

The museum professional community will discuss “Museums and cultural landscapes” at the 24th General Conference of ICOM in Milan, Italy – 3-9 July 2016

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This paper focuses on the 24th General Conference of ICOM, the International Council of Museums, which will take place in Milan, Italy, in July 2016. At the ICOM 2016 Conference the museum professional community will discuss the relationship between museums and cultural landscapes and reflect upon the great changes that have taken place in museums all over the world in the last years. It will be a great occasion for understanding the present and planning an innovative future for museums and museum professionals.

ICOM and its activities

ICOM is a non-governmental organisation created in 1946 by and for museum professionals and committed to the conservation of cultural heritage. ICOM is a forum of 33,000 experts and 2,000 museums from 136 countries and it comprises 114 National Committees and 31 International Committees dedicated to various museum specialities.

ICOM is a leading force in ethical matters and the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums¹ has been translated in 37 languages. The ICOM Code was adopted in 1986 and revised in 2004 at the 21st General Assembly in Seoul, Korea. It establishes the values and principles shared by ICOM and the international museum community and sets minimum standards of professional practice and museum performance. The ICOM Code is an international reference not only for museum professionals, but also for other professionals active in cultural heritage protection.

ICOM has 3 official languages, English, French and Spanish, and its international headquarters are located in Paris, France.

ICOM shares and produces professional knowledge through publications, committees, conferences and events organized around the world, and it offers

¹ The ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums can be downloaded from ICOM website: <http://icom.museum/the-vision/code-of-ethics/>

training and professional development opportunities such as the ICOM International Training Centre for Museum Studies (ICOM-ITC), housed at the Palace Museum in Beijing, China.

ICOM offers services to members such as online collaborative platforms and the ICOM Card. ICOM Card holders have free priority admission to a great part of the museums all over the world.

ICOM fights against illicit traffic of cultural goods and promotes the International Observatory on Illicit Traffic of Cultural Goods². Since 2003 ICOM has published thirteen Red Lists³. Red Lists classify endangered categories of archaeological objects or works of art in the world's most vulnerable areas, in order to prevent them being sold or illegally exported. ICOM promotes the use of the Object Identification⁴, an international standard that gives essential information about archaeological, artistic and cultural objects so as to facilitate their identification in case of theft.

ICOM promotes the Museums Emergency Programme⁵, a forward planning and emergency intervention programme designed for museum professionals and experts in emergency-related fields (firefighters, relief agencies etc.). ICOM is one of the founding members of ICBS, the International Committee of the Blue Shield⁶. Blue Shield works to protect the world cultural heritage jeopardized by natural and human-made disasters.

Since 1977 ICOM has organized an annual International Museum Day⁷ around May 18. 35,000 museums from 143 countries participated in the 2013 Museum Day.

The ICOM General Conference

Every three years ICOM organizes its General Conference. In 2010 the Conference took place in Shanghai, China; in 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; in 2016 it will take

² See <http://obs-traffic.museum/>

³ See the Red Lists Database in ICOM website: <http://icom.museum/resources/red-lists-database/>

⁴ See the ICOM website: <http://icom.museum/programmes/fighting-illicit-traffic/object-id/>

⁵ See the Museums Emergency Programme in ICOM website: <http://icom.museum/programmes/museums-emergency-programme/>

⁶ See in ICOM website: <http://icom.museum/programmes/museums-emergency-programme/international-committee-of-the-blue-shield/>

⁷ See the International Museum Day website: <http://network.icom.museum/international-museum-day>

place in Milan, Italy. The ICOM General Conference gathers 3,000/4,000 experts and museum professionals to discuss a museum issue. In 2016 the Conference theme will be “Museums and Cultural Heritage”.

Events during the week of ICOM General Conference

Firstly, the ICOM Conference offers participants high-profile speakers delivering provocative and visionary insights on multidisciplinary subjects concerning the museum world. Secondly, the Conference promotes scientific discussions among the 31 ICOM International Committees and they debate the Conference theme from different point of views and experiences. Thirdly, it offers a great number of cultural events to get to know the host city and country. Fourthly, the Conference hosts several sessions to evaluate the ICOM actions of the past three years and plan the new triennium of activities.

A Museum Trade & Institutional Fair takes place in the venue of the Conference and permits suppliers and museums to inform participants about their latest projects and products.

The ICOM General Conference is a unique formal and informal network promoting dialogue and exchange among professionals. I have taken part in four General Conferences and each of them was an unforgettable experience and an opportunity for my personal and professional growth.

Milan and the 2016 ICOM General Conference

With her great historical heritage and 5,500 museums Italy is the ideal country to host an ICOM Conference and discuss “Museums and Cultural Landscapes”. Milan is a cosmopolitan, creative city. Milan is the city of culture, design and fashion and it lies in the centre of an area with the highest density of museums in the world. Coming to Milan will offer the participants the chance to visit some of the loveliest art cities in the world (Turin, Verona, Padua, Venice, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Rome, etc.). It will also offer the participants a taste of the celebrated Italian hospitality, of Italian food and of the unique Italian way of life. Milan is a gateway to Italy.

MICO, Milan Congress Centre, is the venue of ICOM 2016. Situated close to the city centre, it is served by two underground and a railway stations. MICO is one of the largest conference centres in Europe and in the world.

Museums and Cultural Landscapes: the theme of 2016 ICOM Conference is a challenge for the museums of the 21st century.

“Museums and Cultural Landscapes” is a theme dear to Italian museology and highlights issues that are central to the vision and strategy of ICOM, but also of many international associations such as UNESCO.

The outburst of the global crisis has made this theme even more relevant. The economic crisis has questioned ways of thinking and living we have always taken for granted. The traditional development models have proved utterly inadequate. The illusion that growth is a linear uninterrupted process has proved false. We have to reconsider development in a more sustainable, well balanced way, reducing consumption of territory, landscape, soil, and avoiding waste of resources, time and intelligence. “Museums and Cultural Landscapes” is a central issue in the debate about the new economic models necessary to overcome the crisis.

The Italian landscape is world-famous. It has been described and visited in all ages and many of Italy’s celebrated landscapes have been preserved with their historical charm. Italy is a great open air museum. The Italian heritage is not only displayed in museums, but also in historical buildings and sites. Developing the relationship between museums and cultural landscapes improves the cultural and social role of museums.

These relations with the territories and landscapes that surround museums in Italy is part of their genetic heritage: they are not only located in large cities but also in and small villages all over the country. Italian museums are part of the local identities and of the historical, social and environmental contexts. That is why André Castel defined Italy as the “museum of museums”⁸.

The central issues of ICOM 2016

Firstly, the perception of landscape differs from one country to another and is connected with the different cultural backgrounds. In some languages the term landscape does not even exist. ICOM respects cultural diversities and promotes a comprehensive conception of landscape. Landscape is a multidimensional concept which adds an anthropological, social, economic, cultural meaning to its physical, natural, geographic significance. Landscape is part of the cultural and natural heritage, to be preserved, interpreted and looked after in its tangible and intangible aspects.

Secondly, ICOM would like to highlight the new social and territorial functions of museums. How can museums take responsibility for the cultural and natural

⁸ A. Chastel, *Italia museo dei musei*, in *I musei*, Touring Club Italiano, Milano, 1980, p. 14

heritage and support its knowledge, preservation and communication? How can museums become centres of interpretation for the places and the communities they belong to? How can museums disseminate the knowledge of the heritage? Museums should be active in the preservation not only of their collections, but also of the tangible and intangible, cultural and natural heritage that surrounds them. The necessary competences and resources should be analyzed and promoted.

Thirdly, tackling the relations between museums and cultural landscapes offers an opportunity to form new partnerships and networks as well as to develop new interdisciplinary approaches. How can we promote an effective cooperation between museums, professionals, associations, institutions?

Fourthly, how can museums help planners and politicians to promote sustainable development and preserve landscape? How can they improve tourism without endangering the cultural and natural heritage?

ICOM's aim is that a "Declaration of ICOM on Museums and Cultural Landscapes" be approved in the 24th General Conference in Milan, so that new strategic objectives and programmes are set for contemporary museums. We plan to identify a hundred innovative actions of museums from different countries and cultures and present them in the Milan Conference as international best practices.