

Environmental Projects, Collections and Their Long Term Storage

Over the last 10-20 years, several interdisciplinary projects have been started and completed. Some of them started as archaeological projects, some as natural science projects, and some were initiated by local authorities, scientific boards etc.

The aim of the vast majority of the projects has been to describe either the present or a former environmental situation, or environmental changes from one time to another. Advanced technology has been used and refined techniques in taxonomy, field or laboratory methods or perhaps data processing have been developed.

Many of the projects have constituted a kind of wide scale study using several different technics aimed at obtaining more information by employing a larger number of parameters, ultimately leading to highly specific discussions and finally conclusions.

At the end of such a project-period, colour slides, different forms of archive material, samples and collections of various kinds will, in most cases, have a very uncertain future. (I am not talking about traditional archaeological artefacts which are normally well handled).

In some cases recognized museums exist within the same university or institution in which the project has taken place, in other cases not. If a museum is involved, the different collections and samples will perhaps be stored but the future is still uncertain.

In very few cases there exist an agreement between the project organizers and a museum for long term storage. Unfortunately, the present situation is that most museums either have problems in handling even the traditional objects because of staff and/or economic reductions or are resistant to new demands. In such cases, the project's collections will suffer and in a short time, the people who were involved in the project will have left or no longer have time to spend on their former work and so, part of the collection will be lost.

As a curator at a museum, I am certainly familiar with all the difficulties concerning space, lack of staff and a reduced economy. On the other hand it is part of our job to take care of selected material for long term storage, and we are also aware that members of projects in progress ask us about collections and other kinds of reference material from former studies relevant to their work.

Certainly, in most cases the old collections which are stored in the museum are unsatisfactorily labelled, and information of importance to the present day scientist is lacking. On the other hand the information that does exist, is of value.

The situation at a museum today is that we only have a very small number of records and objects from present day environmental studies. If at all they are normally unsatisfactorily labelled and in order to keep the general work of the museum running, such material is placed somewhere in boxes, not catalogued in the normal system and safely stored. This means, in fact, that the collection is not available for further study.

The precision of scientific study today is high and the number of parameters increasing. We read of improvements and new techniques developed by different projects. Several large environmental projects have ended without a single reference sample safely stored, at least in Norway. The members or the leader of the project, in some cases, as I have mentioned, do nothing about the samples studied.

We argue for important projects. Vast sums of money are used and, in some cases the locality is destroyed. What is left of such projects? Some reports, also in some cases scientific papers but in most cases no basic documentation exists.

It is clear that scientists in the future will use more parameters than we use today for similar studies. In addition they will want to make use of our data for comparisons, in the first place our reports and papers, and secondly the samples for more precise taxonomic identification or important new chemical analyses. If there is the possibility of collecting more material from the site something can be done and our reports or papers will still be of use and of importance. If, on the other hand, the locality has been destroyed, control and further work on the old collection is impossible and, in many cases, our papers will suffer and be of minor importance.

I do not know the overall situation concerning project collections, storing facilities and the quality of the collection itself. The museum staffs receive into their care a preselected collection of such material. The people are responsible for the storage facilities and the economy needed to keep the museum running, but the same staff also need to be involved in the project in good time, to be aware of the type and amount of material, in order to

be able to plan and advise on the receipt of selected, well labelled collections. In this way, time and money will be saved both at present and in the future.

My hope is that those scientists who follow us will find selected reference samples from our present — and palaeoenvironmental projects, well labelled for further work in the future — a good record of what scientists have done before them.

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