Accession number vs. Inventory number

the history of problems

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Accession

SPECTRUM 4.0

Acquisition procedure

Minimum Standard

The procedure for managing and documenting acquisitions must:

• Ensure that a unique number is assigned to, and physically attached to, all objects;

• Ensure that accession registers are maintained, describing all acquisitions and listing them by number;

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The SPECTRUM 4.0 Accession Register

- entry number
- accession number
- date received or accessioned
- acquired from (name and address of vendor or donor)
- acquisition method
- simple name/basic description/identification and historical information
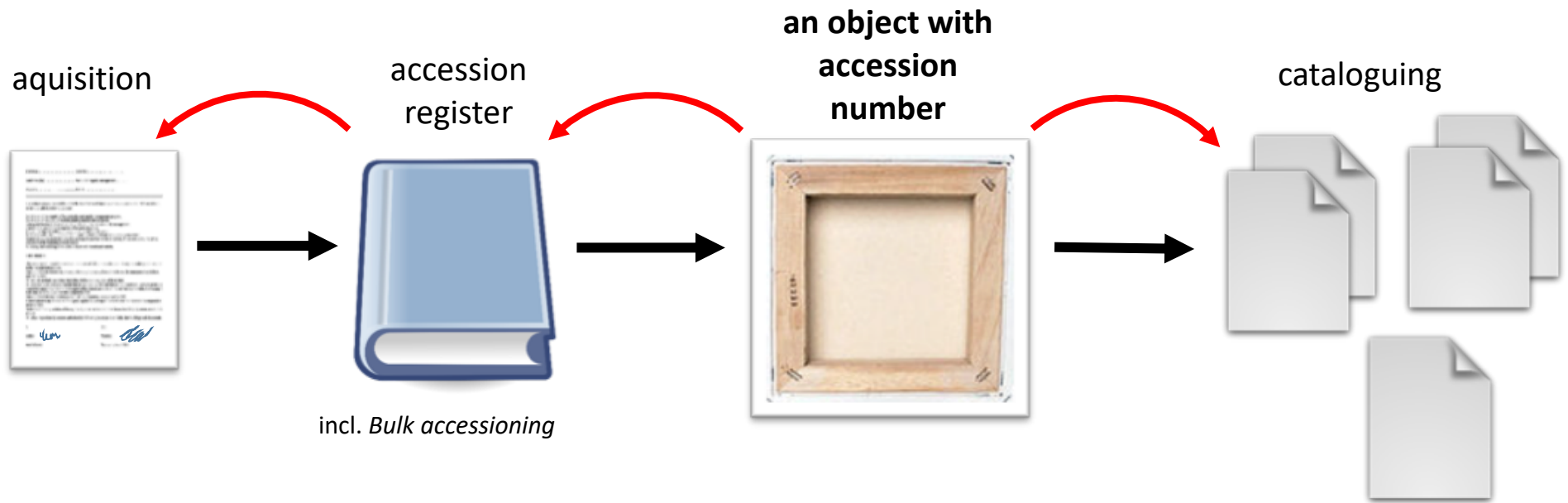- initial store

Numbering

- a simple running number system: e.g. 14603; 14604; 14605; 14606; 14607....
- a more common approach is to use the year of accession followed by a running number: e.g. 1991.3; 1991.4; 1991.5; 1991.6; 1991.7

Musées de France

- three types of accession registers referred to as: inventory of acquisitions, retrospective inventory and mass inventory
- more complex mandatory information than required by SPECTRUM

Numbering

- the year of accession followed by the acquisition number and then the object number

aquisition → accession register → **an object with accession number** → cataloguing

incl. *Bulk accessioning*

Meanwhile in Poland…

Formerly

Museum Inventory that consists of a number of registers and other documents:

- Accession Book
- Field Accession Book (archaeological museums)
- Storage files
- Inventory Book
- Scientific catalogue
- Long-term loans book
- Movement book

The main register is the Inventory Book

- Identification numer consists of an acronym of the museum followed by the number: e.g. MOR/1, MOM/123

- or in most cases: an acronym of the museum and of the collection followed by the number: e.g. MNW/M/123, MNK/III/123

Then

aquisition

Accession Book

basic cataloguing

Inventory Book

an object with inventory number
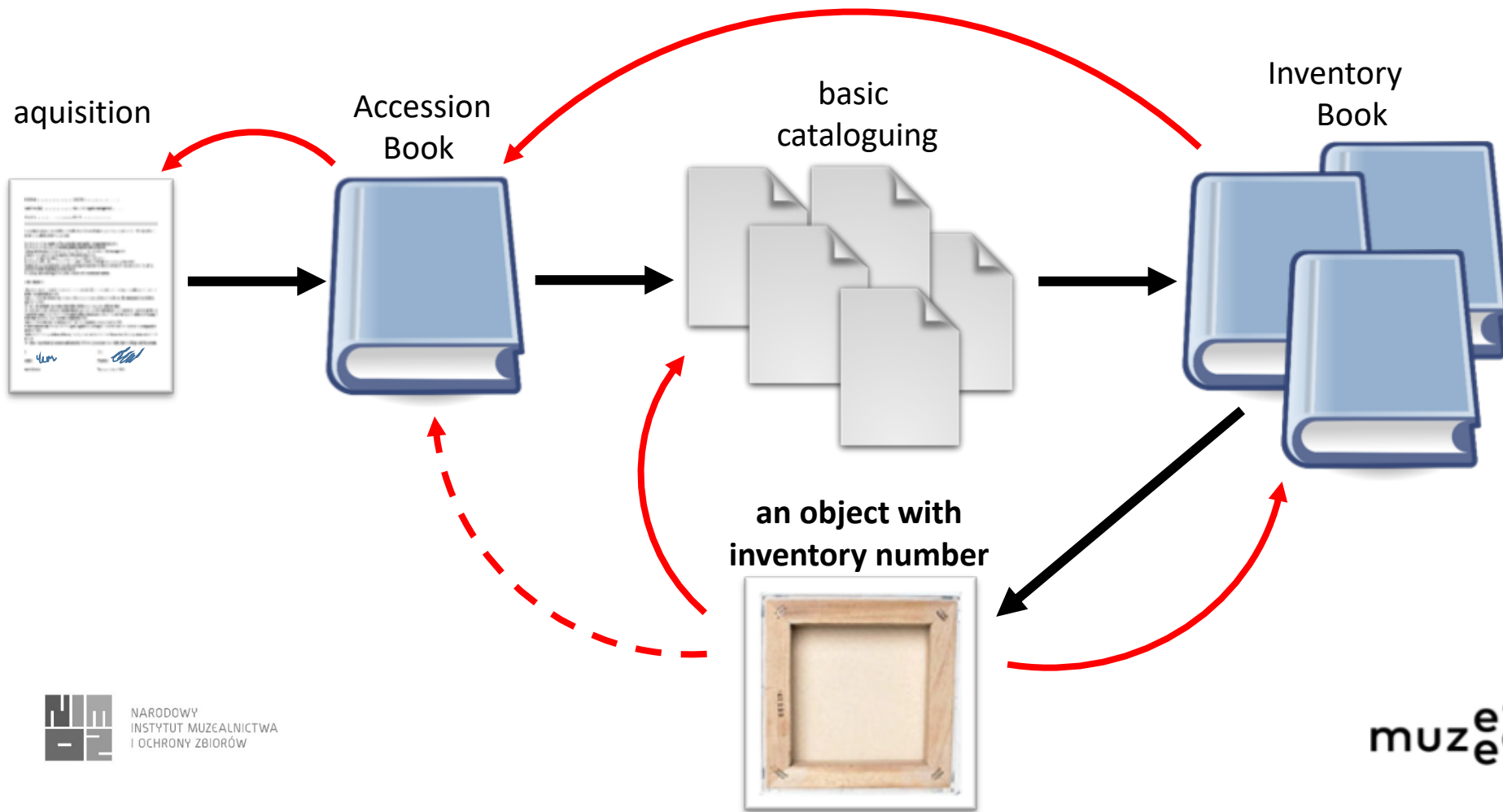
Now

Mandatory documentation of museum objects:

- filing cards,

- Inventory Book,

- Deposit Book,

- documentation of archaeological research and other fieldwork (archaeological museums)
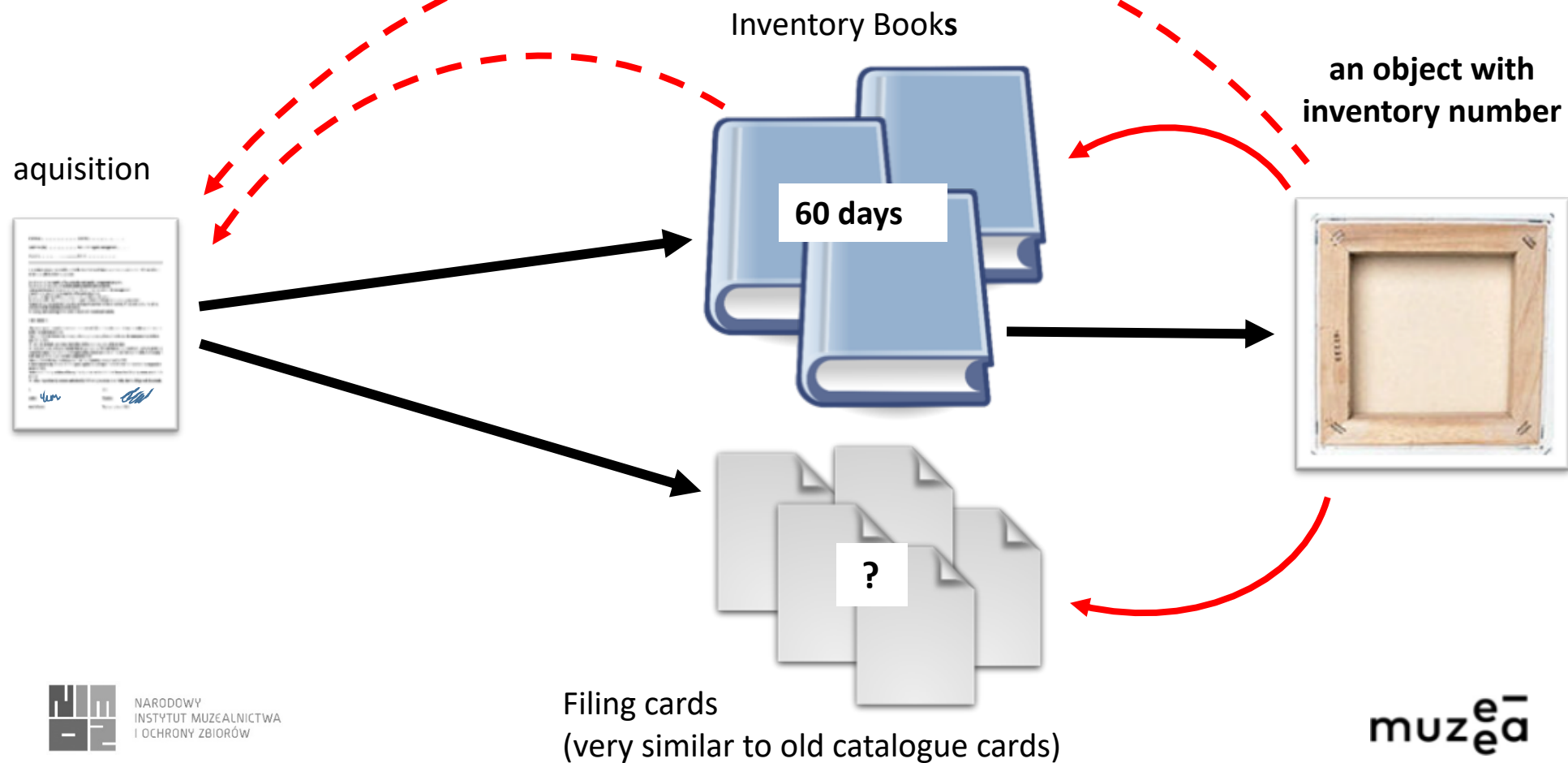
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Now

Mandatory data in the inventory and in the filing card:

- author/producer
- *provenance*
- value as of the day of acquisition
- date and place of production
- material
- techniques
- size and, if needed, weight
- distinguishing features

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Now

Inventory Books

an object with inventory number

aquisition

60 days

?

Filing cards
(very similar to old catalogue cards)

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But does it really matter?

YES!

There are many weak links where we could loose connection
between an object and its documentation

?
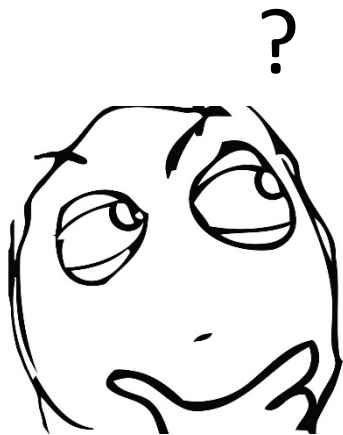
But does it really matter?

1. Problems with an „intelligent" way of thinking about an identification numer – new parts added to old object numbers just to make them look „neat"

2. Problems with collections management – as each inventory is assigned to a collection, it is often regarded as an internal document of collections custodian – registrars are too often not able to control it efficiently

3. Need for re-numbering of objects in many cases – an object can have multiple identification numbers during its lifetime! After many years, inventories are often red with strokes and information that is crossed out

   - when, after reconsideration, an object suits better another collection

   - when collection is divided in two and each one is given a new name

   - when collections are merged and the name changes…

   …because an object has to be marked with a number that consists of the owners abbreviation and an inventory number, that consists of a collection symbol and the object number

But does it really matter?

4. Numerous types of identification numbers in one museum, e.g.:

Gr.Ob.Alb.123 – foreign engravings albums

Gr.Ob.A.123 – foreign engravings – English

Gr.Ob.miej.123 – foreign engravings – towns

Gr.Ob.N.n.123 – foreign engravings – modern German (until 1914, the rest is in completely different department of Modern Art in Engravings and Darwnings Collection)

Gr.Ob.R.s.d.123 – foreign engravings, various old schools

Gr.Ob.R.s.n.123 – foreign engravings, various modern schools…..

+ General Inventory (from year 1916)– only digits, but with blocks of numbers for different collections, which means gaps between them!

But does it really matter?

5. Basic documentation is harder to evacuate in case of a disaster (a lot of books that are partly filled up and often kept in different parts of museum)

6. Problems with printing an inventory when there are few acquisitions during a year

What could be done?

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What could be done?

Proposition for the future: change of the accession system

For sure: no mandatory re-numbering (only in cases when it is reasonable and realisable)

- Back to accession registers. Accession Book = main register,
- Identification numer based on the acquisition date,
- No „intelligent" numbering,
- Back to Catalogue. Inventory = Catalogue = filing cards/digital catalogue records

What could be done?

Possible problems:

- There is little will to change – old „inteligent" system firmly rooted
- Fear of extra work
- How to combine the old and the new?

Solution:

- Like with previous changes: the old documentation stays valid – no need for re-numbering
- New museums – new accession system from the beginnig

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Thank you!

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