

# Draft Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums, their Diversity and their Role in Society

## Preamble

*The General Conference,*

*Considering* that museums share some of the fundamental missions of the Organisation, as stipulated in its Constitution, including its contribution to the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace, the foundation of the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind, full and equal opportunities for education for all, in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge,

*Also considering* that one of the functions of the Organization, as laid down in the Constitution, is to give fresh impulse to popular education and to the spread of culture: By collaborating with Members, at their request, in the development of educational activities; By instituting collaboration among the nations to advance the ideal of equality of educational opportunity without regard to race, sex or any distinctions, economic or social; and to maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge,

Attached to culture in its diverse forms in time and space, to the benefit that people and human societies draw from this diversity, and to the need to strategically integrate culture in its diversity in national and international development policies, in the interest of communities, peoples and nations,

*Affirming* that the preservation, study and transmission of cultural and natural, tangible and intangible heritage, in movable and immovable dimensions, is of great importance for all human societies, for intercultural dialogue among peoples, for social cohesion, and for sustainable development,

*Reaffirming* that the museum can effectively contribute towards accomplishing these tasks, as stated in the 1960 Recommendation concerning the Most Effective Means of Rendering Museums Accessible to Everyone,

*Also reaffirming* that museums contribute to the application of cultural rights, as defined by Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Articles 13 and 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,

*Considering* that they also play an ever-increasing role in stimulating creativity, providing opportunities for creative and cultural industries thus contributing to material and spiritual well-being of world citizens,

*Considering* that it is the responsibility of every State to protect the cultural and natural heritage, both tangible and intangible, movable and immovable, in the territory under its jurisdiction, and to support the actions of museums to that end,

*Recalling* that a corpus of UNESCO and other international standard-setting instruments, including conventions, recommendations and declarations, exists on the subject of the role of museums, all of which remain valid<sup>1</sup>,

*Taking into account* the magnitude of socio-economic and political changes that have affected the role and diversity of museums since the UNESCO Recommendation of 1960,

*Desiring* to supplement and extend the application of the standards and principles laid down in existing international instruments referring to the place and role of museums, in favour of cultural and natural heritage, in its tangible and intangible forms, movable and immovable dimensions, and to the related roles and responsibilities,

Having before it proposals concerning the Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums, their Diversity and their Role in Society,

Adopt this Recommendation on the XX day of November 2015.

The General Conference recommends that Member States should apply the following provisions by taking whatever legislative or other steps may be required to give effect, within their respective territories under their jurisdiction, to the principles and norms set forth in this Recommendation.

## **Introduction**

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<sup>1</sup> The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999);  
 The Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property 1970;  
 The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972);  
 The UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995);  
 The Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001);  
 The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003);  
 The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005);  
 The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)  
 The Recommendation on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavations (UNESCO, 1956);  
 The Recommendation concerning the Most Effective Means of Rendering Museums Accessible to Everyone (UNESCO, 1960);  
 The Recommendation on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Export, Import and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (UNESCO, 1964);  
 The Recommendation concerning the Protection, at National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO, 1972);  
 The Recommendation concerning the International Exchange of Cultural Property (UNESCO, 1976);  
 The Recommendation for the Protection of Movable Cultural Property (UNESCO, 1978);  
 The Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore (UNESCO, 1989);  
 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949);  
 The UNESCO Declaration of Principles of International Cultural Cooperation (1966);  
 The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2001;  
 The UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage (2003);  
 The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

1. We live in a time of unprecedented climate, demographic, and technological change in humanity, with their repercussions on culture and the environment.
2. Our relationship to culture and nature and, in particular, our relationship to heritage and the development of knowledge is being singularly affected. The rapid changes occurring throughout the world pose a constant challenge to societies, including their relationship to history and the preservation of their environment and its tangible and intangible testimonies.
3. The protection and promotion of cultural and natural diversity has emerged as a major challenge of the 21st century. In this respect, museums constitute one of the primary institutions wherein tangible and intangible testimonies of cultures of humanity are protected and promoted. Since the dawn of humanity, humankind has maintained a specific relation to with reality, by selecting a certain number of objects, both tangible and intangible, and by studying and presenting them to current and future generations. This principle has been materialised by the establishment of museums open to the public and dedicated to study, education and enjoyment.
4. Museums have become a popular phenomenon shared around the world, particularly since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; their number has practically tripled in a half-century. By presenting themselves as places for cultural transmission, learning, discussion and training, they play an important role in education, social cohesion and sustainable development. Beyond their role in society, by opening themselves up to all audiences, they also contribute to the development of tourism, thereby constituting an important factor for economic development.
5. Museums are recognized as contributing to all forms of education, formal, informal and lifelong learning, in a variety of subjects. Furthermore, museums have great potential to raise awareness of the public on the benefits of heritage, on its value and importance for societies, thus responsibility of all citizens to contribute to their custody and transmission.
6. This Recommendation clarifies the role of museums, and addresses the importance of protecting and promoting them so they can play their full development role in society and its environment, including the protection of heritage, the protection and promotion of cultural diversity, the transmission of scientific knowledge, the development of educational policy, lifelong learning and social cohesion, and the development of the creative and tourism economy.

## **I. Definition and diversity of museums**

7. In this Recommendation, "museum" is defined as a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purpose of education, study and enjoyment<sup>2</sup>. As such, museums

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<sup>2</sup> This definition is the one given by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which brings together, at an international level, the museum phenomenon in all of its diversity and transformations through time and space

present themselves as institutions that are particularly representative of the natural and cultural diversity of humanity and the issues related to it.

8. Museums conserve and present collections. In this recommendation, “collection” is defined as a set of cultural and natural properties, tangible and intangible, past and present whose different elements cannot be separated without damaging the coherence of the set and whose value is greater than the sum of the individual values of the elements of which it is composed. A museum collection is a collection whose objects are included in the museum inventory.

9. In this recommendation, heritage is defined as a group of tangible and intangible resources that people select and identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions, deserving of protection, enhancement and transmission to future generations.

## **II. Issues for museums in society**

10. Existing UNESCO and other international instruments recognise the importance and role of museums in the protection of natural and cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, and in their overall accessibility to the public. In this regard, museum collections should benefit from the protective measures granted to cultural heritage in these instruments.

11. Museums participate in the development and transmission of knowledge, education and lifelong learning.

12. Museums are currently confronted with considerable changes, related to those of the societies in which they have developed, which could force them to redefine themselves in the coming years, at the risk of seeing some of their missions called into question and their diversity restricted; these are the challenges presented below.

### ***Globalisation***

13. Globalisation has led to an unprecedented increase in the international movement of museum professionals, visitors, collection pieces and sources of funding. These movements are leading to new management practices but also greater expectations on the part of stakeholders. They could also lead to the creation of very large museums that attract millions of visitors and have access to considerable resources, while smaller museums could remain under-resourced to fulfil their basic missions. Another effect of globalisation is the possible standardisation of museums, their collections and their business models, all tied to a single international model, at the risk of seeing their diversity disappear.

### ***Museums relation with economy and quality of life***

14. Museums can be major economic actors in society, both directly and indirectly. Directly, they have widely expanded their income-generating activities. Indirectly, they participate in the tourism economy and can contribute to the quality of life of communities and the regions in which they are located. More generally, they promote the development of the creative economy.

15. The museums' ties with the market economy, along with economic factors, have forced museums to increase their income-generating activities, which could detrimentally affect their primary functions – preservation, research and communication. The benefits of such activities, while of the utmost importance for society, cannot be expressed in financial terms.

### ***Social role***

16. The social role of the museum has a long tradition dating back to the Declaration of Santiago, Chile (1972). Modern museums are increasingly viewed in all countries as playing a key role in the social system and as a factor in social integration. In this sense, they can help communities face profound changes in society, including those leading to the rise in social inequality, the impoverishment of some classes in society and the breakdown of social ties.

17. Museums are vital public spaces that address all classes of society and can therefore play a leading role in the development of social ties and cohesion, and in reflecting on collective identities. Museums present themselves as places that are particularly open to all and are highly sensitive to the idea of providing access to everyone; in particular, this entails those who are the most fragile and most alienated and who, due to financial reasons, physical difficulties or education, do not normally visit cultural or natural sites. They constitute places of reflection and transformation for the development of human rights and gender equality within society. As an agent for social inclusion, the museum also constitutes a specific medium for questioning and discussing current societal challenges.

### ***Digital technologies***

18. Museums have quickly adapted to the development of information and communication technologies. The changes brought about by these technologies are considerable, both for the economy and social relations and, more generally, global culture. The technological transformation of our societies offers extraordinary opportunities in terms of the preservation, study and transmission of heritage. It also brings the risk of a division between more technologically advanced institutions and those that are unable to keep up with technological developments, along with people who do not have access to or training in using these tools.

## **III. Primary functions of museums**

### **Preservation**

19. The preservation of cultural and natural heritage is one of the museum's three primary functions. Preservation comprises activities related to acquisition, collection management, analysis of risks and development of emergency plans, security, preventive and curative conservation, and restoration of museum objects. Member States are invited to support an active preservation policy allowing museums to protect and pass down tangible and intangible heritage to future generations.

20. A key component of collection management in museums is the implementation and management of a professional inventory and control of collections. An inventory is an

essential tool that may be used to protect museums, to prevent and fight illicit trafficking, and help them fulfil their role in society. It also eases the mobility of collections between museums. Member States should take appropriate measures to ensure that the compiling of an inventory based on international standards is a priority in the museums established in the territory under their jurisdiction. Digitalization of museum collections might be of help in this perspective but should not be considered as replacement to the conservation priorities of physical properties.

### **Research**

21. Research, including the study of collections, is the second primary function of museums. It is only through real understanding based on the collections of museums and other institutions that the full value of collections can be realised and offered to the public. Member States should therefore encourage and support research activities carried out in the museums established in the territory under their jurisdiction.

### **Communication**

22. Communication is the third principle function of museums. Communication activities include the exhibition and interpretation of permanent collections, the organisation of temporary exhibitions and public events, publication, education, and other interactions with the public.

23. Communication policies should consider integration, access and social inclusion, and be conducted in collaboration with the public, including groups that do not normally visit museums. Museum actions are also strengthened by the actions of the public and communities in their favour. Collaborative and participative efforts between museums, communities and the public should therefore be strongly encouraged.

## **IV. Policies**

24. Museums must observe applicable national and local laws, and should take note of the principles of international instruments on the protection and promotion of cultural and natural heritage, both tangible and intangible. Museums must also take into account the primary ethical and professional standards established by the professional museum community. Therefore, Member States are strongly encouraged to ensure that the role of museums in society is exercised in accordance with legal and professional standards in the territories under their jurisdiction.

25. Member States should take all appropriate measures to ensure the protection and promotion of museums located in the territories under their jurisdiction, by supporting and developing those institutions in the respect of the primary function of museums. Therefore, the development of the human, physical and financial resources needed for them to function should be considered a priority.

26. The diversity of museums and the heritage for which they are responsible constitute their greatest asset. This diversity extends to the ways in which museums carry out their

primary functions of preservation, research and communication. Member states are encouraged to protect and promote this diversity, while encouraging museums to draw on quality criteria defined and promoted by national and international museum communities.

26. Good practices for the functioning, protection and promotion of museums and of their diversity and role in society have been recognised by national and international museum networks. These good practices are continually updated to reflect innovations in the field. In this respect, the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* constitutes the most widely shared reference. Member states are encouraged to promote the adoption and dissemination of these and other good practices and to use them to inform the development of standards, museum policies and national legislation.

27. The effective functioning of museums is directly influenced by the public and private funding mechanisms put in place for their support. Member States should strive to ensure a clear vision, planning, and adequate funding for museums and a harmonious balance among the different funding mechanisms to enable them to carry out their mission to the benefit of society. The functions of a museum are also influenced by new technologies and their growing role in everyday life. These technologies have great potential for promoting museums throughout the world, but they also constitute potential barriers for people and museums that do not have access to them or the knowledge and skills to use them effectively. Member States should strive to provide full access to these technologies by both museums and individuals.

27. The spirit of the Recommendation of 1960 Concerning the Most Effective Means of Rendering Museums Accessible to Everyone remains a priority in creating a lasting place for museums in society. The social role of museums, along with the preservation of heritage, constitutes their fundamental purpose. Member States should strive to include these principles in the laws concerning the museums established in the territories under their jurisdiction.

28. One of the most effective ways of protecting and promoting museums, their diversity and their role in society is cooperation among themselves and with other institutions responsible for the protection and promotion of culture, heritage and education. Member States should therefore encourage cooperation among museums at local, regional, national and international levels, including their participation in professional networks and associations that foster such cooperation.