

Introduction

Since its creation in 1985, the International Movement for a New Museology (MINOM) has contributed to the museum field with reflections and practices related to the use of heritage as a tool for social change. For the occasion of the 22nd ICOM General Conference in 2010, MINOM joins the discussions on the theme *Museums for Social Harmony* with great enthusiasm. We understand issues such as community action, emancipation and solidarity to be paramount to achieving social harmony. Whether social harmony concerns tolerance, mutual trust or dialogue, in our view it is not possible to ignore political aspects that also form the basis of social interaction—and by extension shape heritage and museum work. Harmony should look in the direction of equality rather than that of conformism¹.

As Pedro Cardoso argues in his article, the development agenda has had a deep impact in the museum field since the second half of the 20th century. Today, we speak of sustainable development, social inclusion, cultural diversity, multiculturalism, and social harmony. These are not magical concepts and we must be critical about the fact that many times they operate more to give an illusion of change rather than to promote actual change. For us, change is a political take on the basics of the human condition. It responds to the capacity of people to truly participate in the shaping of their own future. Conscientization, also known as critical consciousness, is a concept developed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in the 1960's and 1970's, years before the idea of empowerment made its way into the country. Conscientization lies in the root of new museology and of

¹ to borrow the term from Amareswar Galla. ICOM News Vol 62, no2 2009-2010

sociomuseology, advocating for grass-root participation as well as for informed and capable negotiations among heritage stakeholders.

MINOM is a political heir of the Declaration of Santiago de Chile (1972). According to the concept of integral museum, museums should play a role in solving social problems and work in connection with local communities. The Declaration of Santiago, as well as the work of Hugues de Varine, had a direct influence in adding to the ICOM definition of museums the sentence "*in the service of society and its development*" in 1974. In 1984, a group of practitioners of new types of museums (ecomuseums, local museums, community museums, popular museology) met in Quebec. Together they wrote the Declaration of Quebec, which stated that they were *first and foremost* concerned with the improvement of living conditions, the development of populations and their projects for the future. The principles of new museology were also clear: "It has to some extent become one of the possible forms of bringing peoples closer together, for their own and mutual knowledge, for their cyclic development and their desire for the fraternal creation of a world that respects its intrinsic wealth".

In France, Spain, Portugal, Mexico, Brazil, Canada (Quebec), and Italy, ecomuseums and community museums multiplied, and many initiatives grew outside of the Latin circles. Each have in their own way added to the possibilities and implications of local heritage and development work. Today, ecomuseology and community museology are complex fields of knowledge and experimentation. They maintain specific relations with the world of museology and with that of new museology. Relations we hope will become more intense as we break down language barriers and improve dialogue between different countries.

New museology arrives in the 21st century as a movement, a school of thought and a philosophy. As **school of thought**, new museology has its traditions. As a **movement**, it combines the efforts of MINOM and many other organizations and individuals around a common project. In these efforts we

associate with the practice and critical thinking of sociomuseology. Sociomuseology can be seen as the result of a process of maturity of new museology in face of the changes in our contemporary society. The term was coined in the 1990's and applied in MA and PHD programmes at the Lusófona University in Lisbon; in BA courses as well as policies, museum and heritage programmes in Brazil; in experiments at the Reinwardt Academy in Amsterdam²; and in the activities of MINOM international, among others. Sociomuseology encompasses ecomuseums, community museums, as well as the work of what once new museologists called traditional museums. For this, it upholds the **philosophy** of new museology, not necessarily related to the form of ecomuseums or community museums but to the principles of conscientization, participation and social change. Much of the experience of new museums also informs sociomuseology, referring to the power of the process, to the methods, to the role of the professional, to the role of the community and its relation with other stakeholders.

The reader will find in the first part of this publication three reference documents that tell more about this story, the Declaration of Santiago (1972), the Declaration of Quebec (1984) and the Evolving Definition of Sociomuseology (2007 updated version). Sociomuseology brought the philosophy of new museology closer to museums independently of their typology. It sees its role as to contribute to adapting museological structures to a more human view of society. Similar to new museology, it has an interdisciplinary approach, which calls upon other disciplines of human and social sciences.

Sociomuseology is a field of knowledge in development. We know we are not alone in trying to open museums to society. We are, however, aware of our own ways and participate in the international debate hoping to contribute and to benefit from this interaction. Sociomuseology activists have been

² See Sociomuseology 4

trying to improve dialogue also by creating better connections with the English-speaking world. In July 2010, MINOM held its first international workshop in English at the Reinwardt Academy in Amsterdam. The present book is the fourth issue in English of a long series of journals dedicated to sociomuseology, published in Portuguese by the Lusófona University since 1993.

With this special edition published for ICOM Shanghai 2010, we hope to offer the international community a view of ideas, potential and challenges of a sociomuseological perspective. It presents a collection of documents, unpublished articles, translations of texts previously published in other languages, and papers presented at conferences. The authors are active in MINOM, community museology, and sociomuseology, or share much of same concerns and efforts.

In the last decades and especially since the 1990's, the world has witnessed a boom of alternatives to and ameliorations of the modern museum. Besides ecomuseums and community museums, there is the growing work of museums in social inclusion, co-curatorship, museums working with social movements, etc. The growing museal diversity and the democratization of tools pose new questions and opportunities. Within these movements, MINOM acknowledges a tendency of the mainstream establishment to absorb innovation and empty it from its transformative content. The field has become more complex and nuances are difficult to distinguish. We are aware of the risk of participatory work becoming banal. For this reason, in the last years there has been a growing effort to give body to a sociomuseological critique. The second part of this publication (*To Think Sociomuseologically*) offers reflections in this direction. The articles critically review museums and the museum field, identify trends and propose alternatives based on a deeper understanding of participation and social change. Together, they defend work with participation that is more realistic than romantic, that tries to be honest according to the reality of each specific situation, and that is actually far from being a solved subject.

Participation is not an end in itself. It is a means for creating a better world. As said before, it is neither a romantic nor a magic idea. Since the 1960's, initiatives close to MINOM's philosophy have been working with participation and development, mainly via territorial forms such as ecomuseums and community museums. The third part of this publication (*Community, territory and museums in the 21st century*) updates this work. We could ask ourselves what it means to work with communities and territory today? The articles focus less on the typology of museums and more on what they propose to achieve, their underlying principles and modes of work. Initiatives from Portugal, Spain, Brazil, South Africa, Japan and Mexico show how the concepts community, territory and development gain new connotations within the dynamics of the 21st century. Immigration, gender studies, knowledge networks, globalization, and social movements are some of the forces that have an enormous influence on these initiatives. The reader will find exciting examples of museums (whether community museums, ecomuseums, or just museums) and *memory hotspots* working with people, communities, social movements, accessing territories, dealing with memory, and with art.

The fourth part of this publication brings a number of documents about MINOM and the PhD programme in Sociomuseology at the Lusófona University.

Two of our contributors in this publication, the District Six Museum in Cape Town and the Museu da Maré in Rio de Janeiro are exploring the possibilities of starting a partnership. Creating a grassroot network and mode of operation could offer alternatives to local work as well as open new channels of interaction and action in society, in one's own community, but also in the context of the city, country and internationally. It is in this spirit of solidarity that we hope to enhance our dialogue with the museum community.

Paula Assunção dos Santos
Vice-president of MINOM International