

CONFERENCE IMPRESSIONS OF OUR COMCOL GRANT RECEIVERS



Seven grant receivers of Icom COMCOL attended the *Collecting With(in) the City Conference* in Amsterdam (9-12 October 2024)

The number of grant receivers was higher than last years. Since Amsterdam is an expensive and European destination, we decided to invest in both young member and general travel grants. Finally, the seven grant receivers who were selected, all received the general travel grant.

The presence of seven grant receivers from Icom Comcol, from Australia, Georgia, Greece, Morocco, Somalia, Taiwan and Thailand, and of two young member grant receivers from Icom Camoc from Egypt and Estonia truly increased the international dialogue at the conference.

Please find here some conference impressions from our seven grant receivers: Virginia Rigney, Ana Shanshiashvili, Foteini Aravani, Omar Idtnaine, Saeed Hussein, Chelsey Wang and Patoo Cusripituck. The photos are from photographer *Louise Bolechowski*.

Virginia Rigney, Senior Curator Visual Arts at Canberra Museum and Gallery (Australia)



What I presented

“The title of my paper was *Curatorship as intervention : Shaping new understandings of place*. I was pleased to be able to present in a panel session focused on working with artists and felt that there was a good connection with some of the themes that were raised by the first day of off-site visits and the curator led tour of the Amsterdam Museum collection. It was also very positive to have speakers from three different continents presenting in our session. I was pleased to be able to present especially about the work of First Nations artists from Australia.”

Relevant ideas, practices, or networks I got to know at the conference

I was particularly interested in the active archive model that we saw visiting the Imagine IC Black Archives on the Wednesday. I really appreciated the opportunity to go to this part of the city which I would otherwise not have seen or understood.

Also the rent to buy scheme for contemporary artworks is something that I will share with colleagues in similar arts organisations in my city – particularly PhotoAccess where I am a board member.

I was very interested in the First Nations panel chaired by Brandie McDonald and felt that the examples of practice that were discussed were very relevant to my Australian situation. I will connect her with colleagues in Australia.

I thought the key note from the Director of Museum of Rotterdam was excellent. I approached keynote speaker Leontine Meijer-van Mensch Director Rotterdam Museum about a potential collaboration on an exhibition I have curated featuring a Rotterdam born and trained graphic designer Cornel Swen.

I was very impressed by the contemporary collecting practices of the Museum of London – particularly their ability to quickly identify the significance of an issue and collect both oral history and social media.

I was impressed by the Museum of Amsterdam permanent collection space with the concept of the curatorial experimental zone.

Overall

“A well organised and focused conference with a high degree of collegiality and hospitality.”

Ana Shanshiashvili, executive director Georgian Heritage Crafts Association



What I presented

“In my presentation, *Diving into the Living Heritage of Cities: The Case of Old Tbilisi*, I delved into the complex task of documenting intangible cultural heritage within urban environments. I addressed questions like how we can effectively document these living traditions within a city setting and the specific challenges involved in reaching out to the bearers of these traditions. Using Old Tbilisi as my case study, I shared insights from the Georgian Heritage Crafts Association’s work on a UNESCO pilot project, demonstrating how they navigated these challenges to help preserve and promote the city’s vibrant cultural heritage.”

My session „*Folk Perspectives*, was well-structured and incredibly diverse. It was inspiring to see how different cities approach heritage safeguarding, giving me valuable context and a global perspective on the work we’re doing in Old Tbilisi.”

Relevant ideas, practices, or networks I got to know at the conference

“An additional key topic in our conversation was the recent COMCOL annual meeting, which highlighted pressing issues related to ethical considerations—an area that aligns closely with our goals in Georgia. We discussed the importance of strengthening adherence to the ICOM Code of Ethics, especially in light of evolving cultural sensitivities and the increasing need for transparency in museum sector.”

After the conference

After the conference, I had the opportunity to meet with the ICOM Georgia Board members to reflect on the conference topics and how they apply to our work locally.

Overall

„a very well organized conference, with very interesting speakers, a captivating cultural program and a nice setting”

Foteini Aravani, freelance curator and former curator Museum of London (Greece)



What I presented

I was grateful to have the opportunity to present my paper “Eavesdropping on history” in the session *Tangible Meets Intangible* among other inspiring colleagues. In my paper I addressed both contemporary collecting of digital objects such as soundscapes of London, Londoners’ social media posts, dreams and data visualizations, and the community research projects the Museum of London is doing around the re-interpretation of oral histories in the collection.

The talk went really well. I got a lot of questions from colleagues in the audience around the community engagement work as well as the collection-based work on the digital and oral history collection.

Relevant ideas, practices, or networks I got to know at the conference

I had the chance to meet colleagues outside Europe and it was extremely helpful to get to know the work they are doing around community engagement projects in their respective museums. I got to know museums especially in South America, Africa and Asia that are very forward thinking and innovative. Sensitive concepts such as home, emotions, vulnerability were tackled by the majority of the participants and it felt that we are doing another little step towards more inclusive and representative museums, city museums for the people.

Museums need both collections and connections and I felt that these two concepts are coming a little bit closer, step by step. It was very optimistic and hopeful to see that the ideas and practices presented,

felt like they are not disconnected from our audiences on the contrary they are for them, to improve their experience in our museums.

Overall

The work museums all around the world are doing at the moment is extremely inspiring and hopeful.

Omar Idtnaine, curator at the Agadir Museum of Art (Morocco)



What I presented

"My presentation, titled *"Amazigh heritage collections: Engaging stakeholders in transition,"* examined the challenges faced by local stakeholders in transitioning the Municipal Museum of Amazigh Heritage's collection to the National Museum Foundation."

"The questions and feedback I received have inspired me to further investigate how local identities can be better integrated into national institutions."

Relevant ideas, practices, or networks I got to know at the conference

"One of the standout presentations was the keynote by Zandra Yeaman from The Hunterian in Glasgow, who emphasized the importance of building both social and cultural capital through anti-racist and intersectional practices within city museums. Her approach highlighted the need to make museums more inclusive and reflective of diverse community narratives, which deeply resonated with my own projects focusing on heritage and identity."

"Additionally, the conference sessions that explored co-creation in museum settings have given me new perspectives on how to involve local communities more effectively in the development of exhibitions and programs."

"Moreover, the connections I made with professionals working in city museums across Europe were invaluable."

After the conference

"I aim to integrate some of the innovative ideas discussed at the conference directly into my work. One particular initiative is to involve youth curators in experiential projects that connect our museum's collection with the city's heritage."

Overall

"an enriching platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and exploration of innovative practices in the museum and heritage sectors"

Saeed Hussein, director Saryan Museum, Hargeisa (Somaliland)



What I presented

The title of my presentation in the *Folk Perspectives* session was "Somali Music transitional Development and Challenges to Cross Social boundaries." I talked about the origins of the Somali music and transition of the Somali music from Beelow to Heello which began in 1943 , the role of the composers and the social challenges it faced in the context of the civil war. I explained how the Somali music revolutionized, and the spread it has taken from the villages to urban areas . The spread of the music was greatly advanced by the establishment of Radio Hargeisa.

Relevant topics, ideas, practices, or networks I got to know at the conference

In the future, I want to continue ICOM membership and I am particularly interested in conflict areas and how heritage can be safeguarded there peacefully for civilian use. Hence, I appreciated the *City Identities and Conflict* session a lot.

Overall

"Fantastic , I was so impressed about the level of organization and the clarity of all sessions planed in timely manner I was also impressed about the enthusiasm of the participants ..."

Chelsea Wang, research assistant National Museum of History (in Taipei, Taiwan)



What I presented

The title of presentation in the *Sense of Home* session was “Aromatic Imprint : Scent as a Catalyst for Museum Collecting in Taiwan” The focus of my presentation was to express and imagine museum research content through the sense of smell and fragrance. It went very well. The participating audiences were all satisfied and acclaimed the results of the fragrance. I was very touched by the responses.

Relevant ideas, practices, or networks I got to know at the conference

I was very happy to attend the *Intangible Meets Intangible* session and to learn more about the collecting in different culture context and what challenge they meet.

“I really appreciated the session of the Amsterdam Museum and Imagine IC and the *Faces of North Holland* project. I went to this exhibition after conference, and left the sketch of my portrait!”

“I met some friends from Asia, including Korea and Thailand. The conference offered a good chance to strengthen the Asia regional connection.”

After the conference

“I will share new knowledge with the COMCOL Young Professional Network meetings and maybe invite speakers to share their own case in our COMCOL network meetings!”

Overall

“I feel included and cared for in this conference and network.”

“All the organizers in Amsterdam including ICOM COMCOL, Amsterdam Museum, and Imagine IC, they give us very helpful information, they are warm and kind.”

Patoo Cusripituck, Chair of the MA Museum Studies Program at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia (RILCA), Mahidol University, Thailand



What I presented

I had the opportunity to be involved in two presentations at the conference.

The first presentation entitled “The Tale from the Mountain : A narrative of a collection’s journey from a remote area to the city”, was part of the breakout session *Sharing the power of interpretation*. This presentation had four co-authors: Pimchon Channgam, my M.A. student, Teerawan Mingbualuang, my research assistant, Assistant Professor Dr. Jitjayang Yamabhai, our program secretary, and myself. During the session, Pimchon and Teerawan took the lead as presenters.

Their presentation on our Vivid Ethnicity mobile museum was particularly engaging. They brought with them a traditional headpiece of the Akha hill tribe from Thailand and presented as if they were the objects themselves, interacting with the museum audience. Participants were encouraged to touch, feel, and wear the headpiece, offering them a unique, tactile way to understand and experience Akha culture.

The second session was an interactive one titled *Sense of Home*, moderated by Jules Rijssen from Imagin IC. This session brought together museum professionals from Belgium, China, Taiwan, and Thailand to present their interpretations of home, using senses like smell and touch. Our presentation, “Ta Po Po ‘Taste and transform’ : Instant Food Immersive Experience”, explored the cultural significance of Ta Po Po, a traditional Karen food. My co-authors for this session were Dr. Jitjayang and Teerawan.

In this presentation, we addressed the diminishing Karen culture from the Doi Si Than Ecomuseum in Chiangmai province. By offering Ta Po Po as an instant porridge-style food, we provided a tangible, immersive experience, where participants added water to the food, decorate food on top with galanga

and chilly and, in the process, metaphorically "tasted" the culture. This session exceeded our expectations. The audiences were highly engaged and supportive, and to our delight, we even had our first potential customer for the product.

Relevant ideas, practices, or networks I got to know at the conference

The themes of co-creation, participatory practices, and the inclusive museum were prevalent throughout the conference. These discussions reaffirmed the theoretical frameworks and practical approaches we have employed at the *Vivid Ethnicity* mobile museum and in my teaching at the M.A. Museum Studies program. The focus on social engagement resonated with all participants, as museums worldwide strive to become more inclusive and community-centered.

The conference was an incredible experience for me, my colleagues, and my students. My research assistant, Teerawan, emerged as a mentor to my M.A. students, and I felt a deep sense of accomplishment in encouraging my students to present in English in front of an international audience of museum professionals.

On a personal level, I benefited greatly from the opportunity to engage in deep conversations with several prominent figures in the museum field, including the keynote speaker, the Director of Museum of Rotterdam and ICOM Code of Ethic (Ethicom), Leontine Meijer-Van Mensch; the Chair of COMCOL, Daniel Kuijten; and ICOM Vice President, Dr. Inkyung Chuang.

"I also had the chance to network with emerging professionals from China, Taiwan, India, Singapore which led to productive discussions on potential future collaborations."

After the conference

We also held a *Ta Po Po* celebration with the co-creators of the product, where we exchanged ideas and experiences. I wrote a detailed account of my experiences for the M.A. Museum Studies program's Facebook page and plan to write our experience in Mahidol University's newsletter. Furthermore, I will integrate the knowledge gained from the conference into my teaching.

Overall

"It felt like an inclusive gathering of museum professionals where collaboration and exchange of ideas were highly encouraged."

