

ICOM 2010: half a century of changes and impasse

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Half a century, from 1947 to 2010, is enough for us to take stock of the impact of the “ideology of Development” on Heritage. An ideology induced by UNESCO and by ICOM. What has changed and what is still in an impasse? What effects has this ideology had on Heritage? It is after making this assessment that we can better understand the extent to which the theme of this 22nd ICOM General Conference – Shanghai 2010 is ultimately an obvious product of that influence.

From museography to museology

On this path five key moments can be highlighted: i) the early 1970s; ii) the early 1980s; iii) the early 1990s; iv) the editorial drive that took place between 2000 and 2006; v) the redefinition of museology and heritage from 2006 onwards.

The first key moment brought into museology and into heritage the “ideology of Development”. This contamination derived from the simultaneousness of various contributions: the encyclical “*Populorum Progressio*”, published by the Vatican in 1967; the report “*The Limits to Growth*” published by the Club of Rome in 1971; the Founex seminar held in Vaud (Switzerland), also in 1971, with Ignacy Sachs, Gamani Corea, Marc Nerfin and Barbara Ward; the 9th ICOM General Conference of 1971 (‘*The Museum in the Service of Man, Today and Tomorrow*’); the influence of the conclusions of the ‘*World Conference on the Human Environment*’ held in Stockholm in 1972, drafted by René Dubos. These contributions gave rise to the seminal “*Round Table of Santiago de Chile*”, in 1972, which expresses the first great conceptual break in the contemporary history of museology

and heritage. In 1974 the word “Development” enters ICOM’s official definition of ‘Museum’, and there it has remained, motionless and fixed, until today. In these short years of the early 1970s all this happens simultaneously.

The second key moment takes place in the early 1980s. In that year, 1980, the ‘International Committee for Museology’ is founded within ICOM (ICOFOM), and the historic first issue of its journal is published (*DoTraM – Documents de Travail sur la Museologie – Revue de débat sur les problèmes fondamentaux de la muséologie*, 1980). In 1982 the ‘Association Muséologique Nouvelle et Experimentation Sociale’ (MNES) is created. In 1984 the Quebec Declaration is presented. And in 1985, at the Lisbon Meeting, the ‘International Movement for the New Museology’ (MINOM) is founded. We had the privilege of obtaining, by courtesy of Mario Moutinho, a copy of the prized manuscript of the Lisbon meeting. This document, annotated and with the editing produced by the changes that came to be made throughout the said meeting, is a precious source to understand the deadlocks and the solutions that were at the conceptual root of that influential Movement, which today, by its own right, holds a place in ICOM as Affiliated Committee. The concept of “New Museology” and the “International Movement for New Museology” will be the most important factor for theoretical and methodological change to have taken place in this half century. They were responsible for a profound renewal, not merely of museum practices, but also of teaching and academic training. They have eventually become, since 2000, the dominating contemporary programmatic orientation of museology and heritage. The authors of this change are in particular Zybnek Stránský, Vinoš Sofka, Jan Jelinek, Villy Toft Jensen, Tomislav Sola, André Desvallées, Anna Gregorová, Jiří Neustupný, Hughes de Varine, Mário Moutinho and Pierre Mayrand. In 2000 Peter van Mensch summarizes well these trends that arose at the start of the 1970s and continued until the 1980s.

The third key moment occurs in the early 1990s, with the first systematic attempt to explain the museum phenomenon and

the heritage issue by Academia. Gathered in over a dozen works published by the University of Leicester (United Kingdom) between 1990 and 1993, museology and heritage enter the academic world as well as universities' agenda of scientific research for good. Outside Leicester, with Reaktion Books, Peter Vergo edits *The New Museology* in 1989 – explanations and interpretations dominated above all by sociological theories and by communication theories. The work edited in 2007 by Simon J. Hnell, Suzanne Macleod and Sheila Mason, *Museum Revolutions: how museums change and are changed*, tries to summarize those Leicester contributions, whose names include Gaynor Kavanaugh, Ghislaine Lawrence, Paulette Mcmanus, Helen Coxall, Gary Porter, Alan Radley, Kevin Moore, Susan Pearce and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill.

Between 2000 and 2006 there is another key moment in the re-interpretation of museology and heritage. Under the name “Museum Studies”, “Museum Theory” or “New Museology” there is an editorial thrust which congregates a new set of authors, at the same time that it broadens and diversifies the approaches. Nevertheless, this important new stage still does not prevent the sociologist impasse and the excessively relational perspective of explanations and interpretations regarding heritage and museology inherited from the Leicester School. Semiological and post-Saussurean textual approaches are attempted, which criticize the random nature of the relation between ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’. The post-structural approach is used, criticizing the almost-generic fixidity of an *a priori* grammar which would give individuals merely the freedom to *bricoler* [tinker] as in Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism, giving the museum phenomenon a more dynamic dimension or placing it in socio-historic contexts. Use was made of the contribution of Foucault’s *epistemes* applied to the characterization of the social contexts of museum practices (*Ancien Regime*, Classical Age and Modern Age). The museum phenomenon is considered from more tinged approaches of the ‘total social fact’ derived from Mauss. Museum practices and expographies are considered from a post-Marxist perspective, enabling one

to include a learning which gives hysteresis to the relation between economic motivations and the political praxis of individuals. However, despite all this analytical diversity, one cannot prevent the impasse between the explanations based on the outside element of heritage (social contexts, community, territory) versus those explanations based on the inside element (museums, collections, objects). Museology and heritage are led to a cultural relativity which is identified with a so-called Post-Modern critical setting, in which both the 'structure' and the 'action', as 'narrative' (grammar or structure) and 'speech' (agency and practice) stubbornly continue to remain in the same duality that Giddens had already criticized. Good examples of this are the contributions of authors included in the works edited by: Susan A. Crane, *Museums and Memory* (2000); Maria Bolanos, *Cien Años de Museologia, 1900-2000* (2002); Janet Marstine *New Museum Theory and Practice* (2006); Sharon Macdonald *A Companion to Museum Studies* (2006); or Steven Conn's work with the impressive title *Do museums still need objects?* (2010).

The fifth key moment occurs from 2006 onwards. Decisive steps are taken to overcome this relational and sociologist impasse – that heritage is explained by the features of each society which at each historic moment provides its context, as if, by some sleight of hand, it was impregnated by the relational contamination of that contact. That contribution would come from a *Processual Theory of Heritage*, which began to be formed in the teachings of Universidade Lusófona in Lisbon. In 2006, Mário Moutinho and Judite Primo introduced the concept of Sociomuseology. Cristina Bruno, of Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil), presented a new theoretical model of the relation between museum, community and heritage. Marcelo Cunha, of Universidade Federal da Bahia (Brazil), introduced a perceptive political criticism to the rhetoric of contemporary expographies. Mário Souza Chagas, of Universidade do Rio de Janeiro UNIRIO (Brazil), brought about the break of the relational structuralism through the "museum poetics and imaginary". In 2010, Pedro Manuel-Cardoso, of Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e

Tecnologias, discovers the “Structure of Heritage Value”. He obtains the factual evidence of the cognitive map lodged in the mnesis, constituted by nine codifications of heritage value, which is transversal both to all kinds of heritage and to the different times and social-historic contexts that followed one another along the path of human existence. This allowed us to obtain, for the first time, an alternative vision to the traditional chronological and sociological history of the course of museums and heritage. On the whole, these contributions formed the genesis of a new change which has led to the constitution of Museology as an autonomous scientific field within the Social and Human Sciences.

The transformations of the modern concept of ‘object’ into ‘document’ and ‘information’

In these fifty-odd years of influence of the ‘ideology of Development’ on heritage we can observe the rise of three new factors.

Regarding the ‘object’, we perceive the rise of a new type of heritage which was called ‘immaterial’ or ‘intangible’, but which should be called ‘object-code’ because it is made up of «0 and 1», in other words, of an algorithm of signs capable of establishing a binary difference/discrimination. This would avoid the ill-advised rift which we have witnessed within ICOM, and to some extent everywhere else, between ‘material’ and ‘immaterial’, the product of a conceptual analysis of the immateriality of heritage objects that is too naïve and shallow, an error which will surely be corrected in the near future by virtue of the contribution of cognitive and computational sciences. The awareness of the conceptual breach between ‘medium’ and ‘document/datum’ was caused to a large extent by the effect of the process of ‘deconstruction-substitution-reconstruction’ which took place in Conservation and Restoration after 1945 in the name of that ideology of Development within Museology, forcing museum work to reconsider the responsibilities for the reconstitution and transmissibility of heritage.

As regards the 'use' and access to heritage, we witness the acceptance of a new paradigm, different from «seeing-gazing-keeping», which starts using all perceptive channels, which we can call 'total communicational usage'. This would force a second conceptual break, this time between 'document/datum' and 'information. With the consolidation of the ideology of Development, objects to be 'musealized' underwent the need to suffer a communication relation to acquire heritage meaning or value. They no longer explained themselves. Now it was the relation with the contexts and the problems which gave them value and meaning. They no longer had the ability, on their own, to operate the 'separation' and the 'localization' necessary to the process of classifying them in reality, as Paul Watzlawick stated in 1972. And that was reflected in his Documentation work. What Heritage 'is' it is to the extent that the individuals of a specific community have agreed that 'that is its being', so that they can share it and communicate it. As Jean-Pierre Mohen stated in *Les Sciences du Patrimoine*: "(...) the object does not possess reality other than through the human being that expresses it and interprets it with reference to a Culture, or, to be more precise, through a particular individual without whom the message would never exist." (Mohen, 1999, p. 139). Consequently, there is now the awareness that the three conditions were closely intertwined in the communicational procedure in Museology, namely: i) the nature of what is communicated, with the need to be aware of the model through which one communicates; ii) the museum infrastructure or the expographic context which will be designed to enable this communication relationship; iii) the process of turning something into heritage, through which an 'object' gains the so-called 'heritage' quality. This change has rendered invalid the analyses made from a linguistic and semiotics communication model based on the concept of transmission, to give way to the "Communication Pragmatics" model based on a two-way model of information exchange and sharing.

As regards 'heritage value' – in other words, regarding the «motives and reasons for which an object/fact acquires the

dimension of heritage» - a ninth heritage value was added to the eight in existence until 1945, namely the 'transformational value'. The impact of the ideology of Development on heritage added to the existing types of heritage a new class of objects/facts: those capable of being tools for the transformation of Society and the human being. The theme of this 22nd ICOM General Conference (heritage and museums in the service of Social Harmony) is an illustrative example of this 'transformational value'. Just as was the case with the theme of the Conference that preceded it (Museums as agents of social change) or the theme of the 9th Conference in 1971 (Museums in the service of man, today and tomorrow). Heritage is now in the service of 'transformation', which becomes possible for the individuals themselves and for society. Heritage is now justified, not by itself, by the materiality that it is, but by the service it renders by its own pretext. This shift can be clearly surmised from Daniel Café's word spoken in 2009 on the subject of a museum in Alcanena (Portugal): "*The scientific basis is the transformation that the population has made of the Territory, that is their Heritage*". In other words, it is not merely the 'objects' created in the wake of that 'transformation process', it is also the very transformation process used by that population in Alcanena. The same is true of that region's 'immaterial' heritage, specifically the "typical Minde patois". The same justification is emphasized: "*It is a type of heritage that 'results from a communication process' among people so as to make them more efficient and effective in negotiation (business exchange), to the extent that business dealings are crucial to the survival and the preservation of that population in that socio-economic context. There was therefore a socio-economic organization that gave autonomy and survival to the populations of Alcanena for many years without the intervention of the central power. The Territory shapes the human being and the human being 'transforms' the Territory*". This example provides a good summary of the impact of Development on Heritage after 1945. And it makes us understand the three transformations that the impact of the

ideology of Development has had on heritage: - 'Object' becomes *Object-Code*; 'Use' becomes *Total Communicational Use*, and 'Value' becomes *Transformational Value*.

The impasse that insists on lingering

But if this is what changed, there is also an impasse that has remained. Amareswar Gala, on page 3 and 4 of "Nouvelles de l'ICOM", vol.62, n° 2 (2009-2010), shows the part that has stubbornly remained unchanged for this half century, by needing to state that "*the blind acceptance of social harmony as an objective to be achieved at all costs, if it were endorsed by museums, it would mean that their role would have evolved closer to that of the agents of conformism. A role which, I dare hope, few among them would accept!*" (p.3)

In fact, there is a still unresolved conflict. The ambivalence of the objective (social harmony, as well as that of development) hides the impasse between a rhetoric that serves at the same time to deny change and to desire/justify change. It serves to hold back change, meaning the preservation of conformism and the status quo; and it serves to wish that the existing reality changes indeed in the direction of a different goal. We know how the idea of 'heritage of humanity', or the idea of one type of heritage for each one of the ten most powerful present-day linguistic blocks, serves to fight cultural diversity and to deny the restitution of heritage to countries and cultures that were plundered of it. We know that the defence of general norms and directives, staunchly upheld by macro institutions led by a limited number of countries that do not represent the whole of what happens in the world nowadays, means to the crushing of cultural and linguistic diversity. This impasse has not yet been resolved. It actualizes again the clash between an evolutionist, globalizing perspective, and a diffusionist, local perspective of which the episode with Franz Boas in the 19th century has become an icon. Just as Régis Debray stated in 1981, regarding the function of illusion which the concept of 'ideology' operates on reality, this apology of Development (transformed four years ago into *Sustainable Development*, and now into *Social Harmony*) may work as a double register:

- simultaneously of causality and of responsibility. Falling into the category of those notions that allow one to move from imputation (you have erred, we are erring, etc.) to an explanation (because we are not developing, or because we are not making social harmony, etc.). This is an operation that is paradigmatic of the model that forms the basis of the "animist mentality" because, as he states regarding magic, "[they] *carry the solution in the problem itself*". They give the illusion of change. This type of uncritical discourse, historically opportune in times of crisis and anomie, relates to the shamanic role of political speech, in which the authors of the errors theatrically direct the logic of blame towards themselves. As Paul Ricoeur stated in 1988, "the specific element of promise is to construct, by saying, the doing of the promise. To promise is to place oneself under the obligation to do what one says today one will do tomorrow". This magic ceremony of the 'art of doing with saying' does not seem to have been absent from the media-celebrated Conferences promoted by the UN on "The State of the World". And then, from the ones on "The State of the Planet", promoted by the main producers of pollution, allowing them to exorcize the non-Development with the notion of Development, even if it is just a promise with no applicability, the illusion of which is renewed from conference to conference. This shamanic role of the "promise of Development", which is here renewed with the theme of Social Harmony, may correspond more to a wish than to the effective search for the causes of non-Development. And thus the notion of Development would serve not to "heal" but to reduce anxiety and ensure the homeostasis of the (worldwide) social group. On this subject, Régis Debray suggests that magic may have been the first "theory of human practice", because it would allow its authors (for instance, those who hold power) to perpetuate reality (for example, the true cause of asymmetries and social problems) with the *promise*. The function of illusion would be to effectively condition any possibility of change.

It is necessary to bear in mind that in the notion of Development (or of Social Harmony) there is an active, still

unresolved, conflict between a vertical concept of development-conciliation (or exo-development) and a horizontal concept of development-transformation (or endo-development). By introducing the ideology of Development into museology and heritage, UNESCO and ICOM have forced us to inherit that rift, between a vertical type of development conceived from the norms and directives emanating from these political macro structures (UN, UNESCO, ICOM; and others, at regional and national level, many of which lie hidden today under the label of “networks”) and a horizontal type of development, derived from local and community participation of the populations, organized in grassroots associative movements (as opposed to top-down initiatives), being active agents in the diagnostic of needs, in heritage solutions and decisions. This is a rather stormy rift between two different ways of understanding Development and therefore of accepting the way of realizing in practice that future promise – one type of Development we could call exo-development, in which top-down association movements overlap the directory of a few, taken for «representative» of the majority, to the genuine will of the local communities; and another type, endo-development, in which the consideration for the endogenous diversity and resources (human, technical and territorial) make grassroots association movements overcome the directory of the top elements. Daniel Café, in the 1st Seminar on Sociomuseology Research, which the Museology department of Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias organized on 22 and 23 January 2010, regarding the Museum Networks, showed that this conflict was expressed in the very marked difference between “horizontal networks” (almost non-existent) and “vertical networks” (the overwhelming majority). In the latter there is no sharing or exchange of resources, and they serve to impose the directives and norms received from the top structures led by the political power of the State and the International Organizations.

In the former case, the directory (norms and directives imposed from the outside by the museum macro-structures) is imposed on the participation and decision-making of local

communities. In the latter case, the participation and attention to the opinion of local communities rises above the directory, enabling another path to the future based on endo-sustainability, where responsibility is local, the principle of subsidiarity is respected, and where each particular population/community makes decisions given the endogenous resources of the territory it occupies; «growth» is not the basis of Development, but rather the transformation of the territory and of the individuals which will enable them to achieve self-sustainability at the level of basic biological/environmental, economic and social needs. In exo-Development, conciliation serves to keep the ideas of «progress and growth» in existence, in other words, just a pause before global uniformization. Indeed, it is still easy to perceive in «strategic Development documents» the minute presence of the cultural element – both in its structure and its ideological statement. Emphasis is given to the technological and scientific aspects, and the contribution of social and human sciences becomes secondary. Thus criticism of the production and reproduction processes of that social change strategy is waved aside.

In short, the political reading of the convergence of the ideology of Development with museology and heritage, induced by ICOM and by UNESCO throughout this half century, enables us to distinguish two views of Development and Social Harmony in active conflict: i) «development as conciliation factor» (to enable the old goal of progress and economic growth of the 18th and 19th centuries to continue to be the key idea for the future in exchange for well-being and world-scale generalized consumption); ii) and «development as factor for the transformation of the individuals and of society», still not followed through despite being announced as the «good utopia». Endo- and exo-development are the expression of this clash between the «local and the global», between «the directives» and the «community participation», between «top-down association movements» and «grassroots association movements».

What will be the outcome of the Shangai Conference 2010?

Which of these two Social Harmonies will find an echo in the conclusions to be published next November? Will there finally be the contribution to a new paradigm of Human Development, and therefore also to museology and to heritage? Or will everything continue to be as it was fifty years ago?

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