

# Support Culture and Museums to Face the Global Crisis and Build the Future. Lisbon Declaration 6th April 2013. An appeal to European, national, regional and local Governments and Parliaments

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# SUPPORT CULTURE AND MUSEUMS TO FACE THE GLOBAL CRISIS AND BUILD THE FUTURE

LISBON DECLARATION. AN APPEAL TO EUROPEAN, NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND PARLIAMENTS – 6TH APRIL 2013

*Nel corso del Convegno internazionale su «Public Policies towards Museums in Times of Crisis», tenutosi a Lisbona il 5 e 6 Aprile 2013, i Presidenti di ICOM (International Council of Museums) di Grecia, Italia, Portogallo e Spagna hanno firmato questa «Dichiarazione di Lisbona», che invita il Parlamento e la Commissione dell'Unione Europea, i parlamenti e i governi dei paesi europei e le autorità regionali e locali a sostenere la cultura e i musei per fronteggiare la crisi globale e costruire il futuro.*

ICOM, the International Council of Museums, is the international organisation of museums and museum professionals, with 30,000 members from 137 countries. On behalf of hundreds of thousands of professionals and volunteers currently working in museums in our countries, the Chairs of ICOM Greece, ICOM Italy, ICOM Portugal and ICOM Spain, with the close support of the Chair of ICOM Europe and the President of ICOM, are meeting in Lisbon on April 5th and 6th, 2013 for the international conference on Public Policies toward Museums in times of crisis. We appeal to European, national, regional and local Governments and Parliaments to support culture and museums in these times of crisis.

Firstly we would like to point out that the economic crisis is producing dramatic effects upon cultural activities and museums and, secondly, that museums are unique resources that not only produce knowledge and education, but also contribute significantly to economic and social development. Lastly, this appeal presents to the Governments three action priorities to face the crisis and ten proposals for sustainable management of museums and cultural heritage.

## **1. The world economic crisis is producing dramatic effects upon cultural activities and museums**

In Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and many other European countries, the economic crisis has generated a drastic decrease in public and private financial support to culture and museums. Blind automatic financial cuts do not distinguish between ephemeral initiatives and permanent institutions.

These drastic cuts are endangering the existence of many museums and their collections, and threatening the working conditions of professionals, particularly younger ones. Colleagues are losing their jobs and younger professionals are underpaid, have only short-term precarious contracts or cannot find suitable employment. With great concern, we have already seen museums having to reduce opening hours and activities or even being forced to close because of lack of resources, while others are losing their directors and technical teams. Policy makers need to recognise that museums are long-term, intergenerational institutions where research, conservation and dissemination of knowledge are closely entwined. None of these functions should be neglected.

In times of crisis culture, museums and heritage are often considered a luxury that society can little afford, whereas in reality they are assets of sustainable growth. It is our strong belief that at such critical moments we must change our traditional opinions not only about finance and economy, but also about society and ways of living.

## **2. Cultural activities and museums are unique resources for the development of economy and society**

Culture and museums are important investments for a better society, not liabilities to be cut down in times of crisis. Our national and European identities rest on a common cultural heritage which is not a mere memory of the past, but a capital asset in understanding the present and planning the future.

Culture, heritage and museums in particular drive economic and social growth as well as innovation and community cohesion. Even in countries facing serious economic problems museums and heritage should be financed so that they can continue to contribute to social cohesion and development. Unfortunately, in our countries the percentage of Gross National Product invested in culture, museums and heritage is lower than in other countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). We believe that our governments should modify this trend and the resources available for culture should be spent primarily on the activities of permanent cultural institutions.

## **3. The economic crisis and the new role of museums**

In the last few years museums in our countries have changed dramatically and now have larger social and territorial responsibilities.

The preservation and safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage is considered the most relevant function of museums and should not be neglected. However, contemporary museums have wider goals. They offer public services and social activities, as well as culture

and knowledge. They serve new audiences, use new languages and new media. Innovative museums foster public awareness, promote understanding of heritage and offer educational services. They strengthen cultural identities, support social cohesion and develop intercultural mediation – activities which are fundamental in times of crisis.

Museums produce public values and improve regional assets in a global world. They provide facilities and resources for local, regional and national communities. They generate not only knowledge and education, but also income and employment. Museums and monuments are among the most appealing factors for the tourism industry, a vital economic sector in all our countries. Investing in museums, their activities and their professionals is the best way to develop and improve the quality of cultural tourism.

#### **4. Three priorities and ten objectives to face the crisis and promote the values of museums and heritage**

##### *4.1. First priority*

Museums and cultural heritage are positive engines of development rather than sources of expenditure. This is especially true in times of crisis when long-term strategic issues have to stand up against short-term proposals. National, regional and local governments should recognise this and act accordingly. There is no sustainable growth without cultural development. Territories need cultural infrastructures in addition to highways, high-speed railways, airports and telecommunication services. To promote regional growth and international exchanges, and to improve the quality of citizens' lives, we need cultural heritage, museums, libraries, archives, performing arts, theatres, concert halls and exhibition centres.

We are asking our governments to

- Fulfill their public obligations toward heritage and museums and preserve our cultural legacy from one generation to the next.
- Increase the percentage of their Gross National Product assigned to cultural activities, museums and heritage in particular, in order to attain European average standards.
- Increase the resources for museums as permanent cultural institutions so that they can effectively fulfil their social roles and offer a greater number of activities to support communities and local development.

##### *4.2. Second priority*

Governments and communities should defend and promote the human resources of museums. Many museums are suffering from a

severe reduction or even the loss of scientific direction and technical positions. Without scientific, administrative and directive personnel, museums cannot contribute effectively to the life and growth of society and some are at serious risk.

We are asking our governments to

- Support the necessary generational turnover in the personnel of museums
- Preserve and promote the museum professional competences, both in public and in private organisations, and ensure that museum positions are filled by qualified personnel
- Promote the training of museum personnel and the achievement of high quality professional standards
- Implement programmes for the employment of competent young professionals in museums, including the introduction of fiscal benefits.

#### 4.3. *Third priority*

Governments and communities should promote citizens' participation in museum activities on a voluntary basis and encourage synergy between public and private organisations and partnerships in order to guarantee the sustainable management of museums and heritage.

We are asking our governments to

- Promote cooperation in museum and cultural activities among institutions, public and private bodies, professionals and volunteers
- Sustain cultural networks on a regional, national and European level
- Encourage donations and activities in favour of museums and cultural heritage by means of tax relief

(Lisbon, 6 April 2013)

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