

Transformations: Museums and Cultural Diversity

Concurrent session convened by ICOM CCTF
ICOM 2007 General Conference
22 August 2007
Vienna (Austria)

Dr Amareswar Galla, Chairperson, ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force and Professor of Museum Studies, the University of Queensland, Brisbane

During the Quebec General Conference of ICOM in October 1992, the Advisory Committee recommended that a Working Group be established to address cross-cultural issues impacting on museums. Accordingly, at its December 1992 meeting, the Executive Council established a Working Group on Cross Cultural Issues. It was mandated with the following primary terms of reference to:

- examine and report on the ways that museums throughout the world are addressing the wide range of issues with cross cultural dimensions;
- propose guidelines for adoption by ICOM concerning the way that museums should endeavour to deal with cultural diversity in general and indigenous and multicultural issues in particular;
- make recommendations concerning the ways that cross-cultural perspectives should be reflected in the work of ICOM and its committees

The December 1997 ICOM Executive Council meeting received the findings of the Working Group. The ICOM Cultural Diversity Policy Statement and Action Plan were subsequently posted on the ICOM web page. The 1998 ICOM General Conference in Melbourne focussed on the theme of Museums and Cultural Diversity. Various elements of the Action Plan were executed by the constituent bodies of ICOM, in particular its International Committees, National Committees and Regional Organisations.

At the December 2005 meeting of the ICOM Executive Council, the Cross Cultural Task Force (CCTF) was mandated to build on the previous findings of the Working Group on Cross Cultural Issues of ICOM to continue to further the promotion of a truly global and inclusive ICOM.

The membership of the CCTF is: Chairperson - Amareswar Galla (Australia); Corazon Alvina (Philippines); Lucia Astudillo de Para (Ecuador) former member of the Working Group on Cross Cultural Issues; Adi Meretui T. Ratunabuabua (Fiji); Henri Jatti Bredekamp (South Africa); Christine Hemmet (France); An Laishun (China); Pascal Makambila (Congo, former member of the Working Group on Cross Cultural Issues); Lina Tahan (Lebanon); *Reps. Executive Council*: Teresa Scheiner and Rick West.

The CCTF has started a major review of the implementation of the Action Plan associated with the Cultural Diversity Policy of ICOM. A new Cultural Diversity Statement of ICOM is being drafted. Subsequent to the launch of the Intangible Heritage Program of ICOM in Seoul 2004, the CCTF has been actively engaged in providing leadership both through ICOM's input into UNESCO processes and also with ICOM Korea in the launching of the International Journal of Intangible Heritage.

Cultural Diversity and Intangible Heritage as living heritage are inseparable. The synergies and dynamics of the various activities and processes have been challenging and informative. In view of the impact of the accelerated pace of economic, cultural, digital and social globalisation and the rapid growth of tourism on cultural diversity internationally, the CCTF is also mandated to build on the past work of ICOM and its partners to develop an ICOM Heritage Tourism Charter as a guiding framework for museums to benefit from the opportunities provided by tourism while minimising its negative impacts. The proposal for a Charter of Principles for Museums and Cultural Tourism from the ICOM meetings in Trujillo, Peru and La Paz, Bolivia, in May 2000 and the ICOM Phnom Penh-Vientiane Charter on Cultural Diversity and Heritage Tourism facilitated by the CCTF in July –August 2006, have been significant contributors towards this end.

CCTF has been working with the ICOM Ethics Committee to address 'Cultural Diversity as an Ethical Concern'. In particular the Pacific Code of Ethics for Museums and Cultural Centres has been finalised with all the respective countries' directors and adopted by the Pacific Islands Museums Association at their AGM that was organised as part of the ICOM-CCTF Workshop in February 2006 in Canberra. This workshop also brought together the Commonwealth Association of Museums, UNESCO, the Pacific Asia Observatory for Cultural Diversity in Human Development and a range of other partners.

CCTF has had critical inputs into the Review of the ICOM Strategic Plan and argued for inclusiveness to be measured as an outcome across the business of ICOM rather than as a separate strategy. At ICOM 2007 in Vienna, the CCTF convened a concurrent session on transformations and cultural diversity in museums. A new series of conferences entitled 'The Inclusive Museum' has been initiated by the CCTF with planning in progress for 2008 in Leiden, The Netherlands, 2009 in Brisbane, Australia and 2010 in Istanbul, Turkey. Over the next three years ICOM CCTF aims to provide critical interrogation and assistance in leadership for ICOM to forge ahead as an inclusive body addressing cultural diversity across all its constituent committees and organisations.

The following is the summary of the concurrent session convened by ICOM CCTF during ICOM 2007 in Vienna.

Theme. *Transformations: Museums and Cultural Diversity*

Time. 09.00 - 13.00 Wednesday, 22nd August 2007

Venue. NIG II, University of Vienna, Dr.Karl-Lueger Ring 1, 1010 Vienna

Introduction

The integration of tangible and intangible heritage in museums continues to be a challenge that needs to be addressed worldwide. This requires a fundamental approach to connecting collections and communities in all their diversity. This concurrent session brings together Directors of major museums and researchers across the world to discuss and debate methodological concerns based on their first hand experience in addressing heritage diversity and cultural diversity through the museum as critical cultural space. It is envisaged that their perspectives will be based on case studies at the level of the individual museums, as well as national and regional experiences.

Purpose

The aim of this session is to interrogate critical issues that need to be addressed in bringing collections and their communities together within the universal and local contexts of museums, with a particular focus on cultural diversity.

Convenor: Amareswar Galla, Chairperson, ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force and Professor of Museum Studies, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

Moderators: W. Richard West, Jr. Director, National Museum of the American Indian, The Smithsonian Institution; Tereza C. Moletta Scheiner, Coordinator - Postgraduate Program in Museology and Heritage, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and Pascal Makambila, Conservateur en chef des musées, Brazzaville

Program

09.00-10.45

ICOM as an Inclusive Global Organisation

Alissandra Cummins, President, ICOM and Director, Barbados Museums and Historical Society, Barbados

Regional Diversity and Cultural Diversity

Museology and Diversity in Latin America - Nelly Decarolis, Director, Museums of Buenos Aires

'What Museums Africa' – Dealing with Diversity - George Okello Abungu, former Director General, National Museums of Kenya and Lorna Abungu, former Executive Director, AFRICOM

Small Island Countries and the Challenges of Dealing with Pacific Diversity - Emmanuel Kasarhérou, Directeur, Agence de Développement de la Culture Kanak, Centre culturel Tjibaou, Nouméa, Nouvelle-Calédonie

Faces of Europe - Udo Goesswald, Chair, ICOM-Europe and Director, Museum Neukölln, Berlin

11.00 -13.00pm

Museums, Diversity and Community Engagement

Steven Engelsman, Director General, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden

Corazon Alvina, Director General, National Museum of the Philippines, Manila

Hongnam Kim, Director General, National Museum of Korea, Seoul

Jatti Bredekamp, CEO, Iziko Group of National Museums, Cape Town, South Africa.

Rethinking the Nature-Culture Binary in Museums – A Critique

Michel Van-Praët, Conservateur général du patrimoine, Inspection générale des Musées, Direction des Musées de France, France

Intergenerational Challenges – Youth Perspectives

Lina G Tahan, Lebanon/UK

Bruno César Brulon Soares, Brazil

Kim L Selling, Australia/Sweden

Anticipated Outcomes

A framework for critical engagement in addressing museums, universal heritage and cultural diversity

Draft material for developing Strategic Recommendations for the General Conference

Action Planning for the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force

President of ICOM, Madame Alissandra Cummins provided an inspirational opening presentation. It was the strongest commitment expressed by the Executive to cultural diversity in the history of ICOM. Recalling the centrality of the cultural rights of all peoples in the November 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity; the critical interface to be addressed between cultural diversity and biodiversity; and imperatives of inclusion that informed the UNDP Human Development Report of 2004 entitled Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World, she underscored the importance of one of the main objectives of the

October 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions – the recognition of the true value and substance of the link between culture and development.

There was reiteration of ICOM's commitment to cultural diversity beyond the rhetoric, into practical action across the world, taking into consideration geographical diversity. She underlined the importance of the work of the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force as a total project of ICOM 'working in a transversal manner across all of ICOM's constituent bodies, national and international committees, regional alliances and affiliated organisations'. She also emphasised the generation of new knowledge as we engage in embedding cultural diversity in a transformative organisation and the importance of partnerships for furthering culture and development. The need for: promotion of intergenerational dialogue through youth participation; relevant and timely publications as a resource materials; priority for underrepresented and under resourced regions of the world; the furthering of the new Mediation policy of ICOM; more accessible approaches in the work of standing committees and taskforces; maximising on digital technologies and Musedoma; and the sharing of knowledge globally, were also highlighted. 'In short, concepts about self-determination and the ethical responsibilities of museums to communities must be put in action – in ICOM and in museums. The question is no-longer what or when...what we are asking is how.'

In addressing the challenges of regional diversity, Nelly Decarolis called for an understanding of the layers of significance in the cultural diversity of the world through thematic approaches. The challenges of representation of cultural diversity in Africa were presented through snapshots of interdisciplinary case studies by the dynamic duo of George and Lorna Abungu. Emmanuel Kasarhérou provided an eloquent overview of one of the most diverse peoples of the world in small Pacific Island countries covering an aquatic continent stretching over one third of the waters of the world. He made a strong case for all island countries which are under threat from environmental deterioration and the juggernaut of globalisation.

Udo Goesswald illustrated the changing face of Europe and the project-based approach to understanding this transformation through collaborative and innovative museum projects. Interrogating community engagement, Steven Engelsman asked the fundamental question as to whose authority is mandating our work in museums. He called for a paradigm shift in the way we engage with communities and a rethink of the dialectic of connecting collections and communities through demonstration projects that offer good practice. Corazon Alvina and Hongnam Kim called for leadership in innovation and transformation in the corporate culture of museums where the conventional hierarchies and object centeredness is balanced with community centeredness. Jatti Bredekamp argued that colonial legacies need to be understood to decolonise the museum so as to further it as a civic space for meaningful community engagement.

One of the continuing legacies of colonialism in museums is the binary of nature and culture. Michel Van-Praët, one of the most experienced directors of natural history in museums, made a strong case for ICOM to address the persistent and misplaced separation of cultural diversity and biodiversity.

The concurrent session was informed by a challenging and dynamic range of presentations that were both compelling and inspirational in their scope. It takes longer to distil the range of approaches and methods being advocated and pursued. What came across very clearly is that it is not an ICOM top down advocacy that should drive the future, but a bottom up cumulative pool of expertise informed by the membership and their everyday engagement and contestations in dealing with the cultural diversity of the world.

As summed up by Rick West, the fundamental realities of the world are inherently diverse: environment, people, communities, histories. Museums must take all of these realities into consideration. In the steps of unfolding – the key issue is the decolonization of the museum – “the other” being allowed to speak, empowering the first voice, the carrier and custodian of the legacies. He further emphasised that one of the first principles to be addressed if ICOM is to become the truly global museums organization it purports to be, as outlined in its mission – is that we must listen to this message... and *act* on it. The actions that need to be pursued beyond the rhetoric are:

a) A need on the part of ICOM to focus on bringing those from under-represented or not-represented geographical areas and communities into the fold of engagement through addressing geographical diversity and operational capabilities.

b) That focus needs to embed itself systematically in what ICOM does - including programming undertaken through ICOM's ... Secretariat, the work of the National Committees, and IC's collaborations with other NGOs, government organizations. (needs to be embedded in programs – impact through work of *all* committees)

c) Strategic Plan: as the President said,– we must formulate our institutional consciousness on ensuring inclusion and that this must be basis of our actions and must be measured. (be held responsible, and devise measures for outcomes).

Tereza Scheiner, a champion of cultural democracy and Pascal Makambila, a philosopher, reflected on the proceedings with great enthusiasm while at the same time cautioning that the rethinking of the museum needs to be carefully examined with the context of museological discourses. Tereza is concerned that unless we understand the dynamics of change within the science of study that is museology, ICOM's efforts to progress knowledge will be slowed.

One of the major interventions at ICOM 2007 was the exciting initiative by the Executive Council to actively further youth participation through bursaries. ICOM CCTF has been vigorously advocating that intergenerational dialogue informed by youth perspectives, is critical for intercultural dialogue. Three of the ICOM Youth bursary awardees reflected on the Concurrent Sessions and their interventions are included below.

Kim Selling

“Firstly, on behalf of all the ICOM 60th Anniversary Youth Mentoring Bursary grantees, I wish to express our gratitude to ICOM, the Secretariat, ICOM Austria, and our respective National Committees for “putting your money where your mouth is” in establishing these bursaries and generously providing support for the next generation of museum and heritage professionals, enabling many of us to attend the General Conference in Vienna. It has been an honour and a privilege to have this unique opportunity to meet and share ideas with the huge variety of interdisciplinary expertise across the diverse spectrum of world museums.

At this, my first international ICOM conference, I have participated in various committee meetings and heard a lot of talk about ‘cultural diversity’ and ‘inclusiveness’. These are the hip buzzwords of the moment, but to be frank I nevertheless still sense some confusion as to how these ‘buzzwords’ are to be translated into concrete action, not merely lip-service, and integrated into the core business of museums. There is also an ongoing divisiveness in conversations about what ‘culture’ and ‘heritage’ actually mean – not only within the museum industry, but in the wider global society.

As ICOM President Alissandra Cummins said in her welcome speech, “culture is not an optional extra”. ‘Culture’ as our distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional

worldview, is fundamental to the construction of our identities as individuals and social groups. Unfortunately, 'culture' is still often judged by physical appearance (a notoriously deceptive indicator), and there persists globally a deep and abiding popular confusion between 'culture', 'race' and 'ethnicity'. As the presentations in the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force session have emphasized, what does it actually mean in today's world to be European, Kenyan, Korean, Latin American, in different cultural contexts and in different countries? This requires a deep rethinking of the idea of the 'nation state' and the concepts of 'citizenship' and 'democracy' as inclusive participation, not majority culture rules.

How do we deal with the plurality of our own cultural identities? This is an issue I have an abiding personal interest in, being an entity of mixed and multiple races, ethnicities and cultures: a hybrid of Swedish, Australian and Chinese in equal measure. This causes no end of confusion to people, as I'm often variously assumed to be (judging by my name or appearance) Korean, North American Indian, Japanese, Italian, or a man. When people ask me where I'm from (an increasingly complex question for an increasing number of the world's population), I generally say, "I'm Australian", since Australia was the land of my birth and primary linguistic and cultural sphere of belonging. Often I get the reaction (sadly mostly from other Australians), evincing surprise, saying, "Are you? No, really, where are you *from*?" Meaning, what 'racial origin' are you, since I don't *look* like the stereotypical 'Anglo' Australian promoted by the mainstream media and other institutions.

I spent most of my life denying one half of my cultural heritage – my ethnic identity as 'Asian' in a predominantly White Australian cultural context. I have come to believe that this schism within myself is indicative of a wider schism within the Australian cultural community I grew up in. So what does it mean to have a cultural identity, or several, in an increasingly globalised, pluralistic, socially mobile world? I am convinced that there is great vigour and creativity in the hybridity of cultural diversity. Cross-cultural competency is no longer an "optional extra". It is a necessary tool for our own survival, and for the ongoing survival of our natural environment. It means we can no longer afford to think only in terms of either/or, but *both/and* – both Australian *and* Chinese; white *and* black; local *and* global; both nature *and* culture. As Koichiro Matsuura commented on the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, "each individual must acknowledge not only otherness in all its forms but also the plurality of his or her own identity, within societies that are themselves plural."

Like other youth representatives at this conference, I was born when globalisation as an economic and social phenomenon began. In many ways one can see the generations born since 1970 as the *living embodiments* of globalisation, products of the late-capitalist world our parents created. Voicing a (perhaps) youthful idealism, I firmly believe that ideas have the power to change the world: our ideas and worldviews construct our reality and the way we experience the world. I see museums not just as an end in themselves, but as a means to an end, capable of playing an important role in the way we view each other and construct ideas about social realities, our national histories and ourselves.

ICOM as a genuinely international, cross-cultural advocacy body, should continue to lead by example – to continue to interrogate, within and outside the museum, the concepts of inclusiveness, accessibility, and diversity across multiple identities and cultural borders. To this end ICOM itself can become more inclusive and open up further possibilities for the voices of younger generations to be heard. At this conference, some of the most dynamic and inspiring insights have come from conversations with younger members of ICOM. Yet I sensed a notable hesitation or shyness amongst these youths and early-career ICOM members in speaking out about their ideas, mostly arising from a self-conscious 'lack of experience'. There is only one way to remedy this, and that is to continue to provide opportunities for gaining experience and sharing ideas.

I am therefore proposing the establishment of a **Youth Forum for Intercultural Dialogue** as part of the action plan for the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force as a working group of the Executive Council.

I suggest that this Youth Forum begin with a few concrete actions:

An online discussion list hosted by the ICOM CCTF.

A Youth Forum conference stream or session at the first Inclusive Museum Conference held at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Netherlands, 8-12 June, 2008.

A Youth Forum on Intercultural Dialogue as a concurrent session at the next ICOM General Conference in Shanghai 2010."

Lina Tahan

"As a youth representative, I thought the Cross-Cultural Task Force is a good forum to promote dialogue and understanding within communities. I was only nineteen when I first visited a museum and became acquainted with it as an institution.

Culture is to be understood as the basis of development and if it is absent in a particular society then the latter is deprived from a rich history and heritage. In this regard, museums must work to promote respect and understanding for cultural diversity in all spheres of their activities. Moreover, recognising that 'cultural diversity is a historical and social reality at the local, regional and particularly global level' (ICOM *Museums and Cultural Diversity Policy*, 1997) is very essential since the role of a museum in general lies in shedding light on the cultural diversity of various existing communities.

Within this context, Lebanese museums must explore new ways of relating the community's cultural and economic development to the sense of place, identity and self-esteem of its different people. Hence, Lebanese museums ought to increase awareness when it comes to addressing the cultural needs of the local population who has experienced a ravaging Civil War (1975-1990) and whose cultural self-esteem is at risk because of a process of marginalisation in mainstream societies.

The ultimate role and responsibilities of museums in Lebanon will be determined by how well they integrate the diverse cultural heritage of the society they represent with the vision the Lebanese community has of itself, its past and its future.

Lebanese museums should constitute arenas where the identity of a single coherent society is shaped. They should also be theatre stages where multiculturalism is elevated as a healing instrument. At this point, the museologist's role today lies in working for the establishment of harmonious, yet heterogeneous museums displaying the multicultural wealth of Lebanon.

In most of the cases, all of the speakers focused on the role of museums to promote cultural diversity and foster intercultural dialogue. It is differences that open up our horizons and push to go towards the other. This is what should be called an enriching experience rather than a limitation.

The initiative taken by some of the ICOM youth members who met in Vienna is excellent. I believe we need to encourage youth members to participate in the Inclusive Museum Conference series starting in Leiden.

Another thing that I would like to see is encouraging the youth members to write a short article about their experiences with cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue within their own National Committee newsletters or within ICOM News. The page in ICOM News after the Vienna General Conference by youth members who attended ICOM-Vienna to give their impressions will be welcome. So this is a good start for the senior members of the organisations to look at why it is important to involve youth members in ICOM's activities.

I also think that we need to establish some kind of database on the topics dealt with by our youth members. These are either museum professionals or researchers. Please make sure that the list is exhaustive. On the web, there is a complete list of the youth bursars. I also know some young members from other International Committees who would be interested

in this forum and who have very good ideas.”

Bruno Brulon

“My participation on the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force session consisted in a presentation of myself and my views on the Museum field as well as my perspectives on the CCTF group. Intergenerational Challenges are key concerns that are being addressed.

The presentation included a summary of the scenery of Museology in Latin America and the introduction of ICOFOM LAM – a Regional Committee of ICOFOM (ICOM International Committee for Museology) in Latin America. This regional committee exists since 1992 and was created by Dr. Tereza Scheiner from Brazil and Prof. Nelly Decarolis from Argentina with the purpose to discuss the museological theory in Latin America, considering its own issues and the reality of the countries in this region of the world. During the past 16 years ICOFOM LAM was able to have annual meetings in different places analyzing and discussing the context of this different cultures, that are, many times, mixtured in the region.

I also had the chance to introduce the Brazilian initiative of the National Movement of Young Museology and the Electronic Magazine Young Museology that was created by young professionals and students of the Museology School in Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO).

Also I'd like to mention the importance of this initiative of the CCTF to begin a dialog with young different views of the Museum field and to emphasized how honoured I was to be a part of it.

Last but not least, I thank the opportunity to be side by side with other youth participants – Lina Tahan and Kim Selling – that were, as much as myself, challenged to become part of this dialogue. “

Some of the questions raised during the Session for ICOM to address were:

What kind of professional development is required to address museums and cultural diversity? Do we need organisational changes to nurture this priority – in the universities, museum associations and cultural institutions? (Professor Lynne Teather, Museum Studies, University of Toronto)

The role of museums to promote peace and foster democracy by caring [for] cultural heritage is very important in Eastern Europe today and it should be a concern for ICOM. There is a great diversity of cultural heritage in Eastern Europe and its Eastern border – ‘what we call Europe’ and what was always understood as ‘Asia’. The consequence of this separation leads to the danger of dividing people instead of bringing them together. Can ICOM play a proactive role here to avoid artificial borders diminishing the cultural diversity of the region across the borders of Europe and Asia? (Dr Bettina Bouresh, Cologne, Germany)

Is democracy a pre-condition for diversity? Especially for recognition of diversity; cross-cultural dialogue; programmes to address stereotypes, misconceptions etc.

Migration is a major factor in Africa: forced migration; economic migration; combination of both. Can museums address: xenophobia; refugee camps; state actions; international actions; environmental disasters? (Shahid Vawda, South Africa)

Can the theme of migration be explored by ICOM as a unifying theme under which programmes and action plans regarding cross cultural dialogue can be undertaken? Such a theme takes into account the movement of people, forced and unforced, knowledge, and engagement with the environment in the development of humanity. (Kevin Farmer, Curator, History/ Archaeology, Barbados Museum and Historical Society)

In conclusion, I would like to argue that there are many debates that have taken place and many more that are yet to take place. It has been proven that ad hoc approaches are not sustainable or relevant in the long term. Hence, the series of Inclusive Museums conferences and a range of regional seminars in between, will be facilitated by the ICOM CCTF, in order to share case studies; understand different approaches to dealing with diversity; and confront the challenges that are ahead of us for transforming ICOM into a truly global and inclusive organisation. Professor Arjun Appadurai recently pleaded that intercultural dialogue must take into consideration both the internal debates and external debates. In other words, what we need to do is not just confine ourselves to debates within museums, but also engage with those outside that have a global impact. Michel Van-Praët mentioned in the session that all our conversations are within the global concern for environmental protection. The future of the world is not just a natural or cultural concern, it is the greatest challenge for humanity and museums have a role to play in bringing biodiversity and cultural diversity concerns together for promoting what the President Alissandra Cummins called for - a genuine commitment to culture in sustainable development.