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Title: The Cost of Collecting: Collection Management in UK Museums

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financial support for scientifically significant collections will be enhanced.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

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This paper will essentially concern the fallibility of the collecting and curatorial process. It will test the basis on which decisions are made concerning the evaluation of collections; the role of connoisseurship; and the underlying assumptions of the collecting process. It will then go on to examine how value judgements concerning specimens are involved in the curatorial process - acquisition through to disposal - and how the process of collecting alters our perceptions of the material concerned.

Basically my argument is that natural science collections are too complex to evaluate effectively - they originate from a diversity of causes and then are wrapped up in a web of subjective assumptions in the hope that they will ultimately fulfil some immeasurable potential. Is it possible to make objective judgements about the value of natural science collections?

I do not intend to go into the valuation of collections - really my arguments concern the process that precedes valuation.

A DUTCH EXERCISE IN THE VALUATION OF NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

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A massive rescue operation for the preservation of cultural heritage in The Netherlands was initiated in 1990. This government sponsored national programme required a complete inventory of the considerable backlog in the conservation, restoration, housing, registration and documentation of collections in museums and archives of all sorts. This inventory involved a classification of all the state-owned collections and their included objects into four categories of relative importance, A through D, applicable to all cultural heritage disciplines, from the arts to archives. Top level material, e.g. type material in natural history collections, is in category A; bottom level material, unsuitable for storage or any further action other than complete disposal, comes in D. This nationally uniform approach to valuation questions was a *conditio sine qua non* for setting priorities in the allocation of funds by the government agency concerned, ie the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs. The application of the A-D valuation system to natural history collections required a further refinement and more precise definition of the four categories. This was achieved by the formulation of straightforward criteria representing widely accepted indicators of biological, geological, and display values, as well as some supplementary curatorial criteria, such as ownership status. In The Netherlands the system is now widely used, not only for grant allocation, but also in planning documents, acquisition proposals and other collection management tools. In this paper the A-D categorization is described and problems encountered in its application as a tool in implementing collection management policies are discussed.

AN ATTEMPT AT VALUING THE ZOOLOGICAL REFERENCE COLLECTION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE.

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An attempt is made to review the scientific, cultural and monetary value of the Zoological Reference Collection of the Department of Zoology, National University of Singapore (ZRC). We feel that its overall value is essentially the same as many other established zoological collections.

The ZRC consists largely of the original zoological collection of the former Raffles Museum, presently the National Museum of Singapore. It is a repository for research collections of Southeast Asian fauna and is one of the largest and most complete in the Sundaland region. It is unique and irreplaceable because a lot of the material originates from biotopes which are lost to development. Therefore, it is valued as a "natural heritage" for the region. The specimens continue to form the basis of many scientific publications. Although mainly consulted by taxonomists and systematists, the ZRC is also used by other biologists, as well as illustrators.

The ZRC plays a significant part in Singapore's cultural history and is valued as a "national heritage". It was founded by Sir Stamford Raffles, who was also the founder of modern Singapore. Assembled sometime before 1887, it has survived the Second World War and unfavourable government policies in the 1970s. Many specimens were donated by famous personalities in Singapore's history. A small part of the collection is on display for educational purposes.

It is very difficult to assess the monetary value of the ZRC. Ways of valuing each specimen through division of the amount used to procure and maintain resulted in ridiculously high prices. The only way to come up with a "reasonable" price is through arbitrary quotation. We concur that the collection is priceless as many species are presently endangered and are quite irreplaceable in our rapidly changing world.

THE COST OF COLLECTING: COLLECTION MANAGEMENT IN UK MUSEUMS.

Barry Lord, Gail Dexter Lord and John Nicks (1989), Lord Cultural Resources Ltd, 10 Windmill Row, London SE11 5DW

Lord Cultural Resources was engaged by the Office of Arts and Libraries to conduct a national study on the cost of managing collections in British museums including systematic collections. This pioneering study combines quantitative survey data with detailed case studies of representative museums to develop a profile of the state and costs of collection development and management, and

proposes a process by which individual museums may analyze and account for such costs. This study was published in September 1989 by HMSO Books in the United Kingdom. The presentation will focus on the major findings of the study, especially those concerning natural history and systematic collections.

DEPRECIATION, APPRECIATION AND INFLATION: THE ECONOMICS OF BOTANICAL COLLECTIONS.

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It is relatively easy to work out how much it costs to collect a plant specimen and maintain it in good condition and such costs should always be minimized. They equate with value only in the sense that they indicate *past* commitments and priorities; they also give some idea of what would be needed to replace lost or damaged specimens, although with the loss of biodiversity world-wide, replacement will sometimes be impossible. With more difficulty, one can estimate how much other collectors and institutions might be prepared to pay for specimens, were they to be offered for sale. This indicates value in the same way that, for paintings or sculpture, the current price of similar art works at auction can be used as a valuation for insurance purposes (or to impress visitors). The analogy with art works is in some ways appropriate for preserved plants, since each specimen is usually unique (and so, strictly speaking, cannot be replaced), unlike books or coins. Well-preserved specimens of rarely collected species, with good information about their provenance and ecology, would probably command much higher prices on the open market than poorly documented, incomplete specimens of common species - just as the few remaining Leonardo paintings have a value far in excess of what one would pay for one of the myriad landscapes painted by the pupils of Victorian drawing masters. Living specimens require separate consideration since they are potentially self-renewing and can be used for many different purposes, including commercial horticulture, screening for drugs or other plant products, etc.

However, plant specimens have an extra dimension not possessed by works of art, since they are intended principally to serve as raw material for scientific research. Some specimens (types) have a special status as 'biological standards': they define the units of biodiversity (genera, species, varieties, etc) in much the same way as the standard metre defines a particular unit of length. These aspects too could be assigned a financial value. For instance, the presence of many types at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, will attract visiting scientists to Edinburgh and thus provide income to the city. But a number of paradoxes arise from simple attempts at valuation. Intuitively, one feels that a specimen that has been studied thoroughly and documented well by a distinguished scientist should become more valuable as a result of the work done upon it. From an economic standpoint, however, the specimen would seem to be less valuable after the study is completed than it was before, since there is less potential for further work; most valuable of all, then, would be specimens that had not been studied at all. Perversely too, a specimen would appear to lose value more slowly through slipshod work than through careful, accurate studies, since the errors would prompt new work. These assessments are clearly flawed.

Perhaps the mistake lies in trying to value the collections themselves, rather than what is done with them and what depends upon them. Plant collections are an essential basis for plant taxonomy; plant taxonomy is an essential basis for all other plant science, and this in turn supports conservation, plant breeding, genetic manipulation and other activities underlying wealth creation and improvement in the quality of life. This, surely, is the message that needs to be emphasized if the importance of natural science collections is to be appreciated by those who fund them.

INSURANCE IMPLICATIONS OF DISPLAY OF COLLECTIONS MADE UP OF UNIQUE ITEMS WITH LITTLE OR NO COMMERCIAL MARKET VALUE.

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[Abstract awaited]

THE ITALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SCIENCE MUSEUMS AND ITS GOALS IN REGARD TO SCIENTIFIC COLLECTIONS

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The Italian Association of Science Museums (A.N.M.S. = Associazione Nazionale dei Musei Scientifici) was created in 1972 with the aim to re-evaluate national scientific culture through a knowledge of museum collections and to promote the most appropriate use thereof.

Among its goals we can mention: to protect the national wealth of science museums, promoting campaigns and programs aimed at preventing the loss and deterioration of those assets and to help update and protect them; to protect the moral, legal and economic conditions under which the institutions' activities are carried out; to maintain public interest in those institutions, strengthening their educational and cultural roles, etc.

The Association includes at present 407 members, of which 128 are "institutional" (museums) and 279 "individual". Since 1984 a periodical concerning scientific museology ("Museologia Scientifica") is published twice per year. In the first 10 volumes 368 articles have been published concerning the following topics: descriptions of museums and collections (39%); research, concepts and historical aspects (17%); methods and techniques for collection preparation, conservation and cataloguing (15%); teaching, exhibitions, legal matters, etc. (29%).

21 symposia and 9 national congresses have been organized during the last 22 years.