

**ICOM-SA Conference:  
Museum research in South Africa – relevance and future**

The conference took place from 26-27 August 2014 at the Durban Natural Science Museum Research Centre. The conference was generously sponsored by the national Department of Arts and Culture and Ethekewini Municipality.

For over a day and a half, 93 delegates discussed the perceived decline in research output in museums with a view to identifying causes and developing a strategy for the promotion of museum research. Delegates included representatives of university research programmes, the National Research Foundation, the provincial administrations of KwaZulu- Natal, Eastern Cape and Western Cape; as well as museums at national, provincial and local level. Several government officials from the national Department of Arts and Culture and the national Department of Science and Technology participated in the conference.

The speakers of the conference were invited to highlight challenges as well as opportunities facing museum researchers.

Hamish Robertson, Director Natural History Collections, Iziko Museums of SA	The status of research in South African museums
Vusithemba Ndima, Deputy Director General: Heritage Preservation & Promotion, Department of Arts and Culture	The contribution of museums to research and innovation – a government perspective
Andrew Kaniki, Executive Director: Knowledge Fields Development, National Research Foundation (NRF)	Funding opportunities to enhance knowledge generation through museum research
Yonah Seleti, Chief Director Science Missions, Department of Science and Technology	The role of museums in the development of science collections in the national system of innovation
Wayne Florence, Curator Marine Invertebrates, Iziko Museums of SA	Un-natural museums: the unnatural governance structures for natural history collections and research – action is needed
Helene Vollgraaff, Helene Vollgraaff Projects and Chair ICOM-SA	Thinking about museums, museological research and trends
Michelle Hamer, Director - Zoological Systematics, SANBI	National needs for biological systematics in South African museums
Leigh Richards, Curator of Mammals, Durban Natural Science Museum	Making biosystematics relevant: the application of museum-based research in studies of emerging infectious diseases and public health
Bruce Rubidge, Director of Evolutionary Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand	Palaeontological research in South African museums: challenges and opportunities
Gavin Whitelaw, Archaeologist, KwaZulu Natal Museum	Pre-colonial archaeological research in South African museums – challenges and opportunities
David Allan, Curator of Ornithology and Editor of Durban Natural Science Museum Novitates, Durban Natural Science Museum	The past, present and future 'niche' of museum research journals with a focus on the natural sciences
Pearl Sithole, Research School of Built Environment and Development Studies,	The role of museums in oral history research

University of KwaZulu-Natal Howard College Campus, Durban	
Jaco Boshoff, Curator of Maritime Archaeology, Iziko Museums of SA	Historical archaeological research in South African museums: challenges and opportunities
Melanie Hillebrand, Director Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum	Art museums: Making research a priority.
Juliette Leeb-Du Toit, Senior Research Associate University of the Witwatersrand and University of Johannesburg	Art's mediation of history: thoughts on curation and research in South African museums.
Rochelle Keene, Adler Museum of Medicine, University of the Witwatersrand & Julie Parle, Honorary Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal	Museums and collections of medical material: Seeking an ethical framework
Dolly Khumalo, Senior Manager: Museum Services, Arts and Culture, KwaZulu Natal Province	Museum research and its implications for a democratic South Africa.
Wendy Black, Curator of Pre-colonial Archaeology, Iziko Museums of SA	The legacy of unethical research: dealing with human remains
Carol van Wyk, Director Knowledge Systems, Department of Science and Technology	Indigenous knowledge research – how should museums be getting involved?
Johann Tempelhoff, School of Basic Sciences, North West University	Disciplines, archives and artefacts in the changing landscape of research on water in South Africa

The need for a national strategy on museum research was identified to:

- Define a value chain for museum research that could be perceived as adding value to society;
- Create cooperative platforms for research across institutions, disciplines and funding authorities;
- In measuring performance make provision for the open-endedness of research projects particularly rewards for creativity and innovation.
- Build capacity in terms of the number of research jobs and mentorship programmes (that include equity goals).
- Develop an ethics framework based on the ICOM Code of Ethics to address specifically South African issues.

A discussion document summarising discussions as well as providing a framework for further discussion will be available in early October 2014. Anyone who is interested in the document or further discussions relating to the project is welcome to contact ICOM-SA at [icomsamuseums@gmail.com](mailto:icomsamuseums@gmail.com).