
MILAN, ITALY – JULY 4-8 2016

ICMEMO ANNUAL CONFERENCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ICMEMO Board (from left to right): Kornelis Spaans, Julie Higashi, Thomas Lutz, Kateryna Chueva, Markus Moors, Karen Franklin, Ophelia Leon, Jordi Guixé, Iratxe Momoitio, Daniel Dratwa, Erik Somers

ICMEMO

International Council of Museums

International Committee in Remembrance of the Victims of Public Crimes

Headquarters | Siège: Maison de l'UNESCO - 1 rue Miollis - 75732 Paris Cedex 15 France

Introduction

The International Committee of Memorial Museums in Remembrance of the Victims of Public Crimes (ICMEMO) held its 2016 annual meeting in Milan, Italy, within the context of the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) triennial General Assembly and Conference.

This general conference brought together 3,500 experts and museum professionals, from a network of 35,000 members across 136 countries, to reflect on the subject of "Museums and Cultural Landscapes".

Under this theme, ICMEMO organized seminar sessions on three major issues:

- ❑ **Memories of dictatorships in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Post-Soviet States**
 - ❑ *(in partnership with The University of Exeter and L'Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique)*
- ❑ **The Ethical and Educational Issue of Dark Tourism**
 - ❑ *(joint session with ICOMAM - International Committee for Museums of Arms and Military History)*
- ❑ **Reproducibility of Memorial Heritage: Challenges and Debates**
 - ❑ *(in partnership with EUROM - European Observatory on Memories)*

These were accompanied by:

- ❑ A series of **ICMEMO Member Presentations** in short-form (Pecha Kucha) format
- ❑ Site visits (Fossoli, Carpi, and Modena) on the theme of ***Representation and Memory***

Memories of dictatorships in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Post-Soviet States

After an introduction by Karen Franklin (ICMEMO Chair at the time) and Ophelia Leon (present ICMEMO Chair), the floor opened up to presentations by invited members.

Nelly Bekus

*"Commemorating the Victims of Stalinist Repressions:
Case of Two Memorial Sites in Minsk and Astana"*

**University of
Exeter**

This presentation examined the institutional and the symbolic status of two memorial sites dedicated to the memory of victims of the Stalinist crimes in Belarus and Kazakhstan: the mass grave at Kuropaty, and the museum at ALZHIR (Akmolinsk Camp for the Wives of the Traitors of the Motherland). Dr. Bekus focused on the "symbolic role which they play in the cultural landscape", and how they have been "framed and interpreted in the Belarusian and Kazakhstani ideological contexts".

Anar Khassenova

*"Memory of Women
Prisoners in ALZHIR
museum"*

**Art Curator
Museum ALZHIR
(Astana, Kazakhstan)**

Following on from this, the curator of ALZHIR examined the experiences of female prisoners at the camp. Special note was made of how, despite the industrial scale and brutal extent of the internment program, many women continued to attribute their fate to a one-off failure of the system, rather than the legitimacy of the system itself. Finally, we opened out to a discussion of how the museum has involved the descendents of the victims in its commemorative activities.

Barbara Thimm

*"Practicing Democracy at Memorial Sites?
A training experience (not only) in Belarus"*

**Trainer
"Disconcerting
Sites:
Dealing With
Burdened Past"**

Ms. Thimm argued for the idea of a specifically democratic educational approach at memorial sites -- one free of indoctrination and conducive to a pluralistic culture of

remembrance. She developed this through the training concept of “Disconcerting Sites” and its implementation in the recently inaugurated Belarusian WWII memorial site of “Maly Trostenez”.

Gruia Badescu

*“Cultural landscapes of war?
Reconstruction, museification and
memorialisation in post-Yugoslav cities”*

**University of
Oxford**

This presentation examined the treatment of memorial site from the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s (e.g. the siege of Sarajevo and the bombing of Belgrade), including the Sarajevo Tunnel and the Belgrade TV building. Through these cases, Dr. Badescu explored debates around the generation of tourism, how ruins should be maintained and whether they should be reconstructed, and the shaping of war landscapes and “traumasces”.

Ricardo Brodsky

*“Memory, Dilemmas and Debates: the
Examples of Argentina, Chile and
Peru”*

**Former Director -
Museum of Memory and
Human Rights (Chile)**

Mr. Brodsky’s presentation centred on the experiences of three memorial sites: Memory Park (Buenos Aires, Argentina), the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Santiago, Chile), and the sculpture “The Eye That Weeps” (Lima, Peru). Through a close examination of the aesthetic and political elements of these sites, the speaker explored themes of Truth and Reconciliation, and balancing the rights of the victims with the interests of younger generations and wider society.

Roberto Fuertes

*“Didactics of Trauma: How to represent and
transmit narratives in museums dedicated to
Memory and Human Rights”*

**Villa Grimaldi,
Santiago de Chile**

Mr. Fuertes, on the basis of a case study of Peace Park Villa Grimaldi, addressed the role of the audience and visitors in creating the narrative of memory and human rights. He invited reflection on the role of museums as occupiers of a privileged space, and the

duties they have to educate about and represent past trauma to a present which will always make its own stories.

Roundtable discussion

The subsequent discussion focused on the contemporary reinterpretation and re-imagining of memorial spaces, according to contemporary political imperatives and modes of expression.

For example, the subject of graffiti was explored in some detail. Does it constitute a desecration of the memory of victims? Or can it be welcomed, or at least accepted and integrated, into a new and modern meaning for presently-existing society?

Also discussed was the subject of spontaneous memorials.

The Ethical and Educational Issue of Dark Tourism

ICMEMO in partnership with ICOMAM, the International Committee of Museums and Collections of Arms and Military History.

ICMEMO Board member, Professor Julie Higashi from the University of Kyoto introduced Session 2 on Dark Tourism and its speakers.

She argued that, even when museum/memorial sites are related to a dark chapter in history, the sites need to be "promoted," "exploited," and even treated as "commodities" that can be "consumed" by "tourists." Fundamentally, we cannot avoid the voyeurism (or schadenfreude, to use Cole's term, 1999) of curious tourists, who are drawn to the site precisely because it is related to genocide, sufferings, torture, and death.

Dr. Jörg Skriebeleit

"Thana-Tourism: Journeys to the Dead"

**Director: Flossenbürg
Concentration Camp
Memorial Site**

Dr. Skriebeleit spoke about the world of disaster sites, chambers of horrors, Holocaust and Concentration camp travel guides. He addressed the ethical questions he had to face in his memorial museum, calling attention to the International Memorial Museum Charter and its mandate to protect the dignity of victims of public crimes when memorializing them.

Ewa Kowalska

*"The New face of Katy
Museum - The Monument"*

**Director
Katyń Museum**

As Ewa Kowalska could not be present at the conference, Julie Higashi read her paper on the redevelopment and new outlook of the "Katyń Museum", which commemorates the massacre in Katyń Forest where more than twenty thousand Polish soldiers were executed by the NKVD forces.

Magdalena Sasal

*"The House of Katy Relics as a Tourist
attraction on the Map of Warsaw
Museums – an Ethical Dimension"*

**Coordinator of
Promotion and
Educational
Programmes
Katyń Museum, Poland**

Ms Sasal dealt with the conflict in the discourse of the events according to the different sides and political times. She spoke of the need to educate the younger visitors who are unaware of the events that took place at the site of the Katyn massacre.

In the afternoon, the third session was introduced by **Eva-Sofii Ernstell**, director of the Army Museum, Sweden, and President of ICOMAM.

Ms. Ernstell made a summary of the previous session, noting some of the differences between terminology and phenomenology between ICMEMO and ICOMAM, as well as the similarities and the need for remembrance, before introducing the speakers.

**Kirsten
John-Stücke**

*"Wewelsburg Castle, an attraction pole
of Dark Tourism: How to deal with this
phenomenon at a memorial site"*

**Director:
Kreismuseum
Wewelsburg**

Memorial Museum practitioners have to face the dilemma of preserving the site to memorialize the victims, function as an educational institution, but at the same time need to deal with the curious "tourists" or visitors. Wewelsburg, for example, has a difficult task since proponents of the SS ideology might be attracted to visit the site. In this presentation, Kirsten John-Stücke explored how one deals with such an educational and ethical dilemma.

Ralf Rath

*"'Let there be Light!': the German Tank
Museum as a failed dark exhibition?"*

**Director:
German Tank Museum**

Considering his museum as a "lighter" shade of dark tourism, Mr Rath discussed the relativity of dark or light depending on where the focus is set. He explained how he uses the tank exhibit to convey a more educational, historical presentation of war.

Chhay Visoth

*"A new Perspective on a Dark Chapter:
Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum for Peace
Education"*

**Director:
Tuol Sleng Genocide
Museum, Cambodia**

Mr. Visoth addressed the issue of local outreach and international interest. He claimed only 3% of the visitors to Tuol Sleng Museum were local students, with the rest being

international. He argued for the importance of engaging the local population (especially youth) in peace education in order to advance the purposes of memorial museums, and called upon scholars in the audience to help provide guidance on this issue.

Meysam Abdoli

"War museums in Iran"

**Curator:
Malek National Library
& Museum, Tehran**

Mr. Abdoli was part of the largest delegation from any one country present at the ICOM Milan Conference, with more than 200 participants registered from Iran. Meysa Abdoli introduced a few of the hundreds of new Museums of 'the Sacred War' currently being opened in Iran at sites of battles and elsewhere, taking the budget away from national art, history, archaeological and other museums.

ICMEMO Member Presentations (Pecha Kucha Format)

Introduction

Gabriela Römer

*"Memory, identity, patrimony,
commemorations."*

**Assistant Professor
Universidad Nacional de
Córdoba (Argentina)**

Ms. Römer explored these themes through the prism of memorial sites from the Argentine dictatorship. She stressed that a museum of memory can be more than a repository for a country's past, which merely forms part of the current cultural conversation; it can also be an unforgettable learning experience for all involved.

Sigal Meirovich

*"Museum of Memory and Human
Rights in Chile: Cultural Landscapes
for Memorial Pedagogies"*

**Art Historian.
Professor at SEK
University**

Ms. Meirovich took the example of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, Chile, to reflect on the politics of truth, justice, and memory -- to see in what measure they could address the consequences of state terrorism and repression. She made particular note of the relationship the museum shares with its urban landscape, as it is constructed in a vibrant cultural centre of the city, rather than in a site historically associated with the government policy of torture and disappearances it examines.

Laura-Edythe Coleman

*"People, Place, and Our Past:
Curatorial reflections on the
interpretation of difficult
histories"*

Museum Informaticist

Dr. Coleman discussed new research which examines the curatorial voice through the lens of social inclusivity. This centered on the use of local space to enhance the museum's message, and in a sense co-create it with the visitors. The take-away was that the curatorial/visitor relationship should go both ways, with the museum workers acting as facilitators to the visitor's experience, rather than its authors.

Anna Stadinchuk

"Finding the tone to speak on GULAG nationwide: Gulag History Museum and the Association of Memory Museums of Russia"

Deputy Director for Development, GULAG History State Museum

Ms. Stadinchuk touched on two major themes. Firstly, how to appropriately present events of such widespread traumatic nature. And secondly, how to capture the whole context and history of the events, so as to present them in their full depth and breadth. To do this, in the case of Gulags in Russia, she offered the example of bringing together a network of museums to collaborate in telling the story in full.

Katarina Babić

"The Memorial Park Kragujeva ki Oktobar: Memorial Park, Museum and Cultural Events"

Senior curator, Memorial Park Kragujevački Oktobar, Serbia

Ms. Babić presented the work of the Memorial park in Kragujevac, which commemorates the Serbian, Jewish, and Roma victims of a Wehrmacht massacre in 1941. She brought up the role it plays in landscape protection, as well as the cultural, informational, educational, and recreational needs of the local community.

Jane E. Klinger

"Artificial Landscapes and Meaning"

Chief Conservator, U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

Ms. Klinger noted the differences in interpretation of memorials between individuals and groups, before moving on to discuss a new initiative of broadening out the museum's message through special exhibitions on other atrocities. The institution's mission expanded from communicating an atrocity which occurred far from the visitors (and outside their widespread awareness at the time), into taking an atrocity they were now more familiar with to promote awareness of other atrocities.

Dario Disegni

Presentation on the forthcoming National Museum

President, National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah

Rabbi Disegni introduced the concepts behind the forthcoming National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah. It will not be based around a permanent exhibition,

serving rather as a space of interpretation on the subject of the uniqueness of the Italian Jewish experience, as well as its participation in the wider context of European and Mediterranean Jewish experience, and opening out into dialogue with other religions and cultures.

Nayat Karakose

*“Challenging the Social Amnesia and
Politics of Oblivion through the
Hrant Dink Site of Memory”*

**Program Coordinator,
Hrant Dink Foundation,
Istanbul, Turkey**

Ms. Karakose presented a history and possible future for the Hrant Dink Site of Memory, dedicated to the Armenian journalist assassinated on its doorstep. It stands against the impunity of political assassinations and the repression suffered by Armenians and other minorities. It aspires to reconcile with the past with a view to a more peaceful future based on mutual understanding, and hopes to set a precedent for the creation of other sites.

Reproducibility of Memorial Heritage: Challenges and Debates

**Kateryna
Chuyeva**

*"The Maidan Museum: from
NGO to State Museum"*

**Maidan Museum;
Nebesna Sotnya Memorial;
Revolution of Dignity Museum**

The speakers discussed the new institutional framework behind a museum dedicated to such a contemporary (and still evolving) situation, and explore what it means to the Ukrainian nation today.

Carla Prat Perxachs

*"Significant objects:
Finding meaning"*

**Museo Memoria y
Tolerancia,
Mexico**

Ms. Prat Perxachs presented the Museum of Memory and Tolerance in Mexico City, which was originally dedicated to the Holocaust survivors who lived in Mexico, but which has expanded to a broader mission of human rights, and how it relates to the society in which it is embedded. Throughout, she addressed how the same object or collection can have different meanings and levels of significance to different visitors (or even a single one).

Philip Norman Peterson

*"The New Büchenwald
Exhibit"*

**Architect,
Holzer/Kobler, Zurich**

Mr. Peterson presented the design for the new permanent exhibition in the Büchenwald memorial. The aim was to reinforce the information of the exhibition through a physical consciousness of the place itself. It thus serves as an example of the capability of space and form to provide meaning, not just aesthetics.

Erik Somers

*"Nazi Transit Camp Westerbork:
A process of change"
(The Culture of Memories and
Presentations on the Historical Site)*

**NIOD Institute for
War, Holocaust and
Genocide Studies
(Amsterdam)**

Dr. Somers recounted the history of the site: a monument at the location of the former Camp Westerbork, in which a over a hundred thousand Jews were exterminated. Through it, he explored issues of the materialization of memories: the use of "real"

objects of the past vs. new, abstract visualizations which reconstruct the event; and when a simple barren landscape is not enough to symbolize the irreplaceable loss of the victims, and must be given more obvious, transparent markers.

Kornelis Spaans

"The Gaon Jewish State Museum in Vilnius. A project to establish a genuine Holocaust museum in the historic centre of the city"

Consultant on Museum, Memorial, and Remembrance Issues

Mr. Spaans presented plans for a new Holocaust Memorial Museum in the centre of the Lithuanian capital, in the location of the former Jewish ghetto. He also discussed the challenges and opportunities of trying to commemorate the Holocaust in a cultural context which has been dominated by the intervening issue of Soviet occupation and state terrorism.

Marcello Flores
Jordi Guixé

"History and Memory"

Director, EUROM
Director, INSMLI

Mr. Guixé tackled contemporary debates about European memory politics. He addressed the peripheralization of national experiences outside the Nazism - Soviet axis of repression, as well as issues of modern reinterpretation of past events (both from the perspective of the state as well as civil society).

Prof. Flores called into question the supposed neutrality and objectivity of memory, emphasizing the role of the present in reconstructing and reconstituting the events discussed. He acknowledged that memory has consistently been constructed by political elites, and opened the question of what new identities we can form today in the wake of such a legacy (and how historians can emancipate themselves from even these reconstituted identities, in the search for plural truths).

Simon Levis Sullam

"Minorities' Memory: From the Venice Ghetto to the Holocaust"

University of Venice
Ca' Foscari

The speaker warned against the perception of Italy as a comparative paradise for European Jews, and traced the history of the people's repression from the formation of the first "ghetto" in 1516, through to the intensification of a tradition of Catholic anti-Judaism through the Fascist colonial experience, eventually culminating in Italian participation in the "Final Solution" during German occupation in 1943-1945. To tell this story, he made reference to specific sites of persecution now being rediscovered.

Ilaria Porciani*"Museums, Victimhood and the
Memory of Forced Migrations"***University of Bologna**

The speaker presented a close study of contemporary museological approaches to the increasingly acknowledged issue of forced migration. She offered the examples of unsettling, painstakingly-preserved "period rooms" (e.g. in Germany and Italy) which present a snapshot of how these places stood when they were abandoned, and drive home the immediacy of the trauma, and the difficulty of moving past such a loss.

Paolo Pezzino*The Civilian Massacres of
Sant'Anna di Stazzema and
Marzabotto***University of Pisa**

Prof. Pezzino spoke on the subject of the institutional politics of memory, studying how the lack of recognition of the massacres by Nazi troops until the 1970s (and the lack of knowledge about the extent of the crimes until the 1990s) was an ignored part of how the events are talked about today.

Stefanie Endlich*"Memory and Witnesses"***Universität der Künste,
Berlin**

The speaker developed the concept of survivors as "witnesses", noting their increased importance in public perception and commemoration activities as they become fewer and fewer, and asking what role they play in planning or implementing memorials in the public space. She shared experiences of intergenerational dialogue between now much older witnesses and the younger artists who seek to commemorate events of which they had no direct experience, and explores the possibilities such an encounter opens up.

Representation and Memory: Fossoli, Carpi, Modena

During the 4th day of the Conference, for the off-site meeting and tour, the ICMEMO members travelled to Campo Fossoli, Museo Carpi and the City of Modena.

The group was greeted at Campo Fossoli by its director **Marzia Luppi**, followed by an in-depth visit through the site.

At Carpi Museum, architect **Alberico di Belgiojoso**, from Studio Architetti, led the tour. Mr. di Belgiojoso's father was a renowned architect in his own right, who was interned at before being deported to Mauthausen. He designed the museum and exhibit and was a founding member of BBPR (Banfi, Belgiojoso, Peressutti, Rogers, since 1946).

After a full lunch stop in Carpi, the group travelled to Modena where Claudio Silingardi (President of IMSLI and President of the Historical Institute of Modena) led a walking tour, before ending with a visit to the Synagogue of Modena.

Museo Diffuso della Resistenza, Torino

For the 5th day, the group travelled to Turin on an ICOM-sponsored tour and focused on a guided visit to the Museo Diffuso della Resistenza, led by its director **Guido Vaglio**.

A group lunch was followed by a visit to the Museum Library guided by the Head Librarian and subsequent visit to the Museum Exhibit.

Free time for a walking tour of Torino before heading back to Milan.

We reiterate our gratitude to our Sponsors:

ICOM - EUROM - Peter S. Kalikow

The University of Exeter - L'Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique - AHRC-LABEX

And to our Partners:

Casa della Memoria, Fossoli Camp, Museo Carpi, Museo Diffuso, IMSLI

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Report compiled and written by David Solomon, DS Translations & Editions



Session 2.



Session 3.



Session 4.