

Featured article

TOOLS FOR COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

Alexandra VAN KLEEF

*Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands/RCE
a.van.kleef@cultureelerfgoed.nl*

ABSTRACT

Paintings, sculptures, comic books, computer games, stories, it's all part of our heritage. To keep our heritage and our museum collections safe we need efficient collections management. In the last 20 years much has changed and worldwide standards for collections management were developed. One of those standards is SPECTRUM. SPECTRUM is a freely available standard that is currently used in 40 countries across the world.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, collection management, SPECTRUM

Conservation of cultural collections is important for the future, and showing these collections in exhibitions and lending and borrowing between museums make our artworks visible to a larger public. To make both conservation and collections mobility easier standard procedures and standard documents can help. Knowledge of practical steps to take and of legal and ethical requirements can be found in SPECTRUM.

SPECTRUM consists of 21 procedures and functions as a handbook for collections management. As an example there are procedures for cataloguing, conservation and collections care and loans in and loans out. SPECTRUM has existed since 1994 and was first developed in England with the help of museums in the UK and under the direction of the Museum Documentation Association. This organization is now called Collections Trust. They developed SPECTRUM further and the latest version consists of easy to use flowcharts.



Figure 1. Chairs storage, RCE Rijswijk
Source: Tim Koster

More and more countries see how practical SPECTRUM is and translate this handbook in their own language. In the Netherlands and Flanders the Dutch version was developed in 2008 and the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands developed it further and added Dutch flowcharts. Now many museums in the Netherlands use SPECTRUM procedures for their day to day collections care.



Figure 2. Paintings storage, RCE Rijswijk
Source: Tim Koster



Figure 3. Paintings storage, RCE Rijswijk
Source: Alexandra van Kleef



Figure 4. Willem Hussem's painting display preparation, Theater Dakota, The Hague

Source: Alexandra van Kleef

The Cultural Heritage Agency also manages part of the State Art Collection in the Netherlands and uses the SPECTRUM procedures for loans, acquisition, deaccessioning, preservation and all other things that are needed for managing an art collection.

Another advantage of standards in collections care is that if everyone uses the same procedures there is less confusion on how things are being done in other organizations. This simplifies the process of lending and borrowing of objects between the different museums. For example, if a museum uses SPECTRUM you know that they manage risks in a professional way. Mutual trust will help the process of lending and borrowing and increase collections mobility.

Next to the use of standard procedures more and more documents are being

standardized. For example, facility reports and loan agreements can be made universal so that every cultural institution can use them. It would be beneficial if in the future we all use the same procedures and documents to be on a consistent professional level.

The latest developments in collections management deal with collection assessment. What is the significance of our collections and objects? And what is the cultural and historical value? At the moment several countries across the world work with a set of criteria and a framework to make it possible for museums to assess their collections and make important decisions about new acquisitions, priorities in conservation and the deaccessioning of objects that no longer fit in their collections.

In conclusion, different tools have been developed and help museums and other institutes with a collection, to manage their collections professionally and make well-founded decisions to let the collections prosper and make them visible for a large public to enjoy.

