

## Introduction – Social Museology and the new challenges of ICOM

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The creation of the International Committee of ICOM for Social Museology, in 2024, marked a late recognition, in the centre of this global organisation, of the voices and values that fostered some of the deeper changes in the sector during the last 40 years. On the anniversary of the declaration that gave rise to an international movement for New Museology (Québec, 1984) and more than fifty years since the term “social museum” was introduced in a global stage at the Round Table of Santiago de Chile (UNESCO, 1972/1973), SOMUS emerged as a breath of hope in a rapidly changing world of museums. At the moment when we complete our first year of existence, having accomplished a series of fruitful activities involving diverse participants and nurturing cross-cultural dialogues, ICOM faces a new transition. It is a moment when the museum sector deals with new—and unforeseen—ethical challenges. Meanwhile, most institutions still adapt their practices in response to a renewed, more proactive social role, one that was relegated to museums across the world through recent social reclaims. ICOM, and SOMUS by extension, will thrive in this world as long as they serve as the foundational platforms to sustain the ongoing change and to set the needed parameters for museums to work with societies facing the present challenges in various capacities.

This issue marks the first step in a series of SOMUS projects designed to open up discussions on Social Museology—ones founded on ideas that, for a long time, remained confined to a small circle of academics and activists in specific regions of the world, notably Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula in Europe. Thanks to the School of Sociomuseology, at Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias, and to the editorial team of *Cadernos de Sociomuseologia*, this first edited journal issue brings together the voices of Social Museology researchers and practitioners, among which some established academics, founding members of the New Museology movement in the 1980s, and the ones of a new generation of social museologists from different parts of the globe. Aiming for a truly international publication, we acknowledge the authors’ efforts, when possible, to translate their original articles into a second language. This was also possible thanks to the revision work of a plurilingual peer-review committee, including some board members of SOMUS.

The articles in this issue are organised in two thematic sections. The first section contains six reflective works approaching Social Museology in a conceptual or theoretical manner. These consider the current definition of Social Museology—and the school of Sociomuseology—as a legitimate branch of museology, reflecting on its history, terminology, scholarship and policies defined nationally or internationally. In the second section of the issue, the articles reflect on specific case studies or museum typologies and their practices, evidencing some of the changes and trends referred to in the first part of the issue. This analytical pieces present a range of examples from Peru to Germany, Brazil and Portugal. The selected articles in this section amplify the social uses of

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museums and of museology in the present time, showcasing some pressing challenges and proposing strategies grounded on situated experiences. ICOM's recent recognition of Social Museology also reflects a step towards decentralising its perspectives, ones historically based on certain established centres of knowledge production: thus, including more views from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. In this sense, we hope this can be the first of many forthcoming issues of *Cadernos de Sociomuseologia* which help to broaden the scope of Social Museology studies to other geographic regions and cultural contexts—including ones in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, not represented in this issue.

Opening the issue, **Mario Moutinho** debates the distinction between Social Museology, conceived from the principles outlined in the Santiago de Chile Declaration (1972) and later interpreted by the International Movement for New Museology (founded in 1984-5), and Sociomuseology as a school of thought created from the reflections on the term in the *Cadernos de Sociomuseologia* by Fernando Santos Neves in 1993. In his article, **René Rivard** offers an updated reflection based on the work of Canadian Robert R. Janes on an imminent collapse in the museum sector, proposing Social Museology as a “shield” or fundamental tool for different peoples to expand social justice, the meaning of democracy, and contribute to planetary sustainability.

In his analysis of the specialised literature on sociomuseology, **Clovis Carvalho Britto** observes the nuances, contexts and polysemic uses of the term “difference” as a key term in the specialised language of scientific articles and doctoral theses. Understanding Sociomuseology, in the words of Hugues de Varine, as an “academic discipline of Luso-Brazilian origin,” Britto examines the transformations in knowledge production in this area, highlighting its terminological outlines in relation to the broader field of Museology in the Portuguese language. The specific lexicon of museology is also addressed in **Bruno Brulon Soares'** article, which relates the use of the term “community” in specialised literature and cultural policies to a transformation in the sector. The examined transformation, according to the author, requires that professionals reflect on a relational ethics to guide museum work. The reflection underlines the use of the phrase “the participation of communities” in the ICOM museum definition (2022) as evidence of this ongoing transformation in the context of the museum profession—one that can be observed in case studies presented in other contributions to this issue.

In his article for this issue, **Óscar Navajas Corral** reflects on the past and present of New Museology and Social Museology to propose a discussion on the contemporary transformation of the discipline facing emerging challenges of this century. The author introduces a discussion on some of the key themes museums have been facing in order to respond to the needs of contemporary societies: from sustainability to decolonisation, from social inclusion to the challenges involved in our current interpretation of democracy and social justice—notions that are also explored in several of the other contributions to this issue. Reflecting on the importance of the new committees of ICOM, SUSTAIN and SOMUS, focused on sustainability and social museology, respectively, the article by **Marcelo Murta and Nathalia Pamio** demonstrates how debates surrounding these themes have been updated and are taking on new contours within the scope of this global organisation. The authors reflect on how the expansion of these debates—geographically situated since the 1970s—contributes to adding new agendas and decentralising crucial issues for the construction of collective and sustainable futures.

The articles gathered here share at least one common feature, which transcends the diversity of views presented in this issue, namely the understanding of Sociomuseology or Social Museology as a politically affirmative means of expanding the right to memory (and to museums) for groups that have been historically excluded from the processes of valuing heritage and from the construction of public history. In the second part of the issue, opening the discussions based on case studies, the article, co-authored by **Mãe Nilce de Iansã, Maria Helena Versiane, and Mario Chagas,**

discusses how the Shared Management Group of the Nosso Sagrado Collection (Our Sacred Collection) works to combat religious racism through a collaborative musealisation process. By placing technical museological procedures at the service of terreiro communities, the Republic Museum, a self-declared social museum in Rio de Janeiro, restores symbolic ties to reactivate social connections between these groups and their sacred materiality. In turn, **Mário Antas and Ana Rita Lopes** use the sociomuseological approach to highlight silenced narratives at the National Coach Museum in Lisbon, considering the social, political, and ideological contexts that mark the current life of this museum.

**Alfredo Vargas and Bernarda Delgado Elías** present a fruitful case study of the Túcume Ecomuseum in Peru, from which they observe practices of Social Museology in community-based heritage management. The text considers the syncretic cults of Túcume as a dynamic community heritage, in constant transformation, and therefore a concrete challenge for classical Museology. The perspective of ecomuseology, guided by the principles of Social Museology, proves to be appropriate for the preservation of heritage in its entirety—material and immaterial, linked to the territory and the communities that created it. Also looking back into the historical roots of New Museology and ecomuseums, **Anna Leshchenko, Khawla Abdulla, Katalin Banvölgyi, Mel Bittner, Antonia Keis, Manja Leinwather, Miriam Carolina Mauthe, Carolin Saia** present a contemporary discussion on the role and practice of Heimat museums – local history museums – in Germany. Within the framework of Social Museology, their comparative analysis underlines the fundamental characteristics of these museums, bringing about a timely reflection on their role embracing change while preserving some traditions.

In her article, also based on a case study, **Melissa Campos** revisits the educational practice of using teaching kits in El Salvador, examining museum activities beyond the museum walls. The author reflects on cultural mediation based on a university project aimed at democratising the museum for the public through a mobile and participatory device, understanding the museum as an instance of co-creation. Here, the creation with communities once again presents itself as the driving force behind social museologies that escape the limits of museums—when they establish them.

By presenting practical ways of working with the affective memory of migrant populations, **Ana Paula dos Anjos Fiuza** relates the international parameters established by the new ICOM museum definition and the 2015 UNESCO Recommendation on the protection of museums diversity to a new affective ethics. Although not based on a specific case study, the author focuses on contemporary forms that generate collective belonging, proposing Social Museology as a practical tool based on the ethics of sensitive listening. We conclude this issue with a study by **Giovanna Gomes Perrone and Vladimir Sibylla Pires**, mapping the distinctions between the terms Social Museology and Sociomuseology in the Portuguese-language literature. The text, which compiles data from research conducted in the Museology undergraduate programme at the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), makes some preliminary observations on the nuances that characterise production in the field and reflects on the historical origins of Social Museology and Sociomuseology in the international New Museology movement of the 1980s.

This issue of *Cadernos de Sociomuseologia* is conceived as an open invitation for an ongoing global conversation. Our aim is to broaden the debates on Social Museology, extending them to new territories and communities, and to learn from their perspectives. With SOMUS as the main network for exchange and cross-cultural dialogue devoted to a museology committed to people, the debates advanced here will hopefully nurture meaningful connections among professionals striving to equip their museums to better serve society. We wish you a fruitful read!