

# Contributing to a better world



Today's cultural environment is a flexible articulation of traits and features, a multinational puzzle where new significance is assigned to concepts such as 'territory', 'heritage', 'identity', 'culture' and 'museum'. This prompts the need to examine the ways by which culture and citizenship develop, and to better understand the interfaces between the global and the local, the public and the private, the individual and the common spheres. Social and professional practice implies the development of a set of behaviors based on ethic commitments, both at individual and common levels. And ethics become especially important in today's context of rapid social and behavioral change, where the recognition and building of identities depends on the capacity of networking and accepting difference.

## Perceiving other cultures in difference

> In such an environment, it is necessary to build links and bridges that facilitate the encounter between individuals and between social groups. Links may be more or less ephemeral, but bridges are usually solid structures that extend over the abyss, creating new pathways that enable connection, opening up to the unknown, and simultaneously putting what is known within better reach. They allow us to meet others on their own ground and offer an alternative space for others to meet us. To build a bridge, it is necessary to have a certain compatibility of levels that will enable the building of its pillars. It is thus important to perceive other cultures in difference, not above or below our own culture, but horizontally, in the same level, making it possible to fix pillars that will support a solid structure for cultural encounter in between spaces.

> This is the beautiful symbolism of museums: mediation. Mediation allows encounter, promotes interfaces and facilitates flux and interactions among the most diverse relational traits.

> Museums, whatever their type or conceptual model, belong to civil society in all its spheres and represent all kinds of human organizations. They defend, protect, document and disseminate our common heritage. They bridge communities and societies, allowing and promoting mediation between established pathways and those which are being built; between industrialized and developing cultures; between urban and rural environments; between traditional cultures and the new 'virtual' communities created on the Web. They project us beyond our individualities and territories towards a world full of possibilities, where no particular ethnicity, form of government, pattern of development or cultural trait will prevail. They express the richness of cultural diversity and are powerful tools for cultural communication.

> The main goal of ICOM, reflected in its Statutes, Code of Ethics and Strategic Plan is precisely to enhance the role of museums as powerful tools for a global dialogue that is transparent, and which must include the intercultural understanding of human rights, and bio-environmental and cultural difference.

> The theme of the next General Conference — Museums for social harmony — reminds us that a harmonious global society is not a society without problems, but a global society where the different human groups work together to enable a positive approach to the total environment; and where difference must be addressed with tolerance, mutual understanding and respect.

> Museums of all kinds have a key role in assisting nations to achieve these

goals, offering a creative space for intercultural dialogue and developing capacities within the heritage community to meet this challenge. The key concepts are acceptance of difference: accessibility, connection and tolerance. This theme demonstrates the concept of an inclusive ICOM, one that supports and defends inclusive museums, acting in collaborative networks.

> Museums will work towards social harmony by preserving, documenting and presenting material and immaterial heritage in a way that stimulates dialogue. It will acknowledge the importance of heritage for source communities and the fact that cultural diversity supports the development of strategies for the protection and promotion of heritage, by addressing, in a creative way, the challenge of preserving cultural identity while promoting cultural diversity; by assuming a proactive role in assisting local, regional and national governments to achieve these goals; by emphasizing their responsibility to engage with public issues of social change; by facilitating fertilization between urban and rural environments; by enhancing intercultural, inter-generational dialogue; by extending their action to all possible human groups, in all kinds of environments.

## Museum professionals build bridges

> The General Conference in Shanghai, on November 2010, will be an outstanding occasion to enhance the ICOM Strategic Plan. Museum professionals will be invited to discuss their role as defenders of high quality working standards for the care and use of heritage. As promoters of change, they can incorporate new technologies and deal with cultural upheavals in a context of recognition and respect for tradition.

> Professionals will be able to exchange ideas on how to provide wide accessibility to the knowledge of heritage, helping societies to understand museums in process, from their own points of view. An expanded awareness of ethical values will enable professionals to share new opportunities of capacity building, giving emphasis to creativity, emotional intelligence and discovery and stimulating the development of diverse world narratives; and to support new, sustainable practices in the care and use of total heritage.

> As mediators for intercultural understanding, museums contribute for social harmony, helping societies perceive heritage as an instance of possibilities, a true support for a global culture that is more tolerant and more connected to the values of all human beings. Museum professionals must be constantly building bridges over difference, reinforcing ties and developing their work. By working together, museum professionals and different social groups may learn together how to develop alternative actions that favour intercultural harmony and tolerance.

> The expectations of ICOM and the global museum community are that each individual participates, in an affectionate and responsible way, in the creation, protection and development of museums of all kinds, defending heritage with their hearts and minds – thus contributing to a better world.

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