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COMCOL is the International Committee of ICOM with the mission to deepen discussions and share knowledge of the practice, theory and ethics of collecting and collections development.

COMCOL Newsletter is a forum for developing the work of COMCOL and we welcome contributions from museum professionals and scholars all over the world: short essays on projects, reflections, conference/seminar reports, specific questions, notices about useful reading material, invitations to cooperate, new research or other matters. Views and opinions published in the newsletter are the views of the contributors. Contributions for the next issue are welcomed by **1 April 2013** to the editors, and contact us also if you wish to discuss a theme for publication.

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Statement from the Chair

Dear readers!

In this seasonal time we send you our Newsletter as a COMCOL gift! In this Newsletter you will find not only the abstracts from our Annual conference in Cape Town, but also reflections on the conference itself and a report of the Working Group on Contemporary Collecting. Our conference was hosted by the Iziko Museums. I read that the word Iziko means hearth in Xshosa and that in the Xshosa tradition “the hearth is the social centre of the house. It is associated with warmth, kinship and ancestral spirits. Here food is prepared and shared, stories are told and knowledge is passed from one generation to the next”. I have never heard a more beautiful name for a museum, hearth... what a metaphor and not only for a museum space, but of course also for our context for our Annual Conference.



South African Museum, conference venue and one of the Iziko Museums. Photo Eva Fägerborg.

During our days in Cape Town knowledge was shared and passed from one museum professional to the other, but also from one generation to another, sharing and passing on, in such a layered context as Cape Town. We had an ideal context for a conference where we wanted to tackle the museum as institution and the idea of historical progress. We reflected on how various social, political and economic utopian ideologies and experiments are represented in museums and in their collections. It was not a light, easily digestible topic we wanted to reflect upon, sitting next to this metaphorical hearth. Sometimes issues were contested, but the hearth as a metaphor,

represented for me a place of intimacy, where contested issues could be dealt with and different views and opinions could be shared.

I want to thank ICOM-South Africa, ICMAH, but especially the Iziko Museums for their willingness to host this joint conference, to cooperate with COMCOL, this new kid on the ICOM block. I do hope this cooperation will be a sustainable one. I hope we have started a dialogue, that has not ended, but that is only just beginning.

Some reflections on the content:

During our conference two major collecting issues were being discussed. Some case studies showed that collections are a document of a ruling ideology. In the context of our conference this means the present as utopia. Collections are also reflections of an idealized past, hence the past as utopia. At stake is the legitimacy of these collections in periods of transformation. What is the relevance of utopian presentations in the present? Especially since in most cases the involved communities have changed at a faster rate than the museum collections. What needs to be elaborated further is the notion of community and the idea of Museum 2.0. Can this concept provide a useful framework for new definitions of community?

As COMCOL we also need to think more about what appropriate strategies could be drawn up, to make collections more relevant for present day missions and needs. I have the feeling we are still just starting. In some of the case studies that were discussed we saw that there is a deep willingness to understand the ideological construction of the historic collection. A deconstruction of this ideological construction of the collection could in this respect be an important theme of educational programmes. In line with that, the museum needs to develop more and newer strategies for re-interpretation, for example by using artists as guest-curators. We would particularly like to tackle this redefining and re-using of older collections during our conference in Rio in the coming August. A final observation is that an

appropriate use of collections is still constrained by traditional classification principles whether European, Western or otherwise. During the conference I noticed that a new utopian view of museum work could perhaps profit from an integrated, cross-disciplinary approach. ICOM-South Africa, ICMAH and COMCOL are thinking about making a publication of the most relevant articles. I think this publication could be an

interesting contribution to museological discourse.

I wish you all the best for the holiday season and a warm, good, inspirational 2013!

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Abstracts for COMCOL Annual Conference 2012

"Museums and the Idea of Historical Progress" was the theme of the conference in Cape Town, during which we examined various social, political and economic utopian ideologies and experiments and the way they are represented in museums and their collections. In this section of the Newsletter we publish the COMCOL abstracts of papers presented either at the joint sessions 7-8 November or at the COMCOL day 9 November. See also an article in the recently published ICOM News, Vol 65, no 3, page 8: http://archives.icom.museum/icomnews2012-3_eng/index.html

It looks pretty from a distance, doesn't it? A closer look at the process of rediscovering Jewish heritage in Poland

Aleksandra Janus & Dorota Kawęcka

In our presentation we discussed the phenomenon of what is called 'the Jewish Renaissance' in Poland and the consequences of the ongoing process of rediscovering Jewish heritage in Poland in recent years. After the fall of communism, it was finally possible to uncover – and thus try to work-through – the difficult Polish-Jewish memory of World War II and to initiate a debate on a common Polish-Jewish past. Jan Tomasz Gross' book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2001) was one of the first historical publications to discuss the issues of Polish involvement in the Holocaust, the violence against Jews during the war and the advantage Poles took of the Nazi mass killing. *Neighbors* and his later books undermined the self-image on which national identity was based in the last half of the century.

Although the public is now well aware of the disgraceful and tragic moments of the common Polish-Jewish past, that awareness and the utopia of the pre-war peaceful coexistence run parallel. The essence of this utopia is the idyllic vision of *shtetl* as a mythic achronic

place where Poles and Jews existed side by side in harmony. The *shtetl*, treated as an emanation of the Jewish culture as a whole, emphasizes the sentimental and simplified 'retro' version of Jewish history and culture. That pattern of representing Jewish culture is reproduced and repeated – often unconsciously and automatically – by many artists, activists and institutions (for example Rafał Betlejewski's project *I miss you, Jew*). On the other hand, there have been some attempts of deconstructing that image and discussing not-so-long-buried unsolved and painful issues (for example Anka and Wilhelm Sasnal's movie *It looks pretty from a distance*). In our presentation we analyzed to what extent these concepts influence the exhibitions of Polish historical museums that have been recently opened and the new ones which are currently under construction.

In the permanent exhibition at Schindler's Factory, situated near the former ghetto, entitled "Kraków under Nazi Occupation 1939-1945" Polish-Jewish relations were not addressed separately, implying that the war disrupted the harmonious coexistence of the

two communities. In the Jewish Museum in Oswiecim (ger. Auschwitz) the story of the pre-war vivid Jewish community is also told without any major reference to Polish-Jewish shared history, with a catholic priest Jan Skarbek serving as the only “missing link” between both communities. The case of Grodzka Gate in Lublin shows that meticulous documenting of the city’s past and memory of its inhabitants (using tools such as oral history and photo archives) can allow the repressed narratives to be recounted.



We conclude that involving stakeholders and communities of interest in the process of institutional rediscovery of Jewish heritage in Poland can lead to the deconstruction of the utopia of *shtetl* and thus, to a more open approach in tackling a difficult past.

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*Oral history collections exhibited at Grodzka Gate.
Photo Dorota Kawęcka.*

Museum Collections between ideology and reflection

Tanja Roženberger Šega & Tone Kregar

The Museum of Recent History Celje, Slovenia, was established in 1963 as the Museum of Revolution Celje. In the period of former Yugoslavia, which Slovenia was part of at the time, museums of revolution were dedicated to the history of labour movement, anti-fascist struggle and socialist revolution during the second world war, and their task was to profess and promote the ideology of the ruling communist regime. Their programme orientation thus set the basis for their collecting standards and their exhibiting policies.

In the context of social and political changes, which took place in the last decades of the twentieth century, the Museum of Revolution Celje threw off ideological shackles of the past regime, expanded the scope of its activities and the content of its collections, and changed its name to the Museum of Recent History Celje. It successfully transformed into a modern, thriving and well frequented Slovenian

Museum. Despite its current new role, purpose and mission, the museum also pays attention to preserving its own history and the collections that it accumulated in the past. Those collections are not seen as ideological ballast or redundant remnants of past times, but are appreciated as an important part of our heritage, which today has a different function and a different meaning.

A review of collections and museum material from 1963 shows a large volume of museum material dating from the time of war or related to the war. We can divide it into four thematic groups: museum objects indicating violence, personal belongings and mementoes of heroes of the revolution and symbols of the revolution, museum exhibits as a means of preserving historical memory of the war, and documentary and printed propaganda material.

Exhibits were actually an exhibition of power and collections were the tools for presenting

the ideology and for building collective historical memory on one side and controlling society on the other. Exhibits of the Museum of Revolution were arranged to convey and blend information related to

- science and propaganda
- education and indoctrination
- taboos and glorified selective historical memory
- positive and negative iconography



And what is the role of these collections and items 50 years later? Our basic principle at revising the museum material that comes from the Celje Museum of Revolution is certainly its demystification. Objects, which in the past served ideologies for indoctrinating people, today help us understand those ideologies. That is why the museum material, after 50 or more years of its existence, gained further value. Taken from the perspective of participation, social activism and sustainable development, we are starting a social dialogue – an open, respectful, even conflicting one, but still a dialogue, which will replace the former inclination to one-sided views.

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*Museum objects exhibiting power – photo of a
volunteer working brigade in action, 1950's.
Photo archive Museum of Recent History.*

Global Challenges for Regional Utopias

Dennis Herrmann

A large number of German local countryside museums established in the 1990s deal with what were already past utopias of industrialization, small scale trade and early standardized agriculture that served as a motor for individual well-being, community building and prosperity in the 1950s and the following decades. These museums were privately founded by individuals or small groups who themselves experienced a time period of an economic miracle in Germany, the so called “Wirtschaftswunder” and wanted to preserve it for the future. Nowadays the founders and early inheritors retire or die, local farming and

small scale trade are replaced by mass production and globalized market infrastructures, the young move away to cities or identify themselves with different narratives of their local history, e.g. their utopias differ from those of their ancestors.

In our triennially, international research project *New Local Museums as Institutions of Knowledge Production*, based at the University of Oldenburg, Germany, we research the challenges local museums in Germany have to face in the age of globalization. Research questions we want to address in this

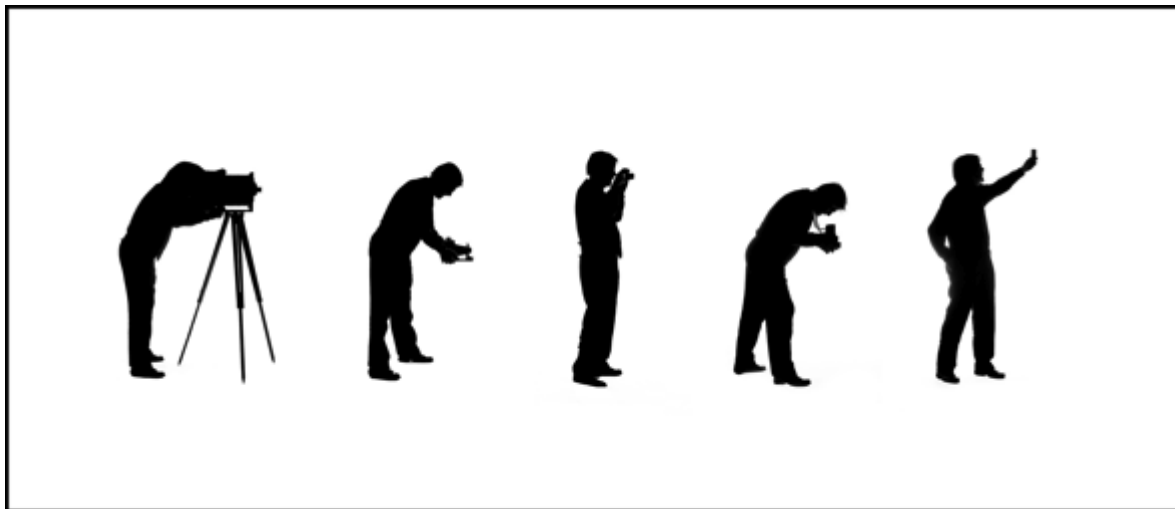
presentation are: What are the strategies of these museums for recruiting the next generation of people engaging with local rural museums? What financing models can be established for the previous, mostly private collections? How can they – or should they – adapt their exhibitions towards temporary and future standards? And last but not least, can

former utopias function as a bridge to contemporary utopias and the people who dream them?

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Images for the future: Aspects of collecting contemporary photography

Merja Diaz & Elisabeth Boogh



The evolution of photography; from analogue to digital. Photo Jacob Forsell.

The digital turn has changed photography. The development is as revolutionary as the invention of the Daguerreotype in the 1830's. A photograph is no longer a physical thing collected in shoeboxes and photo albums, or kept in controlled climate archives as a unique object. Instead it has become a part of a general computer and information technology and turned into an immaterial cultural heritage. One difference between analogue and digital photography lies in the purpose for which a picture is taken, how the picture is used and how it is distributed.

The biggest change has taken place in amateur or personal photography. The pendulum has swung from remembering important life events to using photography as visual communication. But where traditional family albums showed happy moments, digital albums contain images of a far more everyday nature. The widespread use of the mobile phone camera has contributed to this focus, which is a new and still relatively unexplored field in photography.

Digital photography is in many ways a cultural expression created and transmitted on websites where images are published and shared seconds after they have been exposed. They get tagged and narratives are created in the interaction between sender and recipient. The ability to switch between, and intertwine, the visual and verbal is part of the new vernacular in digital communication.

Taking photographs no longer requires the technical knowledge that it used to. By viewing the LCD display one can easily determine whether the technical quality is acceptable, and choose to save or delete it. In the analogue age it was customary to save all exposures on the developed film and mark the frames approved for use. Today, many images may be lost through a light pressure on the delete button. The photographs are stored on hard drives and CDs, which risk becoming unreadable in the future. The file formats used today will change and be replaced by others. Digital technology and the Internet make

digital born photography both ephemeral and accessible.

Photography plays a central role in the production of cultural heritage. The image contributes greatly to how we comprehend life and society. A world without photography would be unfamiliar; it would be a different society with another memory.

But few museums have begun collecting contemporary photography from the public or professionals. They have not yet realised that photographic practices are changing. Nor have they understood the implications of this. Photographs are in many ways still looked upon as single objects to be collected by curators.

How do museums face up to this development? How do you collect this visual heritage, which grows at an enormous rate and risks disappearing before we even have begun collecting? Today new groups produce and distribute their images through social media, which can give rise to new possibilities for participation and creating new content for museum collections. But the digital development puts great demands on the collectors, their competence, and their ability to change and adapt.

The collection of digital photography must be paralleled to when the pictures are being produced. They have to be collected in

collaboration with their creators. It is more important than ever to engage with people who want to contribute to the cultural heritage and the practices used in the web 2.0 enables this participation. The key word in this kind of communication is dialogue.

Photographs can be collected using apps or portals directly connected to the archives. The images can be made available online, they can be tagged and commented on by other users, thereby adding to the content and importance of the collections. The descriptions by the public will supplement the museums formal classifications. We suggest that the museums open up their collecting practices and let the public join in with all that comes with it.

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The authors are working together in the project *Images for the Future* with the aim to find and define practices for collecting digital born photography to museums and archives.

Walking around. The utopian space of the museum and the "two bodies" of the people

Stefan Krankenhagen

I propose that museums have to re-assure themselves about their own physical space and their dealing with space in a more literal sense. In my eyes the utopian potential of the museum is exactly based on the way in which they offer and organize space. This happens quite simply by: walking around. The physical activity of walking is such a basic human practice that it seems not worth reflecting on. 'In an exhibition we walk around'. It was El Lissitzky, the architect and artist, who coined this perfectly simple phrase in 1913. Maybe the physical act of walking around in

exhibitions and museums is so fundamental that we don't care – or don't dare – to reflect upon it. However, let's think about what we are doing when we are doing what we do. In the museum we walk around because:
- Firstly, we are given the right to do so. Walking around – in the sense of crossing borders – is a civic right, ideally since the 18th century. Thus walking around is linked to empowerment (but not to power). The museum experience, unlike visiting the theatre for example, requires that we walk around.
- And we do this, secondly, in a fairly hermetic

space because we extend this to the walking that takes place outside the museum's doors. Thus, walking connects the outer and inner space. The practice of connecting spaces became obvious when visiting not only the District Six Museum but also the former District Six. Our group walked from the Museum to the former site and back again. We realized, naturally, that what I simply call walking appears to be something between a demonstration, a procession and, yes, simply a walk.

- Finally, in museums we walk together. By this we 'establish a space which belongs properly to alliance itself', as Judith Butler has put it. In the biological bodies of the people, the political body of 'the people' appears. What once were the King's two bodies (Ernst H. Kantorowicz) have become the two bodies of the people: a mortal biological body and an immortal political body, as far as the latter is represented or performed in public. Walking together in a museum is one way of performing the immortal body of the people.

In Cape Town, I was struck by the District Six Museum in many ways. But when it comes to the physical act of walking in the museum – which in my view, again, connects the biological body of the people with the political body of 'the people' – I couldn't help but read the central object of the museum – the map on the floor – exactly in that respect.



The map on the floor, District Six Museum, Cape Town. Photo Stefan Krankenhagen 6 Nov. 2012.

Because of the fact that the actual possibility of walking around in District Six has been destroyed violently – and thus the connection between the two bodies of the people has disconnected – the map in the museum offers a possibility of re-enacting the walking around in District Six.

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Rethinking the notion of a museum and its utopian ideologies in a post-colonial state

Njabulo Chipangura

This paper will look at the process of 'museumization' in the post colonial state of Zimbabwe by deeply interrogating the criteria by which ethnographic displays at Mutare Museum were constituted during the colonial period and set out ways of transcending such a practice. It will perform an investigation into the formation of this museum as having been stimulated by colonial and utopian desires to classify the 'other' through the ethnographic gaze and the longing for a primitive timeless African past. The museum as a site of knowledge construction will further be looked at in terms of how disciplines such as

ethnography and archaeology were used to cement racial binaries as exhibited in displays at Mutare Museum. Two display galleries will be used to draw a comparison and to show how representation in this museum has largely remained a utopian space. The Beit gallery on one end has collections of ethnographic objects that are randomly displayed with no meaningful stories to tell and the Boulton gallery on the other has antiques that are neatly and properly displayed. This disparity is problematic and calls for the rethinking of the whole collections practice of this museum, which I will argue is rooted within the

matrixes of colonialism and failures to move beyond certain accustomed way of seeing things even after independence.



Ethnographic objects displayed in the Beit gallery and antiques displayed in the Boulbee gallery, Mutare museum. Photo Stanley Nyamagodo, Mutare Museum.

I will also look at efforts that have been made at Mutare Museum to revamp the Beit Gallery into a traditional set up. More broadly, the paper will attempt to examine how this museum can be decolonised by bringing it close to those societies whose cultural objects were appropriated for scientific inquiry. Museums must traverse beyond our accustomed way of seeing them as cathedrals (sometimes of urban modernity), as ritual spaces, worthy monuments, as examples of

colonial imitation of metropolitan institutions, as disciplinary structures, or as ways of reimagining the city. Issues pertaining to the proactive engagement of local societies in museum activities and allowing them access to collections will be raised in this paper.

The Mutare Museum is an institution that collects, documents, researches and exhibits a diversity of objects that covers antiquities, zoological, archaeological and ethnographic artefacts. The museum is located in Mutare city in the Eastern districts of Zimbabwe. It has five permanent galleries that exhibit different collections. The exhibitions in these galleries were mounted in 1964 when the museum was first opened to the public. Forty eight years down the line not much change has been implemented within these permanent exhibitions except the relabeling of text and the ad hoc mounting of temporary exhibitions. The notion of the museum as it is exemplified widely throughout Africa is closely linked with the phenomenon of colonialism. Similarly, exhibitions at Mutare Museum have been stagnant and biased towards colonialism such that much of the aspects of an independent Zimbabwe have been ignored for quite some time, hence the growing need to change the displays or even revamping some of the existing exhibitions. In this paper, I will focus on the Beit Gallery at Mutare museum as I will be trying to critically analyse how its making was heavily influenced by colonial and utopian desires to classify African objects.

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The short history of the National History Museum of the Netherlands

Arjen Kok

Tourism, as travel and migration, is a major influence on the conception of national and personal identity. The souvenir industry produces the essentialized expressions of national identity that range from mass market products to the more exclusive museum shop

items. As such they provide focus points for the public, comparable with emblems such as national flags or coats of arms or museum displays. Museums tend to distance themselves from this process. But are they right? In all

cases creativity is the force that updates these expressions and representations.

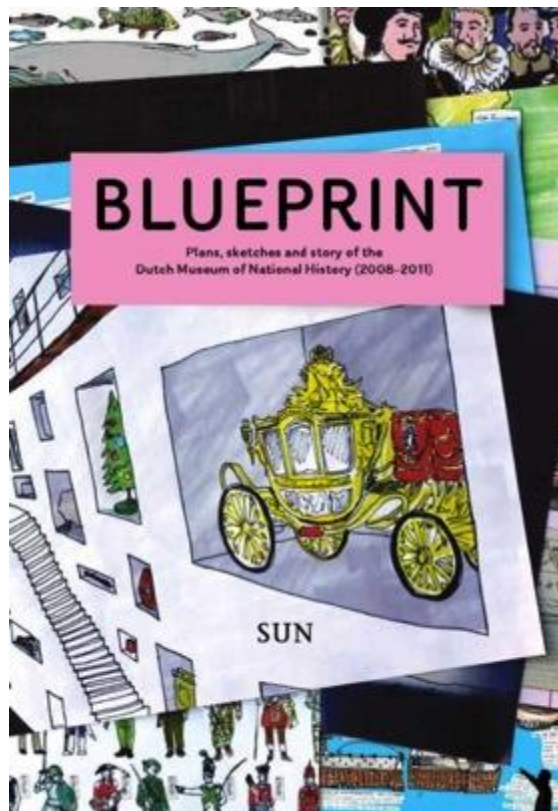
In 2006 Dutch Parliament decided to create a National History Museum. A € 50 million building budget was allocated to the project and two innovative directors were appointed to do the job. Four years later parliament had lost all interest in the project and the budget was cut before the building even started. Of course the economic crisis was a major factor. But behind it was a fundamental difference between the political and museum world in the approach to history as a museological practice.

The Netherlands experienced a renewed interest in Dutch history and Dutch cultural identity at the end of the last and the beginning of this century. A uniting Europe and globalisation were felt to have a disintegrating effect on Dutch society and this feeling was channelled through the presence of ‘newcomers’. They were required to adapt to Dutch culture and identity to prove that they were assimilated in Dutch society. This raised the question: what is Dutch identity?

The new interest in identity and history was fuelled by an initiative of Jan Marijnissen, leader of the left wing Socialist Party. He managed to get Parliament in 2006 to decide that a new National History Museum would be created. A year earlier a canon of Dutch history was created, that highlights 50 moments from prehistory to the present. This canon was highly contested by the academic world who feared the canonical effect and a loss of discussion. The public, however, embraced the concept and produced a myriad of regional, local and thematical canons.

The National History Museum pitch was won by the city of Arnhem and the National Open Air Museum. They proposed a ‘canontower’ as the new museum building, much in tune with the political backing of the project. The new directors of the National History Museum explicitly denounced the canon as a basis for the museum and proposed six themes instead. When they left the concept of the canontower and started to look for a new location and building concept for the museum Parliament

reacted and called them back. Having spent too much time on alternative approaches to the original concept of the National History Museum and stressing their independence from politics, the directors had lost the political support they needed when the financial crisis caused the government to heavily cut cultural budgets.



Valentijn Byvanck et al, *Blueprint. Plans, sketches and story of the Dutch Museum of National History 2008 - 2011*, Sun publishers 2012.

At the presentation of *Blueprint*, a book about the concept and plans of the directors, Jan Marijnissen called it “a postmodern cocktail”, which he did not mean as a compliment. Strangely enough the book reads like a creative adaption of the canon, with many if not every emblem of Dutch identity in it. One wonders if stressing the difference between political and museological visions of history was right. It certainly was not successful.

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Obey, Play and Learn – political ideologies and childcare

Christine Fredriksen

The industrial revolution in Sweden and Scandinavia was related to technical innovations and a belief in industrial development. It was particularly associated with ideology and political movement. Considerable alterations in social structures took place and new social classes emerged – simultaneously Swedish politics changed. These changes in Swedish society went hand in hand with the confidence in the common good of the industrial revolution. In their collections and exhibitions, many museums include descriptions of these changes into new political ideologies and of the practice of building a new and better society. The industrial revolution is extensively described in Swedish museums. It could be said that this historical perspective has permeated many of the objectives of the work of Swedish museums.

In a project conducted by five museum institutions within the region of Västra Götaland, a study has been made of the history of childcare during the development of industrial society. The project is called *Obey, Play and Learn*. This is an interesting field because of the social and political ideologies that have been expressed concerning children and the upbringing of children through several centuries. Over the decades, these ideologies have met with the changing political climate. Discussions and political points of view on how childcare should be conducted are still a part of the debate in Sweden today.

The project *Obey, Play and Learn* is in progress during the years 2009 – 2014 and a substantial exhibition has been produced. In the work of the project, our view is that discussions on the upbringing of children and on childcare reflect interesting ideological changes and utopian ideals in Sweden – childcare significantly expresses changes in society. For this reason, the intention of this project has been to relate political and ideological changes in society to the world of the children. In which ways did the conditions for children change? Is a global perspective of

interest in the study of ideologies within childcare and how can these ideologies be expressed in the exhibitions of the museums?



The exhibition Obey, Play and Learn was popular when shown at Museum of Bohuslän in Uddevalla, in May 2012. Photo Cecilia Ahlsén.

The exhibition *Obey, Play and Learn* is travelling around the region during the project period, on display in libraries, museums and schools. Producer of the exhibition is The City Museum of Gothenburg together with the other museums in the project: Museum of Bohuslän, Textile Museum, Innovatum Science Center and the regional organisation called “The Exhibition is Coming”. One part of the project has included the work of the participating museums in conducting historic and contemporary studies in their own communities. We also invite the general public to story-telling evenings and programmes, with the aim of cultivating knowledge concerning cultural history of childcare and local history. Yet another part of the project included an inventory of the collections of the museums. Which type of items associated with childcare had been collected and what kinds of contexts were related to these items? Could some of the collections possibly illuminate global questions concerning every-day life and the upbringing of children?

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Attaining cultural utopia: South museums and Wikipedia

Isla Haddow-Flood

Africa is a multi layered, diverse continent with high-calibre, vibrant and exciting creative and cultural economies, and fascinating heritages. However, both within the continent and in the global community, Africa's heritages and traditional cultures are often not represented truthfully, nor do they exist online. Similarly, the true extent and multiplicity of contemporary Africa, especially related to the cultural sector, is not being correctly presented, if at all, to the larger continental and diasporic audience via the internet.

This is a pervasive problem that results in Africa's culture and heritage institutions not being given the equal weight and consideration as their more online represented global contemporaries. Since 2000, there has been a significant increase in the global trade of cultural products. Indeed, as in the successful examples of both Nollywood and Music, cultural and heritage industries have been shown to open the door for African economies to participate effectively in the world market.

However, despite these successes, Africa currently contributes less than 1% to the world export of cultural goods, and less than 2% of the world's publishing comes from Africa, which is a telling indication that talent – both academic and artistic – alone is not sufficient to build a competitive, and globally recognised creative economy. To do this, there has to be institutional interventions, on a continental scale.

Let's take Wikipedia as an example. Wikipedia attracts almost 500 million unique visitors every month, who together ask for around 18 billion page requests. 15% of all Internet users access it on any given day. Wikipedia is the world's most extensive and used encyclopedia, and in November 2011 was 1,600 times larger than Encyclopedia Britannica. It exists in 282 languages; 40 of those language versions have over 100,000 articles, and the English one alone has now exceeded four million articles.

Yet, Dr Mark Graham at the Oxford Internet Institute (OII) who investigates who writes Wikipedia and where, claims: "There is a clear and highly uneven geography of information in

Wikipedia. Europe and North America are home to 84% of all articles. ... Almost all of Africa is poorly represented in the encyclopaedia. Remarkably, there are more Wikipedia articles (7,800) written about Antarctica than any country in Africa or South America."

This situation is due to the fact that any article relating to Africa on Wikipedia has either been written by young males (18-24 year olds) from the Global North, who have received their information from western-centric, and often outdated library books, or has been written by a small group of dedicated individuals who find it difficult to sustain their considerable volunteer effort in light of financial imperatives and technological access.

The fall out from this situation is that the world does not see a truthfully reflected Africa on Wikipedia, or indeed on the internet. And so, the richness of the truth is not represented.

Southern museums and cultural institutions have not even begun to share their true wealth of Southern insights yet. These insights will never be shared if they remain constrained by each museum's physical and geographical reality. If the knowledge within the vast majority of the museums of the South remains invisible on globally accessed platforms like Wikipedia, then they can neither innovate, nor share their alternative knowledge and perspectives with a global audience.

An international collaboration between the Africa Centre and Italy's *lettera27* (who initiated the project in 2006), WikiAfrica has been working since 2006 to connect Wikipedia and the cultural institutions of Africa. Over the years, the project has worked through some fascinating cultural, infrastructural, linguistic, and skills-based challenges. The WikiAfrica project has partnered with over 106 cultural institutions with African content (54 organisation from the continent), who have made their content available with an open license that is compatible with Wikipedia. By adopting the CC-BY-SA Creative Commons licence the project's content partners indirectly and directly contribute to

Wikipedia. They have also been guided in a better understanding of how they can contribute to and, just as importantly, be included in the world's knowledge of culture and history.

Links:

www.wikiafrica.org;
www.africacentre.net/wikiafrica;
<http://www.lettera27.org/>

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From military museum to remembrance museum. Finding a balance

Danielle Kuijten

If museums are there for a community to interpret their history and present this history to itself and others, who should decide what to tell and what to show and how should this be done? By putting the past on display, whether through objects, images or text, a museum is committing itself to an interpretation. This interpretation is formed not only by what is included and excluded in the display, but equally important is how it is shown and which role different cultural groups get. The discussion goes further than questions about whether or not all communities are represented in the museum. It is about deconstructing the various utopias that are still reflected in museum representation, in order to build new representation. It is all about resetting these dominant post-colonial and post-conflict perspectives.

Although museums in the Netherlands are working on a more inclusive approach, my feeling is that we are still at the stage where we are not deconstructing the post-colonial yet but are just merely adding things to our collection to get a more multisided representation. This looks as if you are inclusive, but actually you are not. Real inclusiveness goes further, focussing on issues like how communities and issues are represented as part of the overall exhibition in order to think ahead to what the long term effect of this could be. How can museums tell the contested narratives of colonial and post-colonial times in such a way that we can open up the dialogue instead of excluding again or even more?



Wooden figure of a KNIL soldier, hallway museum Bronbeek. Photo D.Kuijten.



Exhibition "The Story of the Dutch East Indies", museum Bronbeek. Close up of the set up of room 2 of the "The dependency 1817-19". Photo D.Kuijten.

In line with this discussion I will present an analysis of the exhibition called *The Story of the Dutch East Indies*, which I did with two other students from the Reinwardt Academy. This exhibition was developed in 2009-2010 as a collaboration between The Military Museum Bronbeek and the Indies Remembrance in Arnhem, and is shown in the former Military Museum on the Estate Bronbeek. These are two very different stakeholder-groups: The Museum celebrates the colonial past of the

Netherlands in the Dutch-Indies with, centrally the story of the Royal Dutch-Indies Army (KNIL), and the colonized opponents. The Indies Remembrance Centre focusses on the Japanese occupation and the Bersiap period in the Dutch Indies commemorating "the suffering that our compatriots in the period between 1941-1949 in the distant part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands had to bear".

The original exhibition at the Museum Bronbeek was very much object based in a traditional exhibition set up. The new exhibition challenged them to revisit their collection and narratives to come to a new multi-sided presentation. As the civilian story heavily rests on memory other ways of presenting the intangible were researched. It was a challenging attempt to have these very different stakeholder-groups placed under one roof trying to tell their stories in one cohesive representation. This paper discusses the set up of the new exhibition and will critically look at the approach to bringing these stories together.

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Imposed utopia. Establishing collections; building the Israeli nation state

Judy Jaffe-Schagen

Today I present some of the findings of my PhD research called *Objects in context, peoples in place. Home, museum and belonging in the cultural landscape of Israel*. In this research I like to argue that more than trends in museology, it is the character of a subculture – religious, ethnic or political – and the connection with the land and the state that is decisive in defining the specific kind of museum. In any case every museum established in Israel has to deal with the question of whether to tell the Zionist narrative with all its nuances and in all its variations, or to exhibit another one.

I would like to single out two recent developments in the establishment of

collections in relation to the building of the Israeli nation state. The first is a temporary exhibition on Hasidim, a movement within Orthodox Judaism by the Israel Museum in Jerusalem that opened summer 2012. It is not self-evident that a secular institution like the Israel Museum would show an exhibition with a religious subject. However, the curator believes that one of the obligations of the museum is to overcome existing stigmas by presenting the material culture of specific subcultures, and by building a bridge between one subculture and another. The exhibition shows the material culture from a group most of whose members probably will never visit the museum, as they consider it a Zionist symbol. The exhibition thus is most of all a

tool to pursue the utopia of the museum itself to build bridges between secular and religious groups. But the result is a one way bridge. The subjects' own utopia, the arrival of the messiah, is not addressed in the museum nor is the museum seen by the subculture as a tool for achieving this goal.



A world apart next door. Glimpses into the life of Hasidic Jews. Israel Museum, 2012. Photo J. Jaffe-Schagen.

The second recent development concerns the opening in 2011 of the exhibition *Israeli texture*. The 47 selected works exhibited in the parliament building consist of something Israeli. They depict the landscape, or the home or the memory. Ariyeh Eldad from the National Party demanded the removal of the painting 'The Orange-grower's family' made by Eliyahu Bokobza. He said that by showing an Arab family from the thirties it is a 'Nakba' painting, presenting the Palestinian narrative. Nakba, an Arab word, means catastrophe and refers to the independence of the State of Israel

in 1948. Reuven Rivlin, the speaker of the parliament, responded by saying that he is proud to present contemporary art that displays the variety in Israeli society. However it is the government's own story that is exhibited. In order to show all the layers of the population, work made by Israeli Arab artists among others should be added to the collection.



Eliyahu Eric Bokobza. The orange-grower's family, Jaffa 1939. 2007 oil on canvas. Collection Parliament building, Jerusalem, 2012.

The question arises whether a museum is the right tool to enable a subculture to establish itself within the nation-state, to act as a mediator between generations and to function as a bridge to the other subcultures.

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From One Utopia to Another: Polish Museums since the Communist Era

Anna Żakiewicz

For over 20 years, since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, we have been experiencing the transformation from oppressive communism to free capitalism. The process concerns museums as well. As state institutions they should provide people with the widest possible access to art and national heritage but they also need public money in order to achieve this.

In these early years of transformation to free capitalism, museums in Poland gained the freedom to seek private sponsorship but at the same time progressively began to lose financial security from the state. So we have to see all the challenges and difficulties associated with this transition and ask the basic question that museums in Poland now ponder: what is more important – freedom or financial security?

The limiting of purchasing and exhibiting were the most obvious results of state financial support before 1989. Artworks suspected of being against the system were strictly forbidden. Sometimes that rule had adopted quite a ridiculous form – until about 1955 no abstract forms had been allowed. After that time the authorities i.e. the Ministry of Culture accepted up to 15% of abstraction in an artwork. It was strongly connected with the creation of a utopia – of an ideal society in the communist state – which should be depicted in artworks bought for public collections and publicly exhibited. Only smiling workers building new houses, factories and schools could be painted or sculpted or happy families. Landscapes should always be colourful and sunny, families – happy...

After 1989 the new government established by a democratically elected parliament continued financial support for museums but budgets allocated for culture were reduced each year. The new possibility of private sponsorship appeared but it was connected with new difficulties. Sponsors wanted, and still want visible results – a big audience, interests of media i.e. press, TV, the Internet. Museums have to compete with pop concerts and sport events and usually lose the game. In Poland the best recipe for success is an exhibition of famous foreign artists borrowed from important foreign museums. A painting by Michelangelo Caravaggio borrowed from the Vatican Museums in 1996 sponsored by FIAT or Impressionists' works from Musée d'Orsay in Paris in 2001 supported by mobile company GSM Plus – both exhibitions presented at the

National Museum in Warsaw – were good examples. The latter was visited by 250 000 people.

Polish potential sponsors i.e. banks, mobile telephone operators or insurance companies are not interested in supporting more ambitious shows, especially those connected with difficult questions. For instance – the exhibition *Ars Homo Erotica* presented at the National Museum in Warsaw could not obtain any support from private sponsors. Obviously, it could not have been organized before 1989 – at all.

Sponsors do not want to support purchases either. They prefer to buy artworks for themselves only. During the communist era nobody could possess any valuable things so now, as a consequence there are no rich private collectors who could donate valuable artworks to museums.

So we have to admit that the freedom to purchase and exhibit as a result of the removal of political censorship is another utopia, which is impossible to achieve without substantial financial resources. It ultimately leads to the limitation of activity.

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Unfortunately Anna Żakiewicz did not have the opportunity to present her paper at the conference but we are pleased to publish the abstract.
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“Once we were warriors” . District Six Museum workshop report

Aleksandra Janus & Dorota Kawęcka

As part of the pre-conference programme, COMCOL organized a workshop at District Six Museum in Cape Town. The aim of this event was to share experiences of the different institutions and participants around collecting memory as a ‘collections’ practice. Our guide for the day was Chrischené Julius, Collections Manager at the museum and a keynote speaker

at last year’s conference in Berlin where she talked about “Participative activities of a community-based museum”. In the discussion we were joined by Tina Smith (Head of Exhibitions) and Bonita Bennett (Director). Before proceeding to the report, let us give you some details about this unique museum initiative and its site.

Since the 19th century District Six was inhabited by freed slaves, merchants, artisans, labourers and immigrants, making it a vibrant area, closely linked to the city. Yet resettlements started already in the beginning of the 20th century as the black South Africans were forcibly displaced from the District. In 1966 it was declared a white-only area under the Group Areas Act of 1950, and by 1982 there was nobody left of the original inhabitants. 60 000 people were removed to the Cape Flats in the outskirts of the city while their houses in District Six were demolished.

District Six Museum was established in 1994 to document the history of the district and the memories of its ex-residents. Today it is well known across the museum world and has been written about in academic books and journals for museum professionals (see selected bibliography below).



Chrischené Julius and conference delegates Stefan Krankenhagen and Léontine Meijer-van Mensch. Photo Eva Fägerborg.

During the workshop we visited both the museum, located in a deconsecrated Methodist Church, and the site of District Six. The most striking element of the exhibition can be seen immediately upon entering the venue. The floor of the building is covered with a large scale map of the district with hand-written notes added over time. It shows a direct representation of the area before the resettlements and serves as a starting point for a museum visit. (Image of the map, see p. 8). However, this visually powerful element can be also read as a metaphor of the museum's agenda. On one hand, it is a tool of collecting memory as visitors can complete the map with information they remember on the spot. On the other hand if, as one of the postulates of ex-residents, which the museum supports, is to

reclaim land and/or reconstruct the area of District Six, including former housing and infrastructure, the map becomes a political statement. As Bonita Bennett, Director of the museum, puts it: "The simple act of locating and marking a destroyed home and an obliterated street on the map has impacted many people deeply on a number of levels, possibly beyond what had been anticipated by the museum when the map was created. The map was always meant to be a place of re-inscription for people whose homes, lives, stories, and material traces had been layered over both physically and through intentionally biased apartheid records; today it continues to be a way of rebuilding and recalling community again and again" (Bennett 2012: 320). The idea is to let people inscribe their story into District Six history by adding their addresses on the map and their stories/objects to the museum collection. As Chrischené said, the museum works as a fragmentary archive – as the memory itself is always divided into fragments. The staff collects stories in the process of an ongoing conversation with the former inhabitants of District Six and when the stories are recorded, they become "objects" too. In its dedication to having a continuous discussion with the community, the museum executes its philosophy of trust and sustaining long-term relationships.



Embroidered messages in the museum. Photo Eva Fägerborg.

The museum has always been a fighter – it culminated the spirit of 1994 and activism is still its major driving force. Especially during the earlier days of its existence, one of its main functions was to support the land restitution process, however today we may ask what is the cause it campaigns for now? "Once we were warriors", Tina Smith said. Now, when the museum has become an international success

and attracts a lot of attention, it is a challenge to keep political autonomy. At the same time, international support is not sufficient for the museum to survive – celebrities come to visit and it creates a misleading image of a wealthy institution, although the museum depends on entrance fees and the funding is project based.

During the discussion we tackled the issue of nostalgia related to the idea of reconstructing the area of District Six: should it be reconstructed as it was, so that people can reclaim their land and have their exact houses rebuilt? Are the expectations of the community all the same? How can the demands of the community be negotiated with the city planners? Another important issue is the changing role of the museum: due to its popularity and the rapid development of tourism it has more and more international visitors – thus the new goal would be to explain the city and its complex history to those who come to Cape Town. Those questions are related to the general problem of all museums: for who are we? Being a “buzz word” is both a treasure and a burden. The challenge is to keep the emotions that are the source and the strength of the museum, but at the same time, to sustain autonomy and answer the needs of new audiences.

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Joint workshop of the working groups on Contemporary Collecting and Resources

Arjen Kok & Peter van Mensch

On Friday Nov. 9th, a special workshop was organised by the COMCOL working groups on Contemporary Collecting and Resources. The purpose of the workshop was to gather views on the possible content of a guideline to be used by museums worldwide to develop policies on contemporary collecting. The following report is a reflection on the meeting rather than a detailed account of what has been said in a lively discussion following the introduction by Arjen Kok.

The initial name of the proposed project (Guideline Contemporary Collecting) already gave rise to misunderstandings and disagreement: why guideline? what is contemporary? and why only collecting? It was clear that few participants were in favour of a guideline in the sense of a document with directives about what ought to be done. A more open approach was favoured. The concept of “toolkit” was considered to be more appropriate. In the context of the working

group “contemporary” refers to contemporary society. It does not (or only partly) refer to modern methods of collecting or the re-evaluation of the contemporary relevancy of existing collections. It was also stated that collecting is just one way of documenting. The toolkit should not focus exclusively on collecting objects. Documenting is to be understood as “continuous and systematic compilation and processing of recorded information for the purpose of storage, classifying, retrieval, utilization, or transmission” (ISO standard 5127: 1.2.01). “Recorded information” refers to all sorts of media, and does include objects.

The new project is from now on to be referred to as “Toolkit Documenting the Present”. The toolkit should bring together experiences and best practices from all parts of the world and serve as a checklist, mapping out strategies and potential ethical dilemmas. The toolkit should not exclude non-institutional initiatives, and encompass the widest possible spectre of the *who*, *what* and *how*, and perhaps also *when* and *whys* of collecting/recording. It was mentioned that the discourse is often too theoretical. There is a need of practice based tools.

Some potential ethical dilemmas were briefly explored during the discussion. Most of them were also addressed in the discussions during the Berlin 2011 conference, such as the role

and authority of the community in relation to the museum expert and the sharing of objects and content between museums and communities.

Documenting the present is an important challenge for the museum world. In a number of perspectives the place and role of the museum in society is questioned. Without effectively repositioning the museum and recreating the relation with its constituent communities the museum may become an obsolete institution and will be marginalised. In order to fulfil its function as a social cohesive institution with a responsibility for the identity of both communities and individuals, the museum has to develop a policy and practice to connect with actual problems and issues of society. A policy on documenting the present can be a strong tool for achieving these goals.

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Robben Island: visit and debate

Eva Hult

I once learned that in relation to museums dedicated to special individuals, Swedish museums mostly are about authors. In the United States they are usually about politicians. On that sunny Saturday 10 November 2012 when we visited Robben Island, I had expectations of visiting the home, for 18 years, of a great politician *and* an author – Nelson Mandela.

We took the ferry from the Waterfront area of Cape Town, a group of museum people from the COMCOL/ICMAH conference. Our hosts from the Iziko museums of Cape Town kindly came with us along with many members from

their staff. After a lovely tour of almost an hour, we reached the island. There we immediately got on the buses waiting for us. A tour around the island with guide followed. After that we met former political prisoners who showed us the prison and the cell where Nelson Mandela had lived. After a short walk back to the boat we left the island.

The conference group visited Robben Island along with all the regular tourists. This was both good and bad. We got the experience of what is offered to the public, but we did not meet or talk with any of our colleagues at the Robben Island Museum. One surprising thing

to me, and to many of us, was that some of the guides were, at times, quite light-hearted in such a serious place. Instead of remaining serious, they told jokes and laughed. That must have been some sort of policy they have at the museum.



A room for 40 prisoners. Photo Eva Fägerborg.



Nelson Mandela's cell. Photo Eva Fägerborg.

The buildings seem to be well kept and that makes it a bit difficult to get the feeling of how it was during the times when the island was a prison. Few objects remain but the emptiness has a significant effect of loneliness and desperation. The absence of objects was compensated for by the guides' narratives, which were told in an interesting way. When you think of the future of the museum maybe in twenty, thirty years time, maybe you then will find recorded memories, films and sounds, like in the house of Anne Frank in Amsterdam.

I myself was a bit surprised that Mandela's history was not as present as I had thought it would be. It was not until a visit to the shop with souvenirs, that I found a corner where films about him were shown and offered for sale.

It was interesting to learn that the island has been used as a place for political prisoners since the 1650's. People from India, Malaysia, Indonesia as well as from Africa, were imprisoned there if they made resistance against the Europeans. So in that respect the island is a symbol of anti-imperialist struggle over the centuries. I would have liked to hear more about that.

On the boat going back I was struck by a similarity between Robben Island and Liberty Island outside New York where the Statue of Liberty is placed. Both islands are situated close to a big city and can be reached after a short pleasant trip in the Atlantic Ocean. Lots of tourists come and during a short stay we get a glimpse of two different symbols of hope of a better world, of Utopia – which was the topic of our conference.

The next morning, 11 November, the Sunday Times published an article, which was very critical of the Robben Island Museum. It was signed Fred Khumalo. He had just visited the island because he was launching a book he had co-authored about the experiences of some of the prisoners. He had gone there on a privately owned boat and had spent half a day there together with a former prisoner. His criticism was that the staff did not find keys to open doors and that so many objects were gone. And he wrote: "One is left hungry for images of how Mandela would have endured the 18 years he spent in this place." He did not think that the place is a museum and wrote that it should be shut down to spare the former prisoners pain and embarrassment.

This newsletter article was later internally distributed among the conference delegates. After a few days we received an answer to the article sent to Sunday Times by Dr Olusegun Morakinyo of the Robben Island Museum and the University of the Western Cape. He wrote:

"Yes RIM as an organization is at present not in the best position that it can be, but anyone who knows anything about heritage conservation and the unique history of RIM since its inception in 1997, will never suggest let alone decreed as Khumalo has done that RIM should be shut down. RIM as an organization never had a structured executive body for the first seven years of its existence

and the present executive of the institution was the first full tenured executive since 2008.

If Khumalo had bothered to consult the current executive of RIM, they would have explained the challenges and prospects of conservation management of the Island and the article will be balanced /.../ Khumalo claimed that RIM is sold as a Museum but it is not a Museum. What he misses is that RIM is a Museum of a special kind. It suffices here to quote Clifford Shearing and Michael Kempa who argued that the “Robben Island Museum is a site for the preservation and exhibition of objects thought to be of lasting value, but also a site designed to promote a hope sensibility; it is also more than that. It belongs to a class that we might think of as ‘governance museums’. That is, museums that are concerned with promoting sensibilities rather than with simply exhibiting

valued objects. In these museums, the exhibits are intentional vehicles for shaping consciousnesses.”

Of course this debate was very interesting since we just had been at the place. For us, museum employees and researchers, it would have been quite an experience to discuss these matters with the staff at the Robben Island Museum. The themes of objects on display or not on display, museums with or without collections, and how to make museums dealing with “difficult things”, are contemporary issues familiar to all of us.

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Essay:

Museums in New Towns: identity, image and participatory culture

Irina Leifer

In 2013 The Netherlands and the Russian Federation pay attention to the special relationships between the two countries. In both countries hundreds of thousands of people live in so called New Towns – towns which were built in a rap tempo after the Second World War by and for domestic migrants. Beginning from the 1980’s New Towns in the Netherlands as well as in Russia find themselves in a difficult situation. They are constantly searching for their identity and – in competition with other cities and towns – for characteristics which will contribute to their clearer positioning. In addition to that, New Towns explore different possibilities to improve the quality of life, with varying success until now.

Various social and cultural institutions, including museums, develop strategies aimed at improving quality of life in New Towns. In the Netherlands museums in such towns position themselves in general more openly, more experimentally and inclusively in relation to their city communities than in Russia. By

means of the participative collecting project *Museums in New Towns: identity, image and participatory culture* two museums – Stadsmuseum Zoetermeer in The Netherlands and Nakhodka City Museum in the Russian Far East – began research along with their citizens, aiming to explore what it really means to live in a town where everyone is in fact a migrant. Within such a framework the input of city communities is of crucial importance. Stadsmuseum Zoetermeer already has a considerable experience with participatory projects. One of them is an exchange-exhibition *Give & Take* which took place in 2008-2009. The other one is a follow-up *Zoetermeer’s Room of Marvels* (van der Ploeg 2009; 4289, *Wisselwerking...* 2009). The museum carefully evaluated the outcomes of both projects and by doing so contributed to the discussion which takes place in the professional museum community all over the world: is it a task of a museum to collect the objects of contemporary (mass) culture and, if yes, how to do it in a concrete way?

Building on the Zoetermeer's participative collecting project it will be particularly interesting and significant to conduct such an experiment in another New Town and to compare the results. Such projects give citizens a chance to participate actively in the process of creating an exhibition, their choices do really influence the content. How will this form of co-curatorship work in another political, social, economic and cultural context? During recent decades museums in Russia had to cope with drastic social transformations and were forced to think about important dilemmas related to their present-day role, mission and functions. Do participatory projects have the potential to help museums redefine their place in contemporary urban landscape and reinvent themselves as dynamic and meaningful institutions? Can such projects catalyse changes in professional relationships within the museums and between the museums and various city communities? Can the public really become co-curators and/or co-creators and what consequences can this have for the position of the institution in a professional circuit and in the city?



Nakhodka City Museum © nakhodka-online.ru

Museums in New Towns: identity, image and participatory culture is a multilayered project which investigates the dilemmas of museum collecting and (re)presentation, also the relationships between the museum and its public and the issue of the ownership of an exhibition. The starting point of the project in Nakhodka is an exhibition with a topic which slightly differs from Zoetermeer's theme, namely: how one has discovered or 'found' himself in Nakhodka in the broadest sense of that experience. This is in a way a word play – the word Nakhodka stands for 'finding'. The end result will be an exhibition created from the donated objects and stories related to them

which reflect on the notion of finding yourself and your own place in a city you live in. The collection Nakhodka 2013 will join the museum collection and will be carefully researched by the experts together with the citizens during the series of master-classes following the exhibition. The preparatory period of the project started in October 2012 and the opening of the exhibition in Nakhodka is planned for May 2013.

Taking into consideration the experience of Stadsmuseum Zoetermeer where the core group of participants consisted primarily of older ethnic residents of the town with an intrinsic interest in museums and the history of the place, Nakhodka City Museum decided to involve the members of the Museum Youth Club in the project from its very beginning. In a run up to the exhibition teenagers and young adults regularly publish in a local newspaper small articles about how they, their relatives or friends found themselves in Nakhodka. By doing this young citizens become the ambassadors of the project promoting it among their peers and inviting them to participate.



Meeting with the Museum Youth Club Photo © Olga Tukavkina.

A very important part of *Museums in New Towns* is its evaluation and analysis. It will be extremely interesting to compare the results of the projects in Zoetermeer and in Nakhodka on different levels. Firstly, which communication strategies aiming at community participation can be considered successful in The Netherlands and in Russia? Secondly, which community representatives (taking into consideration different generations, ethnical background, social position etc) participate more actively in experimental museum projects in both countries? Thirdly, which objects have been collected and what can these

contemporary collections tell about the emotional bond of citizens with their cities? And lastly, which role (shared) memories play in identification and image making of New Towns and how can museums contribute to the process of transforming a planned city into a real one?

The outcomes of the project will be published in the summer of 2013.

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