



**24th ICOM General Conference  
Milano, Italy  
3 – 9 July 2016**

**CIMUSET**

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

**What role for science, technology and industry in cultural  
landscapes?**

**THE CONFERENCE**

Every three years, ICOM's General Conference gathers the international museum community around a theme chosen by museum professionals. More than 1,500 experts and museum professionals meet for a whole week to exchange and discuss museum concerns.

In 2013, ICOM's 23rd General Conference took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 10 to 17 August. The upcoming edition will be held in Milan, Italy, from 3 to 9 July, 2016.

Many professions are represented at the General Conference: museum and heritage professionals, curators, conservators, archaeologists, historians, architects, urban planners, exhibition designers, project managers, archivists, registrars, inventory coordinators, document and knowledge managers, librarians, government officials, cultural policy makers, cultural officers, tourism experts, researchers, academics, lecturers, artists, suppliers, consultants... Participants can also be culture enthusiasts, senior members and students of the above fields and, of course, ambitious newcomers.

Almost half of the participants to the ICOM Seoul 2004 General Conference were directors or board members of museums, while about 20% were curators and conservators. Professors and educators made up almost 10% of the participants.

## CONFERENCE THEME

### **Museums and Cultural Landscapes building up a Cultural Heritage**

[freely adapted from Alberto Garlandini's presentation]

For the Italian National Committee, inviting colleagues from all over the world to the 24th General Conference of ICOM in Milan, is the occasion to debate a key theme in Italian museology: the relationship between museums and cultural landscapes.

This is a central issue for Italy, but also a strategic perspective for the museums of the third millennium all over the world. This theme presents both an opportunity and a challenge for museums to revive their mission and strengthen their cultural and social role. This strategic theme implies two essential questions.

First, to what extent should museums, especially those that hold collections linked to their local vicinities, take up the role of interpretation centers for the region and the community they belong to?

Secondly, how can museums disseminate knowledge on the cultural heritage that dwells both inside and outside their walls? We believe that museums should not only take complete responsibility for their collections, but also for the cultural heritage that surrounds them. Thanks to the skills of their staff, museums should become "musei diffusi" (widespread museums), extended museums and safe quarters to protect the cultural heritage outside their walls.

Museums are active responsible players in their own cultural landscape; they should become:

- carers of knowledge through their collections, research and scientific activities;
- protagonists of new investigations on cultural heritage and active institutions in the protection and conservation of cultural goods inside and outside their walls;
- extended museums and interpretation centers for local heritage;
- centers responsible for education actions related to cultural heritage and landscape;
- actors for the landscape protection, conservation and development, as well as for the urban and landscape planning and for the promotion of cultural tourism;
- custodians of the historical and cultural values of the landscape and promoters of sustainable development.

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF CIMUSET TO THE THEME

### **questioning the role of science, technology and industry in shaping cultural landscapes**

*An occasion for ICOM delegates from all Committees to share ideas and best practices on significant, contemporary issues.*

Science, technology and industry are prime movers in shaping landscapes. Be it a tangible sign on the territory or an intangible heritage characterizing communities, it is a vivid and evolving matter

with a direct impact on our lives. Nonetheless, from many perspectives, there is still a lack of public awareness for technoscientific heritage as an integral part of the broader cultural landscape.

Since their creation science and technology museums have played a fundamental role in formally recording and acknowledging the changes of these liquid systems, with a changing depth of attention to the social aspects and impacts.

CIMUSET 2016 invites participants to ponder over the role played by scientific, technological and industrial heritage in relation to the cultural landscape at different levels. Therefore, this call for paper invites delegates from all Committees to the submission of proposals with reference to four topics that will constitute the starting point for a broader debate, encouraging multidisciplinary. Papers promoting critical perspectives and taking into consideration broader theoretical frames are particularly welcomed.

### **1. CONTEMPORARY HERITAGE: SHAPING THE LANDSCAPE OF FUTURE MEMORY.**

If opening up to the contemporary world is vital for all museums, for science and technology museums this is an even more urgent matter. Contemporary heritage (from postwar period up to nowadays) is constantly evolving, and it entails a number of open questions and issues. Many of these descend from its intrinsic historical proximity, directly implying the fact that collective perception still needs to settle. This awareness affects the discourse on contemporary heritage on many levels. In fact, we need to keep in mind that also acquisition policies themselves reflect those aspects, being an expression of what societies judge worthy to be “put on stage” and to be transmitted to future generations.

The very nature of the museum as permanent institution imposes to cope with the issue, taking into account at the same time the dimension of the past, the present and the future. Struggling for their own existence in the present, museums dealing with contemporary heritage have to be able to project in the future more than others. Scientific, technologic and industrial heritage is furthermore affected by a lack of public awareness that puts it into jeopardy denying at the same resources to preserve it.

Contemporary scientific and technological heritage can be read also in the light of great paradigm shifts that have taken place in science and technology museums in the last decades. The preeminence of some societal questions has pushed towards the introduction of new “assets” and “drivers” that sometimes have no correspondence in our material or immaterial collections, questioning the role of heritage in museums.

So, which is the role and space of contemporary scientific, technological and industrial objects in our museums?

The tangible characteristics of this kind of heritage impose a first level of reflection, considering issues such as the variety of dimensions (very small or very big, material or immaterial), its

delocalization (it is often spread through a variety of subjects and places, in a context of intense mobility and circulation).

What are the challenges connected to their exhibition and preservation? To what extent is unavailability of resources (e.g. depots) affecting the development of our collections and consequently the tangible evidence that we will transmit to future generations? How far is networking a concrete option to pursue more effective solutions, persuade policy makers and raise awareness about the issue? How can we build new, shared skills in which to include solid knowledge already gained in the past, e.g. in the field of restoration and conservation?

Conceptual factors are strictly linked with previous aspects as well.

Acquisition policies are affected by practical issues, but they rest upon theoretical structures and approaches. Forming or broadening a collection – being it material or immaterial – means to capture some expressions of a society rather than others. Yet, we live in a more and more fluid, connected world. Science, technology and industry reflect this aspect of our society very deeply and often this kind of heritage presents transnational characteristics (often the fruit of international collaborations). How do we deal with the issues of local and global provenance? What impact can a broader perspective in this sense have on national narratives such as the one related to the idea of unrivalled records in science and technologies.

Is sharing common criteria a starting point for a more effective and rational selection of materials, e.g. to avoid duplications? What might be the consequences of such a transnational approach?

Do categories currently in use (e.g. in cataloguing, in terminology,...) fit also the needs introduced by contemporary heritage? How far do “traditional” research methods apply to contemporary heritage?

And once we get to communicating this kind of heritage and its related research work, on what kind of instruments, experiences and practices can we rely? How do we interpret it and how do we include it in our projects?

And in a broader perspective, how does it relate to all other aspects of the museum’s life (e.g. educational, other collections, fundraising, ...)? What stimuli can it offer to the institution as a whole?

## **2. WORK AND INDUSTRY IN THE HERITAGE OF MODERN LANDSCAPES**

It’s undeniable that our collective imagination about landscape is deeply influenced by the great changes that took place in the last two centuries, when industrial revolutions played a fundamental role in Western Countries. The heritage of the modern landscapes includes a great variety of industrial landmarks; former factories, mines, heavy machinery, workers’ housing districts or early transportation systems are amongst the best known attractions of industrial tourism. Traces of workers’ everyday life, significant historical moments or evidence of labour movements are preserved less frequently.

Entire urban areas have been formed around factories, whilst the destruction, transformation or 'heritage-isation' of industrial inner-city sites have been the cause of much debate and controversy. However, iconic industrial landscapes like those around the Ruhr, Lancashire or Detroit still carry heritage values that have been noticed and respected over the last decades.

De-industrialisation has destroyed many historical sites or started transformations that effectively delete meaningful industrial heritage. Former factories have been rebuilt as shopping malls or apartment blocks that now hardly retain any association with previous times. Some sites have been preserved as industrial museums - trying to represent the forgotten glory or deprivation of industrial times. Industrial heritage has also become part of much wider political and economic considerations. Specific aspects or materializations of industrial society have been naturalised, and the past is shaped by different conservation efforts. Museums play troublesome roles as attractions, preservers, interpreters, creators and shapers of industrial heritage.

We encourage museum practitioners and scholars to submit papers that relate to the wide themes of industrial and labour heritage in the context of landscape. A theoretical approach to issues of heritage, industry, labour, museums and history is most welcome.

- What is the 'heritage-isation' of work and industry?
- How is industrial heritage constructed and presented today?
- What is the meaning of urban and rural landscapes within industrial museums?
- How should we develop the role of industrial heritage in collaboration between museums and the tourist sector?
- How do we make industrial heritage accessible to people that were not initially included as visitors and users (e.g. people with mobility impairments)?

For the last 20 years we have been addressing an audience with personal experiences and memories of industry and industrial sites and landscapes as places of work.

- How do we address the next generations who do not have this biographical connection and for whom traditional industry is a distant experience or at the most something connected to nostalgia (such as steam train rides)?
- The same applies for immigrants - can industrial heritage help them in their integration process?

This session is dedicated to the theoretical evaluation of heritage processes and interesting representations of history, mainly in the context of museum and heritage studies. Papers that focus solely on practical preservation of built environments, history of architecture or equivalent case studies unfortunately cannot be included in this session.

This theme is co-organised with WORKLAB (International Association of Labour Museums) and MUSIL (Museum of Industry and Labour of Brescia).

### **3. DIGITAL LANDSCAPES AND DIGITAL CULTURES**

Digital technologies have entered our lives touching meaningful layers of our daily experiences. If museums are institutions able to listen as much as they speak, then this revolution needs to find its place.

Science and technology museums, in particular, need to double their efforts in finding a place for it: digital technologies represents at the same time an instrument to communicate contents and an immaterial heritage strictly connected to a material heritage (just think about the so-called "internet of things" as cutting edge topic). Furthermore, the very nature of this heritage – rapidly evolving, pervasive, ubiquitous in our lives – makes it a matter of public discussion, thus soliciting science and technology museums to offer public programs through which they can gain broader views of the topic.

For science and technology museums, more than other kind of museums, being conscious of the multi-layered nature of digital is hence the starting point to ponder over their role in contributing to raise awareness about it.

This multi-faceted relationship opens a number of related issues that can be approached starting from two main perspectives:

#### *Museums as users of these technologies*

Apps, optimizations, social media... museums try to open up to digital but too often the focus is still on media rather than on contents. What is the value, the meaning and the relevance of such instruments compared to other interpretation tools we have used so far? What are the skills we need to learn in order to fully exploit the potential of digital assets in developing our exhibitions and projects? What are the challenges and opportunities opened by the direct link that social media create with the public?

#### *Museums as institutions where memories for the future settle*

For the occasion of the inauguration of the new Information Age gallery at the Science Museum in London, in October 2014, Her Majesty the Queen sent a Twitter message for the first time: an emblematic event not only from the point of view of the media but also in terms of the cultural perception of the museum and of its role. What kind of meanings are connected to this heritage? What kind of response and commitment do digital issues solicit in science and technology museums as places staging change ? To what extent is digital (and not merely "Informatics") actually the subject of curatorial research and consequently an object of public programs? What are the relationships with other collections, given the multifaceted nature of the matter? How do we deal with it in our projects for the public and who are the professionals able to do this?

**SUBMISSION DETAILS**

Please send your proposal for papers (title, text 500–700 words) or for posters (A1, portrait format) along with a brief professional profile (150 words) through the application form available at **this form** no later than February 18<sup>th</sup> 2016.

Submissions will undergo a selection process: a jury will decide which papers and may suggest to have the proposed contribution switch to another category.

Receipt of submitted abstracts will be acknowledged by email by the end of February.

CIMUSET conference is intended to present the atmosphere of a workshop and will be open to all General Conference participants.

Please remember that presentations taking into consideration single case studies should focus on general principles and considerations as well and that all papers should be written in clear and correct English.

For any inquiry please write an email to **[cimuset@museoscienza.it](mailto:cimuset@museoscienza.it)**