

# Museums, Social Landmarks

**Declaration of Funchal**  
on the European Year of Cultural Heritage



11.05.2018

## **MUSEUMS, SOCIAL LANDMARKS**

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Since their reinvention in contemporary times, as places of delight and enlightenment aiming to educate their citizenry, museums have spread everywhere, experiencing explosive growth rates in several parts of the world. In the two last decades the global number of museums has possibly doubled with new museums being established every day. It is estimated that within the current decade two dozen new cultural centres focused on museums will be built in various countries with an investment of about 250 billion US\$ and in China, alone, 500 new museums are forecast to be created every year.

This is the result of the ever-growing appetite for culture that comes with economic development and also of the general acknowledgement of the important role of museums nowadays, as significant contributors to the urban economy and social inclusion.

But it is so, also because museums have been able to respond efficiently to the needs of a changing society. They enlarged immensely their conceptual scope, both in terms of collections assembled, research, curatorship and management and in terms of technological recourses oriented to educational and promotional purposes. Anchored, as always, in material collections, museums have successfully adapted to the world of digitalization, taking complete advantage of virtual representations as means to better promote remote or in loco knowledge, and emphatic evaluation, of real objects.

Museums promote and communicate universal values. Though locally rooted, they tell stories of global significance and are seen everywhere as prized national landmarks. They are a source of inspiration and creativity and have a strong impact on education. They are dynamic, inclusive and democratic institutions, reaching all sectors of the population, from large metropolises to small towns and villages, and all social groups, from the wealthy and long-rooted to the poor and struggling where sometimes immigrants are the dominant element.

Unfortunately, times of global financial austerity have painted a gloomy picture with the negative impact of decreasing public and private financial support to museums and culture in general.

One decade of crisis derived from the global financial crash has had a devastating effect on museums, as it was observed in the “Lisbon Declaration” (ICOM, 2013): at government level, the extinction of high administrative specialized bodies, the

strengthening of administrative centralism, the significant decrease in allocated budgets, the lay off at all levels of skilled staff and the loss of legal and functional autonomy; and at private level, the risk of closing museums and selling collections and the dramatic increase of antiquities exportation, both legal and illegal.

Conscious of the vital importance of cultural heritage as a universal value for us as individuals, communities and societies, as it shapes our identities and everyday lives, the European Union has designated 2018 as the European Year of Cultural Heritage, which purpose is *to encourage the sharing and appreciation of Europe's cultural heritage as a shared resource, to raise awareness to common history and values, and to reinforce a sense of belonging to a common European space.*

This event, however, has an extra European dimension, as among its objects we also find the contribution *to promoting cultural heritage as an important element of the relations between the Union and third countries, building on the interest and needs of partner countries and on Europe's expertise in cultural heritage and highlighting the potential of cooperation in matters of cultural heritage for developing stronger ties within the Union and with countries outside the Union and for encouraging intercultural dialogue, post-conflict reconciliation and conflict prevention,*

Museums and monuments play a central role in this intercultural dialogue.

As it was put forward by the most recent Eurobarometer (nr. 466), promoted by the European Union, the large majority of Europeans, more than 80%, expresses the importance, even the pride, that they attribute to cultural heritage; more than two thirds state that the presence of cultural heritage can have an influence on their holiday destination; more than half, have visited museums or attended cultural events related to museums and monuments in the last twelve months; almost eight in ten consider that cultural heritage or cultural heritage-related activities create jobs; almost nine in ten believe Europe's cultural heritage should be taught in schools, as it tells us about our history and culture; and more than three quarters urge public authorities to allocate more resources to Europe's cultural heritage.

Having taken all this into account, and considering especially the opportunity given by the celebration of the European Year of Cultural Heritage, the European Regional Alliance of the International Council of Museums (ICOM Europe) and the World Federation of Friends of Museums (WFFM), jointly committed to the development of museums and to the support of their activities, decided to recommend the following guidelines, with the aim of contributing to a better fulfilment of their mission towards society:

1. After years of budget cuts and in a time of economic recovery, public authorities, guardianship institutions and museum trustees shall improve the level of financial support to museums allowing them to better deliver their services to community;
2. Museums are then able to generate significant economic benefits through areas such as jobs, tourism, investment and urban regeneration, and should be seen by public authorities as catalysts for local economic development;
3. Citizens can be made more aware of the cultural importance of museums to their lives and be encouraged to take active participation in their promotion and safeguard;
4. Museums shall take measures to develop community engagement and to improve their role as dynamic inclusive institutions, namely by promoting the establishment of associations of friends of museums;
5. Museums shall work to broaden their audiences with special attention to the engagement of young adults, through a thorough research of their needs and interests;
6. A new agenda of public policies towards museums should focus on networking and include travelling exhibitions, shared services (restoration, inventory, digitalization, insurances, marketing/advertising, etc.), shared resources (researchers, other staff, etc.), wider use of new technologies (especially in the domain of digitalization, mainly 3D registering and Virtual or Augmented Reality).

As observed by the EU, the year 2018 has a symbolic and historical importance for Europe and its cultural heritage, as it marks a number of significant events such as the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War I and of the independence of several European states as well as the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Thirty Years' War. The European Year of Cultural Heritage can therefore offer opportunities to better understand the present through a richer and shared comprehension of the past.

ICOM Europe and the WFFM have great pleasure to give this contribution to that important goal, in the island of Madeira, that is also celebrating the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of this archipelago.

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