

# CAMOC MUSEUMS OF CITIES REVIEW

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## CAMOC ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2019

### “City Museums as Cultural Hubs – Past, Present and Future”

Kyoto, Japan,  
September 2-5, 2019



DOSSIER: LISBON WORKSHOP • THE AVANT-GARDE CENTRE IN MOSCOW  
• CITY MUSEUMS: REFLECTIONS ON A MISSING DEFINITION

about colonialism, war, violence, intolerance, prejudice, indifference, escapes, loneliness, release.

Between “book” and “reader”, a reciprocity, a kind of exchange was established, given by the activation of personal memories, sensitivities and awareness. A well-known practice, but not so common in museums: in Italy it has been successfully tested, by ABCittà, at the Museum of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and at the Museum of Cultures (MUDEC) in Milan.<sup>4</sup>

The Human Library experience had two relevant aspects: the first was the tight link with the exhibition, of which the Human Library gave an original interpretation; the second was the spontaneity of the initiative, led by young citizens who felt consciously involved and generously told their stories in a light but profound way.

As a conclusion of the 1938-2018 project, the Human Library was an opportunity to experiment new and powerful tools, test the openness of the Museum to new approaches, and work to foster active citizenship and social cohesion.

## Part 2: The historical perspective matters

As his contribution to the Lisbon conference, Joan Roca I Albert, by reporting to his personal experience at MUHBA and other projects and approaches, explained in a very powerful way how the historical perspective in urban museums matters. In specific, he recommended that one be careful when “splitting history from the present”, keeping it in a kind of sacred bubble. Significantly, he reminded us of the Barcelona

<sup>4</sup> Cimoli, A. C. Musei, pregiudizi, empatia. Gettare il corpo nel dialogo. In *RootsRoutes*. Retrieved from: <http://www.roots-routes.org>

Declaration (2013): one particular paragraph seems to be highly meaningful, embracing many of the ideas offered during the Lisbon conference: “City museums collect and keep the material and immaterial heritage, past and present, of their cities and citizens. By shaping the chronicled and living memory of towns, these museums contribute to the dynamic process of writing and rewriting the city’s history, actively involving citizens, who provide their own definitions of their urban history and heritage within a single historical framework”.

This statement links to the contribution made by Elif Çiğdem Artan, who examined the emblematic case of the creation of an archive by citizens, devoted to “the future of the present”, that is to say a very recent heritage that is already history. Both Joana Sousa Monteiro and Chet Orloff pointed out that history is much more than “the past”, and Catherine Cole observed that the museum of the city has to relate to the past and present. Jette Sandahl reported the progress of the ICOM process for the new definition of the word “museum”; from her considerations, the message of the need to face history and its contextualization was clear.

In this difficult and inescapable relationship, connected with the issues of accountability, relevance and democracy, lies one of the challenges and responsibilities of the Museum of the City of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whatever happens in a city – with a resonance in the world as well – is a fact concerning the city museum. Likewise, whatever happens in the world and has an effect on the city. Many urban museums have been working on this challenge and the actions they can take. Coming out of their walls and beyond disciplinary cages, provides an opportunity to embrace precious urban energies, especially among the youngest, and brings confidence in the role of the museum as social agent.

## ■ After the CAMOC “Towards a City Museum Watch” Workshop

*Dr. des. Elif Çiğdem Artan*

### Introductory notes

On May 3-4, 2019, CAMOC members and friends gathered together in Lisbon for the “Towards a Museum Watch” workshop. As a grant-awarded presenter, I had the opportunity to hear inspiring projects, participate in vivid discussions and get feedback to my dissertation. I have recently completed my doctoral research at TU-Berlin, Center for Metropolitan Studies. Its main focus is on archiving digital-born materials by mainly concentrating on two case studies, Interference Archive

in New York and bak.ma in Istanbul, with an objective of seeking the remaining activist videos from the Occupy Wall Street and the Occupy Gezi Park movements. As it was an ethnographical study, I interviewed more than 50 actors engaged in the selected archives and I illustrated the current debates, challenges, and obstacles in autonomous media archives by asking the following question: how can activist videos contribute to a non-linear and non-authoritarian history-writing? The main argument in my doctoral research: today, history of unprivileged and marginalized communities is recorded



*CAMOC Workshop poster. © Museum of Lisbon*

by the communities and archived with the communities. Notably, the easy production and free dissemination of video pave the way for a challenge in terms of collecting, curating, storing, and providing access to the enormous amount of data. Today, autonomous archives document, preserve and present the counter-image of the state archives by working as collectives. Based upon the idea of “archiving now collectively” and the question of “too much material”, I concluded my talk by asking the audience about the possible collaboration between city museums and autonomous archives, concerning ICOM’s ongoing project of the new museum definition.

### **The highlights of the meeting**

The discussion regarding posing my research question led us to the keynote speaker of the workshop. Jette Sandahl (ICOM MDPP Chair) gave an amazing talk about the process of writing the new museum definition. First, the new definition is participatory, for ICOM requests definition entries from all around the world; second, it presents excellent transparency for ICOM provides visibility to all of the entries by publishing them online, and finally, it is inclusive for ICOM accepts entries in all languages. After reviewing some of the entries, Sandahl also provided information about the selection strategies. At the end of the submission process, the Executive Board will finalise the new museum definition proposal, and in Kyoto, during the gathering of ICOM 2019, there will be a voting: the current definition vs. the new proposal. Sandahl highlighted that the museum definition is the status of ICOM, and therefore, a status change can only be possible with one alternative rather than having multiple proposals to be voted. The discussion of the new museum definition continued during the presentation of Francesca Lanz (Politecnico di Milano), as her talk focused on the need for a new city museum definition. After comparing a series of

museums with the ideal status of the city museum, Lanz underlined the necessity of reviewing the definition by affirming that a new definition can be helpful for certain institutions which do not have the know-how for sufficiently representing the city.

In the following session, Joan Roca (MUHBA) examined the new museum definition by listing 15 elements to answer the question of “How to Detect a City Museum in 20 Minutes?”. His 13<sup>th</sup> element, which was asking “How to ensure low-cost practices when collecting the present?” was directly related to my doctoral research. It was such a pleasure to hear Joan’s comments on my research topic, and I also had the opportunity to get his feedback to my findings during our city tours organized by the Museum of Lisbon. As site tours, we visited a series of museums that comprise the city museum. Each visit was accompanied by our Lisbon colleagues working there, who provided detailed information regarding the museums’ collections and exhibitions. Surprisingly, the second day of the workshop was held in the renovated storage building of the Museum of Lisbon. The day started with the invited speaker, Jan Gerchow from the Historical Museum Frankfurt, who argued that city museums are omnibus museums as they are composed of manifold perspectives. In his opinion, a city museum should be inclusive for all aspects of a city and display transdisciplinary scientific research. Another invited speaker, Catherine C. Cole (CAMOC/CAM), approached to the new definition of city museum by asking the role of city museums: “Museums ‘of’ or ‘in’ cities”. Independent museologist and curator, Paola E. Boccalatte (Italy), who was also awarded a grant, presented her inspiring projects focusing on the notion of race.

### **Final remarks**

In addition to the fruitful discussion, we had the opportunity to develop our collective working and creative thinking skills through the interactive workshops coordinated by Annemarie de Wildt (the Netherlands), Cristina Miedico (Italy), as well as Darry Razen and Vitoria Ramirez Zanquetta (the Netherlands). The workshop, which started with welcoming speeches of Joana Sousa Monteiro (Museum of Lisbon/CAMOC), Afsin Altayli (ICOM Secretariat), Ekaterina Travkina (OECD), and Ian Jones (CAMOC and the future of city museums), was concluded after the final debate session conducted by Joana Sousa Monteiro, Joan Roca, and Jelena Savic (CAMOC Secretary). Consequently, attending the CAMOC’s “Towards a City Museum Watch” workshop was an invaluable experience. I am grateful to be a friend of CAMOC.