

COLLECTINGNET

An international museum network for collecting issues

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Collectingnet is an international museum network for collecting issues created at the conference *Connecting Collecting* at Nordiska Museet, Stockholm in November 2007. Collectingnet invites museum professionals and scholars to take part in developing the network into a vital association and mouthpiece of international cooperation. The Newsletter is published four times a year and distributed to members of Collectingnet, and is also available on line at <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/Publication.asp?publicationid=4213&topmenu=143>. We welcome contributions with reflections, conference/seminar reports, project presentations, specific questions you wish to raise, literature tips, invitations to cooperation or other themes. Please send your contribution to the next issue by **1 OCTOBER 2009** to collectingnet@nordiskamuseet.se. You can also contact the editors personally: catherinemarshall5@yahoo.com, eva.fagerborg@nordiskamuseet.se, lotta.hylten-cavallius@mkc.botkyrka.se

Proposal regarding the establishment of an International ICOM Committee on Collecting

The proposal to establish an International ICOM Committee on Collecting gathered support from 140 ICOM members in 27 countries and five continents. This strong support confirms the need for an institutional platform for reflections on the practice, theory and ethics of collection development.

The proposal was sent in due time, but to our disappointment it was not brought to the agenda during the ICOM meetings in Paris 8-11 June because of so many urgent matters – most of them related to the current financial situation.

We will keep in contact with the Executive Council and Advisory Committee to find another appropriate occasion to present the proposal.

Eva Fägerborg
Collectingnet and Samdok

Peter van Mensch
Reinwardt Academie

Entrepreneurial Cultures in European Cities

Elisabeth Tietmeyer and Zvezdana Antoš

This article is a short presentation of an EU-project focussing on urban small and medium scale business, with contemporary museum collecting as a major component. The project *Entrepreneurial Cultures in European Cities* is part of the EU Programme “Culture 2007-2013”. Project facts:

Duration: 1.9.2008-31.8.2010

Co-ordinator:
Amsterdam Historical Museum (NL)
Co-organizers:
Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb (HR)
Volos Municipal Centre for History, Documentation and Archives (GR)
Institute of Social Education Luxembourg (LU)

Museum of the History of the City of Barcelona (ES)
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, Liverpool (GB)
Imagine Identity and Culture, Amsterdam (NL)
Museum of European Cultures – Berlin State Museums, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (D)

Associate partners:

Nachbarschaftsmuseum e.V., Berlin (D)
Tallinn City Museum (EE)
Human Migrations Documentation Centre, Dudelange (LU)

In this project museums and cultural organisations in cities of the above-named partners explore for the first time the possibilities for small and medium-sized businesses to contribute to an emerging European citizenship. Firstly the project focuses on the economic, social and cultural strategies of entrepreneurs, many of whom have an immigrant background. Secondly the project involves an interaction with the customers, also often from an immigrant background. Intercultural dialogue is therefore an important issue of this project.



Volos: Artist/owner of the gallery. Photo: Zvezdana Antos, 2009 © Ethnographic museum Zagreb, Croatia.

Nowadays museums try to involve a wide and culturally diverse audience in their activities, including citizens who do not normally visit museums. This is the case, for example, with small and medium-size entrepreneurs, who work very long and hard hours. Many of them have little time to visit museums. Municipal and national governments consider these entrepreneurs to be the economic and social backbones of society. Governments often stimulate local economies by improving opportunities for new entrepreneurs, in combination with urban revitalisation of neighbourhoods. Art, culture and creativity are likewise being recognised as important economic and socially cohesive forces in post-industrial cities.

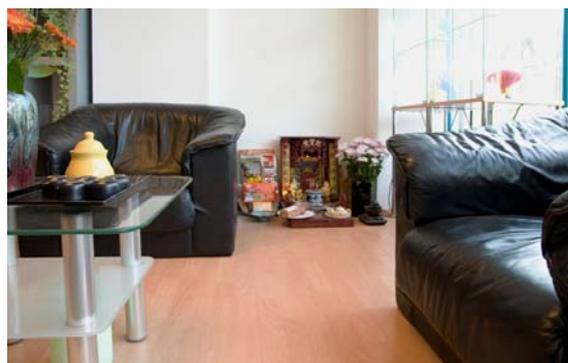


Amsterdam: Catering outlet – food from Surinam – owned by a man from from Surinam.

Photo: Zvezdana Antos, 2008 © Ethnographic museum Zagreb, Croatia.

Each project partner contributes from his or her own professional expertise and works with specific museum methodologies like “outreach work” in an innovative way which involves new audiences in museums. The projects connect art and design with new entrepreneurial initiatives; and above all, promote interdisciplinary collecting of tangible and intangible heritage of contemporary entrepreneurs. By this last method the museums expect to contribute to the empowerment of these businessmen and women. Thus they can identify with the museum as a place that contains their history also and as a forum for intercultural dialogues.

The result of the shared work will be an interactive website which is at the moment a work-in-progress, a digital touring exhibition and a comparable virtual collection of objects, text and photos.



Berlin: Small altar in a cosmetic studio run by Asian woman. Photo: Ute Franz-Scarciglia, 2009 © Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.



Berlin: Cosmetic studio run by Asian woman.
Photo: Ute Franz-Scarciglia, 2009 © Museum
Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu
Berlin

For further information please contact the website:
www.eciec.eu

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An observation of culture heritage use

Ilze Knoka

On April 29, in the Museum of Valmiera, Latvia, a conference was held with the deliberately incomplete title *Culture heritage: museums but not only...* The conference, which coincided with the 50th anniversary of Valmiera Museum, was organised by the museum, the City of Valmiera, State Authority of Museums, Centre Culturel Francais in Riga, ICOM Latvia, Vidzeme Planning Region, and Conseil General du Bas-Rhin in France.

As can easily be detected from the title, the underlying concept agreed by all of the speakers was that of cultural heritage as a common goal of various institutions and cultural organisations: On the one hand traditional museums in their time-honoured way of displaying things and eco museums with their intention to preserve the environment and population, and on the other hand institutions that are plainly tourist attractions; museums that mainly collect physical objects and the UNESCO project *Memory of the World* with its documentary testimonies; public museums and private collectors – all were of interest to the keepers of culture heritage and were discussed at this conference.

However, the report I would like to focus on, is the one given by Philippe Mairot, director of the Franche-Comté Museums of Local Culture and Techniques in France. His report carried the title “Extending culture heritage – ambitions and responsibility: Examples of eco museums and social history museums in France”. As Mr. Mairot is the president of the Fédération Nationale des Ecomusées et des Musées de Société (National Federation of Eco-museums and Museums of Social History), it was no surprise that the main part of his presentation was devoted to the concept and the current

development of eco museums as an issue that museologists have been interested in for about thirty years now. On the second day of the conference Mr. Mairot gave a truly inspiring seminar to museum professionals and students at the Centre Culturel Francais in Riga.

Having started the presentation with a parable about a museum curator who keeps fishing on the bank of the Heraclitus River and deciding unilaterally which pieces of history to collect, sometimes dreaming of building a dam to block the river, Mr. Mairot went on to rephrase a quote from Jorge Luis Borges about a book that cannot be a mirror of the world as it is only another piece added to the world. In terms of museum history, these institutions of cultural heritage have come a long way from seeing their role as just representing identity to actively making it; now they are refusing their traditional responsibility of mediator and choosing a new one – to be kind of a demiurge, even more – to be the main exhibit and leave the role of author (at least that of co-author) to visitors. If we add the notion of *musée vivant* where there are no visitors but inhabitants, what do we have left? The discussion continued around notions of territorial marketing, in which identity was just another trademark, which have become a notable part of the museum industry, keeping in mind the necessity for museums to keep up to date, while remaining attractive and cost-effective as well.

After this short summary of museum development in the last third of the twentieth century Mr. Mairot came to the rhetorical questions he wanted to pose to the museum professionals present. While museums have been exercising their tourism potential and

employing their resources to attract as many audiences as possible, ethnology and other disciplines, once they have been engaged for the sake of museum exhibitions and programmes, have been developing their potential at least as energetically as the former. Contrary to the museum field, where the notion of 'edutainment' has been created and applied, ethnology has continued its analytical practice of gathering and grouping facts. Hence these two, who used to be close co-workers, have parted from one another. The unresolved question is whether this development should be treated as threatening and should be changed; whether museums and academic science should be brought together.

Although fully aware of the rhetorical nature of the question posed and the professionalism of the audience in Valmiera, which allowed more theoretical debate, still this report brought me to another question. Does an attractive museum, following principles of edutainment in its communication policy, have to be in direct opposition to the correct presentation of historical facts? Does this mean that stories and storytelling in museums can not be applied without abusing historical/scientific truth and that the division between museology and ethnology accentuated by Mr. Mairot is more than just a museological observation of an ongoing process? Even keeping in mind the reality that overused *hands-on* practice does not always mean *minds-on* in museums and that

miscarriage is possible, does it have to lead us to an inevitable conflict between experience and experiment? Or is it just a breakdown in communication across different languages that we cannot avoid overstated oppositions and bring the concepts of 'entertaining' and 'correct' together? The question is all the more challenging as there are so many good examples where museums have succeeded in performing both in science and edutainment.

Should this question be turned more closely towards the realm of collecting, isn't it taking us to that rather frightening idea that collecting is the first phase, a necessary prerequisite for the serious, eternal part of museum activity – for research, hence these two are the important activities in traditional museum practice. It seems that attempts to make museum education (and museum existence) attractive and thereby museums themselves socially justifiable is like having a toothache that has had to be endured, but is expected to be temporary. Most visitor friendly museums prove that a high quality entertaining activity is based on just the same process of research, it is simply presented in another way – or translated into another language.

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