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UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS JOURNAL



THE POWER OF MUSEUMS: SUSTAINABILITY



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UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS JOURNAL ◀

UMAC - NATHIST - ICME - ICR 2022
Book of Abstracts — The Power of Museums
Integrated in the 26th ICOM General Conference

ICOM PRAGUE 2022

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This issue of UMACJ was edited by Andrew Simpson



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For the first time ever, four important committees of ICOM join efforts in Prague to organise a super conference encompassing university museums and collections (UMAC), natural history museums (NATHIST), museums and collections of ethnography (ICME) and regional museums (ICR). The theme of the joint conference will be 'THE POWER OF MUSEUMS: SUSTAINABILITY'.

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EDITORIAL

The power of museums and the power of the network in transformative and defining times

Andrew Simpson, Dorit Wolenitz, Irena Žmuc, Marta Lourenço & Ralf Čeplak Mencin

The global museum community meets in Prague for the 26th ICOM General Conference from 20-28 August 2022. The three years since the 25th ICOM General Conference in Kyoto have probably been among the most disruptive and disrupted periods of time for the museum profession and the world in general. This conference will focus on the strength, position and capacity of museums in building a free, democratic and literate society. It will consider how museums are changing and adapting to meet the challenges and needs of the 21st century. The ability to cope with the social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic will also be discussed by the global community of museum professionals. Drawing on lessons learnt during the past three years regarding sustainability and resilience will undoubtedly be a focus of both formal and informal discussions in Prague. The intervening three year period left the global community of museum practitioners and theorists without an agreed revision of the museum definition; this will also undoubtedly be a focus of discussions and even, perhaps resolution.

The call for papers this year, in line with the themes of the ICOM triennial, was centred on how the power of museums operates on many levels and in many contexts. Museums are unique human organisations with the ability for dialogic engagement with diverse communities and the broader public on the critical issues of our times. We are presently experiencing confronting challenges where there is a heightened sense of urgency for action and changes in many inter-related areas of nature and culture, perhaps even the most challenging in all of human history (Economou et al. 2021). We are challenged by climate change, the environmental emergency, inequality, social injustice and the impact of Covid-19 on our social and economic conditions as well as our professional practice. We are also challenged by economic and existential questions related to definition and purpose of our organisations that test our capacity for adaptability, resilience and even survival.

Such big questions require broad debates at the widest possible level. The compiled abstracts for the meeting in Prague reflect the wide breadth and depth of these debates. For the first time, UMAC (university museums), NATHIST (natural history museums), ICME (museums of ethnography) and ICR (regional museums) organised a joint call for proposals, the abstracts of those selected for either oral or poster delivery over two days (22nd and 23rd August) comprise the bulk of this volume. It is an interesting joint enterprise involving two distinctive types of ICOM International Committees. There are two focussed on the nature of their collections namely NATHIST and ICME; and two focussed on their institutional settings, UMAC and ICR.

The combination of UMAC, NATHIST, ICME and ICR, joining their members for the first time, called for papers seeking answers to some of the urgent questions in contemporary museology. While experimenting in network exploration and bringing diverse voices and different perspectives into dialogue, the aim was to share and be inspired by examples of projects across and between different collecting disciplines and different institutional settings. We welcomed experiences, case-studies and in-depth reflections that help us power our networks and push the frontiers of our understanding.

We were keen to test questions such as; are museums effectively making progress towards UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? Are museums becoming truly polyphonic and inclusive of many voices? Are the knowledge systems of First Nation's peoples becoming part of the epistemic systems of the museum?

Are museums truly transitioning from being points of cultural authority to being parts of a network of cultural agency? How can museums harness their power to become effective agents of change?

As can be seen in the compiled abstracts, the joint meeting is divided into three sessions. The first session entitled – The Power of Museums: Inclusion / The Making of an Inclusive Museum – covers a range of issues about diversity, inclusion and ‘decolonisation’ across all aspects of museum function. Convened by the International Committee for museums of ethnography (ICME), this session sought insights into the challenges and prospects of making museums truly polyphonic spaces, including the how and why of weaving together different knowledge systems into our practices.

Session two – The Power of Museums: SDGs / Museums’ Actions for Sustainable Development – explores coupling the Sustainable Development Goals with museum practices, namely how to enhance the effectiveness and implementation of the SDGs. Convened by the International Committee for natural history museums (NATHIST), the session also analyses the development of sustainable museums and the positive climate actions our organisations can take.

The third session – The Power of Museums: Harnessing the Power of Networks – is all about the growing value of the diverse network that enables current transformation from central point of cultural authority to a network of cultural agency. It covers the involvement of communities in museum practices and how trans-disciplinarity can be an axis for innovating the museum. This session is convened by the International Committee for Regional Museums (ICR).

While oral presentations from these three sessions are scheduled over two days of the Prague conference, posters are for the first time presented on a digital platform enabling access to anyone registered for the conference regardless of whether they are affiliated with UMAC, NATHIST, ICME or ICR.

In addition to these three sessions there is a separate off-site meeting at Charles University of Prague. This session is convened by UMAC and is exploring the same questions within a framework of academic museology. This will include an important panel session on the display of human remains, an extension of the UMAC restitution and repatriation program (Scholten et al. 2021).

As can be seen in this volume, many authors have undertaken or are undertaking projects aimed at answering some of these questions while others are raising even more questions than those envisaged initially. Agenda 2030, the United Nations call to action, the future of the planet, the role of museums as brokers of knowledge, the need for broad participation in the creation of knowledge and the need for actions and positive change to be derived from knowledge comes through in many of the presentations selected by the joint programming committee and compiled as abstracts in this volume. The need for both engagement and understanding across society through existing networks and also the need to develop new network connections is a clear and definite outcome of this collaborative experiment as part of the 26th ICOM General Conference.

While the specialisations represented in this volume shows considerable depth of knowledge in many important areas, the global nature of the challenges facing humanity requires linked up or connected knowledge to fashion viable and coherent human responses. For example, the Anthropocene is a concept with great potential because it examines perspectives about the deep human-caused ecological changes we see around us. We are all impacted by these. The Anthropocene conceptually breaches the artificial ‘natural culture’ divide and is of critical significance to the sciences and the humanities alike. It will both permeate and frame the work of natural history museums, museums of regions, university museums and museums of ethnography alike. Beyond even the specialisations of our four international committees, the challenges faced by humanity put culture, history, the environment, in fact everything, in a state of flux.

As the international museum community comes together in 2022 in Prague there has never been a more important time for looking outwards beyond our own comfortable boundaries, for divergent thinking, for multiple epistemologies and for a belief in the power of museums and the power of the network to deliver new possibilities for the future and for our museums to be central to this transformative process.

As ICOM aims to resolve the museum definition in Prague, these are defining times indeed.

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Session 1:
The Power of Museums
Inclusions
Moderator: Ralf Čeplak Mencin (ICME)

23 August 2022



Session 2: The Power of Museums Sustainable Development Goals

Moderator: Dorit Wolenitz (NATHIST)

23 August 2022



Session 3: The Power of Museums Authority and Networks

Moderator: Irena Žmuc (ICR)

23 August 2022

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Hrdliček Museum, Charles University of Prague

University Museums and Collections
Moderators: Andrew Simpson &
Giovanna Vitelli
25 August 2022

Preliminary Program:

<https://tinyurl.com/UMAC2022Prague>



Poster Session

The Power of Museums

In alphabetical order
by first listed author
22 - 23 August 2022

THE MUSEUM AS A TOOL OF CONNECTION. THE CASE OF THE DIFFUSED MUSEUM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MILAN-BICOCCA

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Keywords: university, communities, transdisciplinary, digitalization

Abstract

The University of Milan-Bicocca is a recent institution, created in the last quarter of the twentieth century, placed in a new open campus in a completely renewed area in the Northern part of Milan, formerly occupied by huge industrial facilities. From its creation, the University has paid great attention to activate connections in this transformed territory with its old and new residents. Meanwhile, the University has started a process of connection between the different departments to improve the knowledge about tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and to share experiences, practices and research on it.

In 2019, the University identified, through a diffused museum, an adequate tool to activate these connections among and outside the departments. The museum aims to improve collaborative practices among the different parts of the University (the departments but also the library and the archives) and to involve the community of 'users' of the territory such as; residents, students, personnel of the university, occasional visitors, in participative museum processes.

The museum is currently in the primary stages of activation (digitalization of the collections, designing of the 'diffused' displays etc.) and it is hosting some temporary activities to experiment with different ways to connect University/collections/territory.

In this presentation we will introduce some relevant actions in this direction and analyze the results.

Biographical note

Franca Zuccoli is associate professor at the University of Milan-Bicocca. Lecturer of the courses: Teaching and learning methodologies, Art Education. Chairperson of Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro's educational section (2007-11). She collaborates with numerous museums for educational and training projects. Her main research fields are: relationship between school and museum, focused on contemporary art.

Rita Capurro is an independent researcher in the field of Museology, specialized in Art History and Design for Cultural Heritage. She collaborates on various research and didactic activities, in particular, she teaches Tourism and Cultural Heritage at University of Milan-Bicocca. Her research interests are: museums/territories, interpretation of cultural heritage, museums/religion.

Giampaolo Nuvolati is full professor of Sociology of Environment and Territory at the University of Milan Bicocca where he teaches Urban Sociology. His main research interests concern quality of urban life, conflicts between metropolitan resident and non-resident populations, methodological approaches in urban studies.

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