Tidying up in the past – for the future
- prioritising in museum collections

Haugesund, 16.oktober 2017

Anne Bjørke, head of collections
Bergen City Museum
Guidelines for prioritisation

Transfer of ownership and destruction of cultural history museum objects

Bergen City Museum

http://www.kulturradet.no/vis-publikasjon/-/retningslinjer-for-avhending
http://www.kulturradet.no/vis-publikasjon/-/guidelines-for-prioritisation
The Norwegian guidelines in short

1. **Preparation**
   - Clarify legal and formal issues
   - Ensure compliance with statues and planning documents

2. **Planning**
   - Define why the process is to be done and what the goal is
   - Choice of methods/tools

3. **Implementation**
   - Selection of objects
   - Valuation and documentation

4. **Choices and consequences**
   - Further actions following the prioritisation process
Legal considerations

• Registered or not - no legal difference

• Legal difference between transfer of ownership and destruction

• Documentation of ownership

• Possible to apply to amend or reverse claims/demands from donor

Search: Eeg + avhende

http://hdl.handle.net/1956/7899
Å rydde i fortida – for framtid

Prioritering, avhending og destruksjon i museumssamlingar

Heidi Seilfaldet og Anne Bjørke
Choices and consequences in BCM

• We have valuated 365 chairs
  – Just over 100 physically destroyed
  – Just over 50 offered as part of the educational collection
  – 200 + preserved as museum objects

• We have valuated 55 ploughs
  – 15 physically destroyed
  – 5 offered as part of the educational collection
  – 35 preserved as museum objects
Our experience so far...

- The process has to be firmly rooted within the organisation
- Important to be open
- Making a decision requires practice
- Makes it easier if you can physically gather a group of objects – but it’s not absolutely necessary!
- The collections become more representative
- Less opposition than we expected...
- Increased interest and acceptance
- Time-consuming, but very satisfactory
The road ahead...

• Try to find solutions to some challenges:
  – How can we follow ICOM’s Code of Ethics in an efficient way?
  – How do we handle documentation backlog?
  – How much time should we spend on ‘obvious destruction candidates’
  – Consider other external recipients for transfer of ownership
  – Consider public auction/sale
How did we end up where we are?

• Many collections formed due to the effort of enthusiasts
• Focus on collecting in order to «save» our heritage
• Focus on exhibitions & activities for the public
• Little attention given to storage conditions and documentation
• Gradually lost sight of what one had
To prioritise, or not to prioritise, is **not** the question...

- Prioritising is a must – we do it all the time!
- Questions often come if transfer of ownership or destruction is suggested
- Will an object be of more value in a different collection or will be better suited as a prop?
- Maybe it is considered not to have sufficient historic value for us to spend resources on it?
Why do we need to prioritise – and sometimes dispose?

• More representative collections with a higher cultural historical value
• A better overview of the collections
• Avoid pushing the decisions over to our future colleagues
• To spend public funding in the best possible way
• Realistic expectations for new storage areas
What about new material?

- An increasing amount of material possessions during the last century
- Less *stuff* is designed and produced locally
- We need to discuss and decide who should collect what
- Important to state what not to collect
- We have to make bold choices
What if we don’t dare?

• Are the collections we pass on as representative as they could be?
• Have we spent the funding in the best way for the society we are serving?
• Will the assessment become even more difficult in the future?
• Have we done our best to secure material heritage from our recent past and the present?
• Are we doing the best job we could do with the resources we have?