall museum practices, with sustainability and the circular economy in mind. We cannot think that the physical and cultural landscape is and always will remain what it was in the past, especially now that we face an ecological transition and new interpretations of museum

work. Cultural institutions have the duty to present not only an image of the past but also a vision of how to face the future.

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Appendix

A. Deaccessioning Handbook:



Deaccessioning Handbook.pdf