

ICOM Shanghai 2010

Museums for Social Harmony

Report from UMAC's 10th International Conference in cooperation with CIPEG, 7th – 12th November 2010, Shanghai, China, by vice chair Ing-Marie Munktel, Uppsala November 30, 2010.

“University Museums and Collections as Recorders of Cultural and Natural Communities”

University museums have long been charged with the responsibility for preserving, studying and making accessible to scholars and the public, collections of all kinds. The collections are the result of decades, or even centuries, of important research, excavations or expeditions. As a result artifacts, specimens or works of art may be from cultures that are remote from us in time and location. In today's society there are many questions about the collections in our university museums. Do they record the cultural and natural communities world wide? Why are our collections important? What do they teach us in the 21st century? How can collections be made relevant to today's students, scholars and public?

The UMAC committee had the first board meeting for the year on Monday, November 8. Our chair Dr Cornelia Weber welcomed the board and told us that we are now 200 members and 70 delegates from 23 countries that were present in Shanghai. We then discussed how to adopt UMAC's strategic plan to ICOM's new plan. Professor Peter Tirrell from Oklahoma University will work on this. The financial report showed that UMAC's economy is good and now allows us to develop a bibliography. The priorities for the coming three years were decided and they are as follows: more marketing and cooperation with other committees, to produce a survey of our museums via the Newsletter, maybe also an on-line exhibition as a master project. Most working groups are still functioning, like for example the Strategic group, the Publications group, the Advocacy group and the Research group. The delegates for the new board were presented and the voting took place at the AGM meeting on Wednesday November 10. New chair is Professor Hugues Dreyse, Strasbourg, France and

as vice chairs, Dr Ing-Marie Munktel, Uppsala Sweden and Dr Peter Stanbury, Sydney, Australia, were chosen.

Tuesday, November 9 and Wednesday, November 10 not less than 24 papers and 3 posters were presented:

The host from China, professor Wu Hong-zhou, talked over the title, “ Chinese College Museums current situation”. He told us that there are 200 university museums in China, half of which are open to the public and 6 are well known tourist attractions. Not less than 23 have museum studies and museology. The major problem is differences in resources for development, insufficient funding and low social status. He also stressed that there is a big lack of understanding as regards the function of museum within Universities. The young student Tong Jin reported that only 15% of the students were aware of their museums and only 5% have learned from the museums. Another student, Li Rong from Australia, reported from successful use of cultural heritage in connection with the world Expo 2010. There were also examples from South East Asia about how university museum collections were used in contemporary curatorial practice. In several papers the lack of funding and also the lack of access to collections was discussed. From the United States professor Silverman reported about decreasing budgets and that the value of collections is unknown. There was also a discussion about the repatriation of collections concerning different Indian tribes and new regulations coming up about this in the United States. Professor Lyndel B King, Minniapolis, presented the Mimbres (an Indian tribe 1000 years ago) collection of ceramics, and the risk of repatriating to unknown relatives of today. Graciela Weisinger, Argentina, talked about “Human remains in museums and their restitution”. She raised the question if human remains, i.e. archeological finds, should be used for public display. She also relayed that human remains were sometimes reburied in her country. Most of the audience seemed to think that we display human remains to learn more about their lives and that we display them with dignity and only when it is vital to understand a culture.

New examples of projects on Records of Academic communication were presented from colleagues in Germany and Italy. And finally a study tour to The Shanghai University of Medicine finished off our program.