

CITY MUSEUMS AS CENTRES OF CIVIC DIALOGUE?

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1. Arjen van
Susteren.
*Metropolitan
World Atlas.*
Rotterdam
2005
Simon

2. Stephens.
City Limits.
*Museum
Journal.*
October 2005,
pp. 22-25

3. *I Musei
della Città.*
Roma 2-3
dicembre
2005.
*International
Scientific
Conference on
City Museums
and the City
Museum of
Volos*
(Greece).
Volos 31
March – 2
April 2006.
a conference on
plans for the
city museum
of Antalya was
held in
Antalya 29-30
April 2006.
From April 30-
2 May 2006
the ICOM
committee of
city museums,
CAMOC
organised a
conference in
Boston
*Museums of
the city as
gateways to
understanding
urban life.*

Two years ago I read an interesting book review in a Dutch newspaper. It was on the newly published Metropolitan World Atlas, written by a Dutch urban planner, Arjen van Susteren¹. He compares 101 cities all over the world, like Los Angeles, Detroit, Rio de Janeiro and Beijing. Of these, 89 could be defined as a 'metropolis'. According to Van Susteren, one of the characteristics of a metropolis is that global contacts and relations are more important than local ones. One of these is located in the Western part of the Netherlands and it's called the Randstad. It is made up of well-known Dutch cities such as Amsterdam, The Hague, Leiden, Utrecht and Rotterdam. One of the remarkable differences to other metropolises is, however, that a city map of the Randstad does not exist. Yes, in a spatial-economic way the Randstad is a reality, but not in a political, cultural or mental way. Will there ever be a museum of Randstad city? I doubt it, at least in the near future. The reason is that in Randstad the feeling of belonging, of being part of a city, is connected with the individual cities, which make up this metropolis. Their history goes back to the Middle Ages and the interest in their past is very much alive. Neither the inhabitants of Randstad nor the tourists would at this moment recognise themselves in a Randstad city museum.

The publication of the above mentioned Metropolitan World Atlas is just a Dutch example of a well-known, worldwide phenomenon which is called urbanisation. Simon Stephens writes in his article City Limits in *Museums Journal*, October 2005, that the growth of cities is probably 'the most significant global development of the past 100 years'². It seems that within two years, half the world's population will live in a city. How will city museums handle this? Are we prepared?

Clearly in many places the interest in city museums is growing. For example in Flandres, starting in the nineties of last century, municipal, provincial and national governments have stimulated the development of city museums in cities like Antwerp, Gent and Bruges. More recently, during conferences in Rome, Volos and Antalya it became clear that similar developments are taking place in Italy, Greece and Turkey³. Of course the point of departure of plans and discussions varies greatly, nationally and even locally. However, the general trend is that both museum staffs and local or national authorities are asking themselves what part a modern city museum can play for the inhabitants of the city in the first place, and secondly for the tourists. In other words, as a category the city museum is very much alive.

During the Fourth Conference of the International Association of City Museums, which was organised by the Amsterdam Historical Museum in Amsterdam in Amsterdam from 3-5 November 2005⁵ there was plenty of opportunity for exchange of ideas on recent developments in the field of city museums. Before going more into detail on the general theme of this conference it is important to present a brief summary of the background of this type of conference. In 1993 the director of the Museum of London, Max Hebditch, took the initiative to organise a symposium with the title Reflecting Cities. The idea was to offer city museums a high-level forum for professional discussion and co-operation. At the end of a very fruitful symposium, the participants decided to found an informal association for professionals working in city museums, which should also be open to those working in related institutions or organisations. For this purpose it was decided to organise a symposium every two years. In 1995 the Barcelona History Museum succeeded in bringing together a large group of city museums again, covering several important themes such as Museums and Historic Centres and The Urban Change and Heritage Conservation. At the end of this conference, the participants expressed the wish to continue the forum for discussion and to strengthen the links between city museums in the future. Decisions were taken to give

some structure to the organisation of the association. An international working group of six people was set up to advise the future president on the next symposium and on other more general issues related to the association. Another resolution was to maintain a close relationship with the ICMAH (International ICOM Committee of Museums of History and Archaeology) and also the International Association of History Museums, an organisation associated with ICOM. The Forum wanted to remain a strictly informal organisation.

Unfortunately it was not possible to organise the next meeting until 2000. This time the host was the Historical Museum of the City of Luxembourg. The symposium brought together not only city museums; it was also the symposium of the ICMAH and the International Association of History Museums. During the Amsterdam conference this close link with ICMAH, especially with the city museums working group of this ICOM committee, and the International Association of History Museums was maintained. Moreover, and this was new, several board members of a new ICOM committee, CAMOC (the Committee for the Collections and Activities of Museums of the City) were present at the conference. This committee was founded during the ICOM conference in the autumn of 2004 in Seoul, on the initiative of the city museum of Moscow⁶.

4. The conference was organised in close co-operation with an international working group of the International Association of City Museums. Dutch co-partners in this conference were the Rotterdam Historical Museum, Het Schielandhuis, and the City Museum of The Hague.

5. The International Association of City Museums is a strictly informal organisation, without a board and without fees. To become a member you can write to the author of this article. To become a member of the new ICOM committee of city museums CAMOC please look at their website. www.cja-arts.com/camoc.htm

6. www.
ahm.amsterda
m.nl

What was the general theme of the Amsterdam conference? During recent decades many people have been trying to find a new meaning for the concept of 'citizen' or 'city dweller'. How do we live together in the city, in what way do we experience the city? In this context it is interesting and important to realise that city museums do not just function as keepers of the historical collections of the city. They also tell and present the story of the city and its inhabitants; in other words, city museums function as writers of history. Are city museums conscious of the fact that they play a part in the historiography of the city? Do they actively participate in processes of change in the city? Do they offer a platform and endeavour to function as a forum? In other words: do city museums chose to be a conscious agent in the social, cultural, economic and even in the political climate of our rapidly changing cities? Can they function as a place for civic dialogue?

In order to stimulate an interdisciplinary discussion participants from many different professional fields were invited, such as housing corporations, urban historians, tourist boards and immigrant organisations. Of course the majority of participants were professionals working in city museums. Students were another important target group. In the end 160 people from 26 countries in Western and Eastern Europe, Africa, and North America, took part in the conference.

Why Amsterdam?

Why organise the conference in Amsterdam? Since the Amsterdam Historical Museum (AHM) opened in the 1970s it has earned a very good reputation, both in the Netherlands and abroad.⁶ In 1999 and 2000 extensive changes were made to our permanent exhibition on the history of Amsterdam. These changes were inspired by several objectives:

- attracting a wider audience (families with children, youngsters, and a culturally more diverse public)
- the expansion of the rooms on the recent history of the city
- working with other sorts of collections, (material and immaterial), with a view to stimulating interactivity during visits to the museum.

These new rooms of the permanent exhibition are the result of 'try-outs' in various temporary exhibitions during the second part of the nineties. Moreover, during these years, the museum has developed a new collection policy for the late 19th and 20th century, a period previously scarcely represented in the museum's collections. At the same time, the AHM has developed a multicultural and intercultural visitors' strategy.

At the moment we are revamping the entrance area and the first room of the museum. There is also a plan to make changes to the rooms about the earlier history of the city on the basis of the same objectives mentioned above.

More than ever, the museum really wants the museum to be for all Amsterdammers. The principles of the concept of social inclusion, particularly popular in the Anglo Saxon countries, form the basis of all our exhibition programmes and educational work.

The AHM is not only active within the four walls of the museum. There are many activities in other neighbourhoods and regular contact with various kindred organisations in the city. Other heritage partners are particularly important such as the City Archives, the Historic Buildings & Archaeology Service and the University, which are all responsible for parts of Amsterdam's heritage. This of course also applies to the Stedelijk Museum, which houses the municipal modern art collections, and the Rijksmuseum, which since 1885 has had a considerable part of Amsterdam's older art collections on long-term loan. There are also close connections with other cultural institutions in Amsterdam and numerous municipal services and companies. The Amsterdam Historical Museum is thus not only physically in the middle of the city but figuratively too.

Amsterdam is a very international city. Over 170 nationalities live there, and several of its economic and cultural activities extend far beyond the municipal or national boundaries. Amsterdam is also a city that is constantly changing. Two thirds of its

750,000 inhabitants have changed in the last ten years as a result of both emigration and immigration.

The subject of the conference was especially appealing to the alderman of culture of the city government. In 2003 her department published a long-term cultural vision of the city in the year 2015. The introduction of this document stated that culture is a key element in the city: it facilitates contact, mutual respect and understanding between people of different cultural and social backgrounds. It can contribute to moulding a new, dynamic, flourishing, intercultural city where all the inhabitants feel at home. Three main topics were emphasised: 1 City identity and identification with the city, 2 Culture as an essential part of and as an instrument for education, and 3 Culture as a sub-sector of the city's economy. To achieve certain goals in all three of these topics, several spearheads were chosen. One of them was Shareholdership. To a large extent a city functions best when the inhabitants feel responsible for the public domain, when they look upon themselves in a way as owners. This means that in this vision, the inhabitants are committed to what happens on the street and in the neighbourhoods where they live, and that they want to take an active part in this. The city government wants to heighten the feeling of being a shareholder by stimulating intercultural exchange and encouraging people to

7. *Het Geheugen van een Stad (the memory of a city)*. Vierstedenworkshop Stadsmusea (Workshop of city museums from four cities). Gent-Bijloekemuseum 23-24 November 2004. p. 107

8 David Fleming. *Making City Histories*, in *Making Histories in Museums*, ed. Gaynor Kavanagh, Leicester 1996, pp. 131-142. p.139

cross borders. It is clear that cultural heritage in a museum like the AHM can play an important part in this.

The content of the programme

What is a city museum? Some automatically think that it is synonymous with 'historical museum', and indeed, this is often the case. However, the exciting thing about city museums is that they can be very multifarious, including art collections, archaeological and historical objects and sometimes objects related to natural history. It is, therefore, necessary to be somewhat more precise. I would like to use here a description of Steven Thielemans, presented during a workshop attended by four city museums in Ghent in 2000: a city museum is a museum about and in the city. It is connected, in the sense of involved with both the strategy of the city government and with its citizens⁷.

Let's move now from the word 'museum' to the word 'city', a very important part of the generic name of our type of museum, because this is of course what we are all about. As I mentioned already at the beginning of this article cities everywhere in the world are becoming more and more important in our societies. In recent decades they have often been growing increasingly faster in terms of both space and population. There is high immigration and sometimes also emigration. Due to complicated factors

such as globalisation, fast transportation and modern methods of communication, cities also rapidly change economically and culturally. There is a great deal of literature on the city, written by a wide range of professionals like sociologists, economists, urban planners, architects and specialists in the field of cultural activities. The city is clearly a 'hot' spot.

How do city museums react to these changing cities? Are they capable and willing to 'work with all our city partners to ensure that museums and the inhabitants [...] are involved in a series of dialogues and joint initiatives, like David Fleming wrote in 1996?⁸

The conference started with two keynote speeches. The first was held by Dr. Michiel Wagenaar, a university lecturer at the Department of Geography and Planning of the University of Amsterdam. In his lecture, titled *The Urban Mosaic Townscapes and residential patterns in the Western world*, he spoke about people and places: about social topography and the built-up environment of the city; about how cities work like sorting machines in filtering the local populace to different locations. The system does not disperse residents at random over the urban domain. Income, status and ethnicity play a crucial role in explaining how someone finds their place in this urban mosaic.

Dr. Wagenaar explained how places will change over the years and how this is also determined by the

dominant political and economic system. He argued that when the pre-modern urban order collapsed under the twin forces of industrialisation and rapid urbanisation, two models of land use emerged that have continued to play an important role right up to the present, despite important changes after World War II. The first model is the so-called *laissez-faire* response, which is found predominantly in countries like England and later in the United States. The second model is the strong state response, found first of all in France, with Paris as a prominent example, but also in countries in Central and Southern Europe.

Professor Vanessa Schwartz, a historian of modern visual culture at the University of Southern California, presented the second keynote speech. Her subject was *Urban Icons*, a rather new field of study attempting to isolate a critical visual element in the construction of urban experience and identities, and also in the construction of extra-urban developments, such as e.g. nations, ideologies. One of the examples she elaborated in her lecture was the Eiffel Tower in Paris, as a prominent example of an important city icon⁹.

Neither of the keynote speakers works in a museum, but both have strong connections with museums or have a vivid interest in what city museums do.

The keynote speeches were used as introductions to the three main themes of the conference.

The first theme: Shaping the city

By collecting objects of interest and organising exhibitions and educational activities, the museum records parts of the history of the city. There is of course not one history of the city; many stories shed light on the city's history. The history of the city is dynamic; it is changing continuously.

Important questions were:

- In what way does the work of city museums relates to written histories of cities, in particular to the 'official' histories? Are we aware that we play a role in recording history? How complete do we want to be?

- What objects do we collect and how? Many museums occupy themselves with oral-history projects, recording memories and stories. What choices are made, which media are used, whose memories? How important is immaterial heritage?

- Are we concerned with the history of the entire city, or do we actually limit ourselves more to the historic centre? Do we emphasise the history of centuries ago or modern times?

- What is the relationship of city museums with other heritage institutions and services, such as archives, historic buildings and

9. The project is co-directed with Phil Ethington. The text of the speech of professor Schwartz is part of a special issue of *Urban History* (v.32, n. 1), May 2006 (Cambridge University Press) and its multi-media companion that can be accessed through Cambridge Journals Online: http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/history/urbanicons_companion/index.htm.

services, archaeological services etc.? Do we co-operate? How are our tasks demarcated?

- How do we choose the themes of our exhibitions and decide what to collect? Do we listen to others, to the non-museum world (target groups, the municipality ...)?

**The second theme:
Activating the city**

Do city museums consciously want to play an active part in the city? Several city museums have developed an outreach strategy to involve inhabitants of the city in the museum. In line with this strategy some museums take on an active role in the city, or in some parts of it, to improve the quality of life for example. Some museums are active outside their buildings, organising small exhibitions in neighbourhoods or by loaning objects to airports, banks, department stores etc. Why are they doing this, what are their objectives? What alliances are developing (e.g. with housing corporations, social organisations, businesses and municipalities)? Some museums deliberately present themselves as forums for discussions, art performances and as a dynamic part of the city.

Questions for this theme were:

- In what way do museums seek contact with the city and its inhabitants? What alliances are being forged? Does

the museum want to contribute to wider social objectives?

- To what extent do exhibitions function as a platform for discussion? In what way do museums involve groups or individuals in the compilation of exhibitions (or websites and educational programmes)?

- Do city museums play a part in what is nowadays called the 'creative' city, for example by co-operating with institutions for higher education, as a platform for artists or by commissioning assignments?

- In what way do city museums actively influence the heritage strategy of a city?

**The last theme:
Representing the city**

Every city evokes images. Inhabitants all have their own mental picture of the city. Tourist services often bombard tourists with specific, carefully chosen images. Tourists have seen the city on television and read books. Some images of the city are pleasant and socially acceptable, but other images refer to the darker, less pleasant aspects of the city. Cities also use images when competing with other cities for tourists, as well as for new businesses and economic activities etc. of new inhabitants. Is it possible to make a general analysis of how these images are chosen and of the role city museums play in this?

Here the following questions were asked:

- Tourist boards choose specific images of the city for their promotional activities. Is there any contact with city museums, do the museums participate in this? What similarities and differences are there between the images tourist boards choose and those manifested in city museums?
- Is it possible or desirable for city museums to aim to make an active contribution to dismantling specific stereotypes that the museum considers being undesirable or incorrect? Can they try to contribute to forming new stereotypes?
- In some cities a so-called 'heritage centre' informs tourists about the city. What should be the relationship between city museums and this type of activity?

To make the conference as interactive as possible each theme was subdivided in four parallel workgroups, with two presentations of case studies from international city museums. Each theme was introduced in a plenary lecture. This proved to be a very fruitful and interesting instrument for exchange of information and discussion. The participants could follow case studies from a large diversity of city museums in cities, such as Helsinki, Warsaw, St Petersburg, Venice, Vienna, London, Liverpool Amsterdam, Zoetermeer, Berlin, Lyon, Antwerp, Beirut, Addis Ababa, Meknès, and several others

Some results and conclusions of the conference¹⁰

The subject of the conference was evidently of real interest to many city museums. The speeches and the discussions made it clear that city museums are willing and able to approach and deal with this subject in many different ways. It is no easy task to distil the major points and main lines of argument from so many contributions by participants from 26 countries, without generalising somewhat, but I do think it is possible to identify a few main ideas.

Generally speaking it can be said that museums in different cities, mainly in Western Europe and the United States, have developed from a supply-oriented approach to a question-oriented approach in recent decades. A lot of energy is put into seeking new target groups, and into outreach work and public surveys. When choosing subjects for exhibitions, museum staff works in a question-oriented way as far as possible. Museums must be as accessible and welcoming as possible. The authority of the curator, so often taken for granted, is being questioned. The comment, 'The visitor can become the curator', during the paper on the plans for a city museum in Beirut was indicative of this.

In other city museums, like Warsaw and St. Petersburg, the emphasis is more on a reorientation of the picture of the past, which until

10. The complete text of the 29 lectures and the discussions is published in *City museums as centres of civic dialogue?* Amsterdam 2006.

recently was the 'official' version of history. Exhibitions and educational products are a means of prompting discussion by the public in the museum. There are also city museums, such as the one in District Six in Cape Town, which endeavour to refined chapters of history that have been suppressed or concealed. For these museums, working with memories and stories from the public is crucial, both in and outside the museum. Collection building, exhibitions and educational projects go hand in hand in this.

It is useful to reflect now somewhat more in detail on the diversity of papers given at the conference and to pay attention to the opinions raised during the discussions. A brief overview per theme follows of the main points raised.

Theme 1: Shaping the city

1. In a period when many museums agree that they must primarily be audience oriented and not collection oriented, what is the responsibility of the curator for recording the history of the city? The curator/museum must in any case take an independent stance as the public expects the museum to provide reliable information. The curator must provide the narrative framework for the story of the city. An important part of the content of the story may be the result of working with groups and organisations in the city. This co-operation can take on many

forms. Ultimately a joint evaluation of the results should follow.

2. How independent can city museums be in relation to the government? Clearly the answer to this will vary from country to country. It naturally makes a big difference whether the municipal government finances the museum, either completely or predominantly. In principle everyone agreed that museums must be as independent as possible in their stance and approach: they are devoted to long-term learning, not short-term political aims. In some countries, however, political pressure is so great that the situation is very different indeed. It is sometimes easier in these situations to present a particular vision of history in a temporary exhibition rather than in the permanent display. Sometimes, however, political programmes and the vision on museum policy do concur, like the necessity for an intercultural approach to history and cross-cultural dialogue. This is the case for example in Amsterdam and London. It is certainly advisable for city museums to enter into dialogue with the politicians of their city. Museums who actively seek contact with all kinds of groups in the city should not exclude politicians.

3. Museums must also record and present the recent changes in the city. Contemporary collecting is therefore essential. Co-operation with all kinds of parties is necessary: groups of immigrants and children, the business community, housing corporations,

developers and all those other groups who play a role in changing in the city. In addition a different form of co-operation is required between the various heritage sectors, such as museums, archives, libraries and historic organisations. Digital media, like websites, can provide an excellent joint gateway for this purpose. Contemporary collecting demands a critical revision of the role of the object. What is the relationship between the object and the documentation of the context? What is the relationship between the material and immaterial forms of heritage? Some argue strongly that contemporary collecting must conform to the existing profile of the museum regarding its older collections. Ethnography is an important disciple in contemporary collection building and there should possibly be more collaboration with experts in this field. The city museum of Helsinki is one of the few to have ethnographers in their staff.

4. The history of the city told by more than one museum. Participants shared the view that the history of the city is not only found within the walls of the museum. In several cities intensive co-operation between museums and other heritage institutions has developed in recent years. The idea is to tell the 'story' of the city in more than one place. Interesting examples were presented from Bruges and Antwerp. It is important for the different museums to profile

themselves. Agreements on making collections more mobile at the level of the city can play an important role here. In practice this approach is not always straight forward, as the cultural differences between the heritage sectors can be considerable. It takes time to be able to work cross culturally.

5. The role of artists in temporary and permanent exhibitions ought to be greater in the future. These could be visual artists but also story tellers. More than anyone, they are able to put emotions in the spotlight or introduce controversial subjects.

Theme 2: Activating the city

1. According to some, the city museum can and must function as a sort of workplace. Seen in this light the museum is a place where memories can be recaptured and recorded either individually or in groups. Museum staff leads this process, give support, and record the memories. This view of the museum means that memories of all kinds can be brought together. The discussions that may result can in turn prompt new memories or a new story about the past. The museum as a workplace, is by its very nature, dynamic. Relating memories and working together on the story of history can sometimes have a healing effect and contribute to recording parts of history that have been suppressed. By functioning as a workplace, the museum can provide a bridge between the usual academic visions of history

and personal memories and stories. This was particularly the case in the city museum of District Six, Capetown, in the plans for a city museum of Beirut.

2. There was a lot of discussion on outreach work and city museums. Contact can be made with new groups of people who do not go to museums through this type of work. These are mostly groups living in economically and socially deprived areas of the city. Co-operation with organisations, associations and people from these neighbourhoods is essential. It is crucial to set up and implement such projects together and not to present a ready-made plan. A museum does not usually have all the necessary expertise. This costs a lot of time and money. Above all, patience is essential: you must be prepared to work towards your ultimate goal through a process of trial and error. The museum staff does not usually have sufficient training in outreach work to be able to do this properly. Training museum staff, for example in the field of cross-cultural skills, or employing experts temporarily is then necessary. But how far should you go with this sort of work? Where is the dividing line with real social work? This is an important discussion point.

3. Several city museums try to activate interest in the urban heritage and the city's history outside the museum building. In co-operation with partners like tourist organisations, schools, archaeological associations etc, city museums are extending their

area of work. Historical tours of the city, small neighbourhood exhibitions and treasure hunts stimulate the interest of local residents and tourists. Interactive websites can add an extra dimension to this.

4. In a number of cases city museums also function as a discussion forum. The reputation of museums as places where authenticity is considered to be extremely important could be exploited more in this sort of activity.

5. There are city museums, for example in African countries, where the city museum and the phenomenon of the classical museum are not very well known. It is important for such museums to seek active partnerships with stakeholders to their foster their interest in the museum. Pilot projects can activate the interest of stakeholders and other target groups in their own history and urban heritage.

Theme 3: Representing the city.

1. How do museums divide their attention between the local and regional population and tourists in their work? All city museums are directed at the local population but also hope to attract tourists. City museums in large cities can achieve this more easily than those in smaller ones. What does the city government want? Tourism and culture are sometimes in the same portfolio at municipal level. This can be to the advantage of the museum's plans because policy is in the hands of one department. Sometimes the local

authority forces the city museum to choose for the tourist in the economic interests of the city. City museums try to follow their own policy and make this plain to the local authority.

2. People from outside the city often have a more positive image of the city than the local population. Some city museums make a conscious decision to try to change inhabitants' negative image of the city, for example, by temporary exhibitions and educational activities. This is done in consultation with the city council and others. In addition, information on less well-known parts of the city and historical topics must be made available to tourists. The city museum of Rotterdam presented stimulating examples of this during the discussion. This can rectify the one-sided, cliché image that tourists often have of the city. Working with tourist services on, for example, developing historical tours is one means of doing this. City 'icons' as described by Vanessa Schwartz and Philip Ethington in these proceedings should not be refuted or camouflaged. The city museum can make good use of them.

3. As well as positive images of the city, there are also negative images and negative subjects that are more or less taboo. There are various approaches to dealing with such subjects. You can choose to approach the issue from different perspectives, carefully considering all aspects, and let the viewer form his or her own opinion. Another approach is to set aside the

taboo and explicitly state your own opinion as a museum, as the Amsterdam Historical Museum did in the exhibition on prostitution in Amsterdam.

4. What risks do city museums take when they present controversial or consciously suppressed subjects from the past? Every city museum that takes, or is able to take, an independent stance can choose to do this. Reactions may be strong, varying from letters from regular museum visitors to public discussion. To what extent is there a danger that the museum will estrange its own public? Is that a bad thing and is it possible that the museum will attract completely new groups of visitors? The article on how Liverpool Museum chose to deal with the subject of the former transatlantic slave trade in the city sheds light on these issues.

What should we pay attention to in the coming years? I would like to name (in random order) a few areas of interest.

The classical division of roles between curators, educators and the public relations department is no longer sacrosanct. It appears that the task of the curator is moving from being an expert in the field of collection building and presentation to the role of facilitator or mediator in projects employing educational staff and sometimes PR staff on an equal basis in the project team. What is new is the role the visitor can play in this team, albeit at some distance. Several articles in this book

report on experiences with this approach, including the one on the East Amsterdam project of the Amsterdam Historical Museum. It seems to me that this process is still in the early stages and that in the coming years we must consciously seek to define further the different professional responsibilities.

A second area needing attention is the forging of partnerships and development of networks. As several of the conference papers and reports clearly show, the possibilities are enormous. What choices do we make when trying to reach new target groups, what partnerships are of strategic importance politically, what partnerships are unavoidable given the new developments in collection building and heritage management? One thing does appear to be certain - city museums can no longer operate alone; partnerships and networks are essential. Every city museum must follow a conscious strategy in this respect, whereby it will often be difficult to withstand the political pressure that is always present to a greater or lesser degree.

Expanding the expertise of the museum is a third issue requiring attention. Staff will need more training in the field of intercultural skills and insight as well as in fostering a cross-disciplinary attitude towards other heritage services such as archives, historic buildings and archaeology.

Fields like ethnography, sociology and social work should possibly be more strongly represented in city museums. Policy must pay special attention to the middle and higher levels of staff; they must be more representative of the population composition.

A fourth area requiring attention concerns the acquisition and presentation of the newest history of the city on the one hand and that of centuries ago on the other. Can or should contemporary collecting fit in with the existing framework of older collections. What should be done when the newest, often historical documentary collections differ radically from the older, for example, art collections? How can we make earlier history more interesting to as a wide a public as possible, who have little or no prior knowledge on this part of the city's history?

Finally, city museums should make more use of the opportunity to interchange the expertise they all have. In this period of rapid connections, both physical and virtual, the opportunities are there for the taking. This can also contribute to city museums adopting a more international approach on themes like immigration and emigration, the slave trade, racism etc. There are plans to research the possibilities for creating a virtual platform.

The conference clearly showed how much we could learn from each other. The network of the International Association of City Museums offers, as everyone knows, superb opportunities for this. Perhaps the city museums workgroup of ICMAH can in the future play a special role by setting up interdisciplinary pilot projects to investigate the more theoretical and practical issues that are of importance

in the city-museums world. A condition would have to be that the results are transferable. During the conference it was clear that museums often have theoretical ideas on, for example, policy with regard to the public or collections, but owing to a shortage of time and money, as well as a lack of museological expertise, cannot put these ideas into practice.