REPORT

ICMEMO ANNUAL CONFERENCE
MILAN, JULY 04-08, 2016

ICMEMO Annual Conference

The General Conference of the International Council of Museums ([ICOM](#)) gathered more than 3,000 experts and museum professionals in Milan, Italy to discuss pressing issues in the museum and heritage sphere. Focused on "Museums and Cultural Landscapes", the triennial meeting took place from July 3-9, 2016 and included the annual conference of the International Committee of Memorial Museums in Remembrance of the Victims of Public Crimes (ICMEMO). During the meeting, ICMEMO members elected a new board and named Ophelia Leon as Chair and Jordi Guixé (European Observatory on Memories) and Thomas Lutz (Topographies des Terror) as Vice-Chairs.

Report by Claudia Sbuttoni, PhD student, Columbia University. Visiting fellow at EUROM
Abstracts of the presentations are available on [ICMEMO website](#).

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

Session 1
July 4, 2016 – MiCo (Milano Congressi)

The first ICMEMO session was organized by the [University of Exeter](#) and [Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique](#). It was opened by Karen Franklin and Ophelia Leon, Chair and Treasurer of the ICMEMO board, who introduced the remembrance of violent crimes and thanked those who helped organize and support the conference.

Nelly Bekus (University of Exeter) presented the [mass grave at Kuropaty](#) in the outskirts of Minsk (Belarus) and the museum of [ALZHIR](#) (Akmolinsk Camp for the Wives of the Traitors of the Motherland) in Astana (Kazakhstan). Bekus analyzed the institutional histories of these two sites for commemorating the victims of Stalinist repression and discussed their symbolic role both in the landscape and in their nation-states. Her focus lies not in the discussion of trauma and its overcoming but rather in "the ways and mechanisms that influence how the identity formed

within the previous Soviet system has been used in the reconstruction of post-Soviet Union states". Next, **Anar Khasenova** (Museum ALZHIR) highlighted the museum's activity on the specific memory of women-prisoners in the camp. Established May 31st, 2007 on the day of national repression, the museum serves as a tribute to the memory of those repressed during the Soviet period but also for the edification of the younger generation.

Barbara Thimm (Consultant in Organizational Development) discussed practicing democracy at memorial sites through the concept of "disconcerting sites", developed from her experience as a trainer in Belarus and Germany. She provoked the audience to think about their first memorial experience and encouraged those involved in memorial sites to reflect on their own personal perspective of this history and how this perspective impacts the way the topic is presented and spoken about, as well as the limit of tolerance and how one should interact with visitors. **Gruya Badescu** (University of Oxford) discussed how urban space can act as a mediator of memory, how to make sense of spaces of memory, and the shaping of war landscapes and *traumascapes*. Specifically, he explored the examples of the NATO bombing of Belgrade (1999) and the siege of Sarajevo (1992-1995). Some, like the Sarajevo tunnel, have assumed new functions as tourist attractions within the sphere of dark tourism. Others, including Belgrade's TV building and the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, inspire discussion and debate on how to handle the presence of ruins.

Ricardo Brodsky (Museum of Memory and Human Rights of Chile) introduced memory dilemmas and debates of political violence through the examples of Remembrance Park (Buenos Aires, Argentina), the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Santiago, Chile) and the sculpture "The eye that weeps" (Lima,

Peru). His presentation was specially focused on the role of victims and citizenry in the construction of these monuments and sites. Memories, he argued, are further proof of the relationship between the past and present and facilitate a way to make amends, even if only symbolically, through their political and aesthetic complexity. **Roberto Fuertes** (ICOM Chile) described the experience of the Peace Park Villa Grimaldi (Santiago de Chile) to propose a didactics of trauma, based on the representation and transmission of narratives of memory and human rights. He also discussed how museums should engage visitors, their role in the context of human rights, and how they occupy a privileged space to address social issues in the public space.

The first session was closed with a discussion on the issue of memorials that are graffitied, being repurposed in a contemporary and political way. Do we clean graffiti off or do we listen to the public? What does this teach us about memorials and memorialization? One of the main arguments was that monuments are politically active testimony - even if they are not speaking, they communicate something to the population. When graffitied, monuments retain emotional power over the collective memory of certain groups.

The ethical and educational issue of Dark Tourism

Sessions 2 and 3
July 5, 2016 – MiCo (Milano Congressi)

The two panels of the second day were organized in collaboration with the International Committee for Museums of Arms and Military History (ICOMAM). They focused on the ethical and educational issue of Dark Tourism.

Session 2 was introduced by Julie Higashi, co-chair of ICMEMO and Professor at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, Japan. She gave the floor to the first speaker, **Jörg Skriebeleit**, director of Flössenburg Concentration Camp Memorial Site, presented "Thana-Tourism: Journeys to the Dead". He referenced the International Memorial Museum Charter and asserted that memorial museums are responsible to protect the dignity of victims from all forms of repression. Next, **Julie Higashi** spoke on behalf of **Ewa Kowalska**, director of the Katýn Musuem in Warsaw. She presented the new face of the Polish museum, named after the Katýń massacre, a series of mass executions of approximately 22,000 Polish soldiers and police by Soviet NKVD forces in April and May of 1940 in the Katýn Forest. For decades, it was forbidden to speak of this mass murder. The panel finished with the presentation of **Magdalena Sasal,** coordinator for promotion and educational programs at the Katýń Museum, who focused on the ethical dimension of treating the museum as a tourist attraction. Polish students are increasingly unaware and uninformed about the massacre as time goes on, and the museum seeks to address this issue through age-specific presentations.

The **discussion** after Session 2 touched on the tension between ICMEMO and ICOMAM in their categorization of the trauma they present: whether suffering is labeled or categorized as 'sacrifice' or 'victimization'. It was discovered that there is much more fluidity in the use of these two terms, and that even military and arms museums include words like 'victim' in their narrative. Once again, the topic of spontaneous memorials was discussed, compared to the history of building specific sites of museum memorials. Additionally, the issue of "Selfies with Auschwitz" was discussed, and the group spoke about their own experience with young people who do not acknowledge the weight of the history being presented, and mused whether their lack of sensitivity stems from the lack of individuality in museums. Others echoed the sentiments of Monday's keynote speaker of ICOM conference, **Orhan Pamuk**, who expressed that museums should be like novels, containing small stories that touch you and leave an imprint.

Eva-Sofi Ernstell, director of the Army Museum of Sweden, introduced the third session of the second day. She reminded the audience of the need to always keep and preserve memories for to erase them would give a false idea of the past.

Kirsten John-Stucke, director of Kreismuseum Wewelsburg, presented the Wewelsburg Castle as an attraction pole of Dark Tourism. She described the difficult history of the castle, used by the SS under Heinrich Himmler, and how the memorial site confronts the esoteric and mysterious "big secret cloud around the castle". According to John-Stucke, the complicated history of the site is confronted with a variety of educational programs for youth and adults alike, which give visitors the ability to form their own opinion about

history. Next, **Ralf Raths**, director of [Deutsches Panzermuseum](), discussed the German Tank Museum as a failed 'dark' exhibition. Although the museum deals with a 'dark' topic, Raths explains that it is only 'gray' according to the [Stone Spectrum of Dark and Light Tourism]() (2006). Surveys of visitors are currently being conducted in order to decide how best to handle suffering and death in the museum. By adding darkness to the exhibit, rather than showing the machines without explanation, Raths hopes "to bring balance to the light side".

The discussion that followed their presentations focused on the degree to which museums should listen to their visitors' wants and suggestions. Although museums take into consideration these opinions more than in the past, have museums gone too far in catering to their visitors? Additionally, some raised the issue of presenting the tanks out of context. Raths responded that tanks are not to be liked or eroticized in the museum, and by adding histories (both positive and negative aspects) we can confront this issue. The museum needs to reflect that tanks are still used today, and will be used in the future

The session followed with the presentation of **Chhay Visoth**, director of [Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum]() (Cambodia), who discussed the museum's efforts to bring Peace Education to young Cambodians and asked the help of scholars in the audience. Only 3% of the museum's visitors are local students, while the rest are international visitors. He hopes students will become messengers and spread knowledge to others through educational programs and the use of social media. Finally, **Meysam Abdoli**, curator at [Malek National Library and Museum]() (Tehran), explained that Iran contains 31 war museums, one per province. According to him, the appearance of war heritage

means that the influence of war was felt in many domains: cinema, poetry, museums, theatre. "Before the war, there was a more archeological approach to heritage but now that has changed", he concluded.

ICMEMO Member Presentations
Session 4
July 6, 2016 – MiCo (Milano Congressi)

Daniel Dratwa, Session Co-chair, introduced the third day of the ICMEMO conference, presented in the Pecha Kucha style. The first presentation was delivered by **Gabriela Römer**, professor at Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (Argentina). She spoke about memory, identity, patrimony, and commemorations, stressing the central issue of identity in memorial sites. She focused her discussion on "[La Perla]()", one of the 340 clandestine centers of detention in Argentina. According to Römer, places like La Perla show how a multitude of microhistories can help paint the larger picture of the period. "Through increased comprehension and empathy, we give meaning to the past and solidify the construction of identity in the present".

Sigal Meirovich, Art Historian and Professor at SEK University, presented the [Museum of Memory and Human Rights]() in Chile as an example of a cultural landscapes for memorial pedagogies. Established to prevent further attacks on human dignity, the museum follows recommendations established by the Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The museum exists as a space

that contributes to the culture of human rights and democratic values. Next, **Laura Edythe-Coleman**, a [Museum Informacist](), presented curatorial reflections on the interpretation of difficult histories. "All museums", said Coleman, "handle contested cultural heritage, objects imbued with meaning or *numen*". She understands that although all museums are unique, curators must create a curatorial voice through gatekeeping, localization, and the significance of space. She recommended that we must "curate the curators" in order to "facilitate an experience to stand witness to shared history".

Finding the correct tone to speak on GULAG nationwide was the focus of the presentation by **Anna Stadinchuk**, Deputy director for development of the [GULAG History State Museum]() and member of the Association of Memory Museums of Russia. Her goal is to tell the whole story of gulags, presenting the history in full by working with a network of museums in order to encourage the discussion of this topic. Then, **Katarina Babić**, Senior curator and art historian in Serbia, presented the [Memorial Park Kragujevački oktobar and Museum](). The park contains many sculptures and monuments dedicated to the memory of Serbs killed by Wehrmacht troops in October 1941, and the museum (opened in 1976) collects studies and artifacts of significance.

Jane E. Klinger, Chief Conservator of [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum](), discussed artificial landscapes and meaning. With 2 million visitors per year, the USHMM is moving toward creating discourse on man's inhumanity to man. Klinger explained that "memorialization is not a static activity, but rather provides an encounter, purposefully evocative of

meaning in a way that underlines instability". The museum seeks to transform memorialization of a specific event into a universal call for action against all infringements on civil liberties and human rights around the world. **Dario Disegni**, President of the [National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah](), presented the forthcoming museum as an organism to recognize the richness of exchange between Jews and non-Jews in Italy. The museum, which will not be based on a permanent collection but will work as an interpretation center, aims to share knowledge and increase consciousness about Italian Jewish history and culture, intercultural dialogues, peace-building, and intends to illustrate the originality of Italian Jewish history in the larger context of Europe and the Mediterranean. The site of the museum will be the former prison in Ferrara.

The morning session ended with a the presentation of **Nayat Karakose**, Program Coordinator of the Hrant Dink Foundation (Turkey), on challenging the social amnesia and politics of oblivion through the [Hrant Dink site of memory]() in Istanbul. The site is a work in progress and is dedicated to the memory and legacy of assassinated Armenian journalist Hrant Dink who established Agos, the first Armenian newspaper in Turkey, in 1996. The site, he explained, will show that a murder intended to silence has proven counterproductive and encouraged the Turkish people to question and protest. "It will be a site of memory, hope, transformation and *parrhesia* (the one who feels obligation to speak the truth even at the expense of one's safety)", said Karkose. Its goal is to promote reflection, interaction, and historical dialogue in order to fill the gap in Turkey's official curricula.

Reproducibility of Memorial Heritage, challenges and debates
July 6, 2016 – Casa della Memoria
Session 5

The afternoon session, organized in collaboration with EUROM, took place at Casa della Memoria in Milan, headquarters of Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia (INSMLI) and four other memorial associations. The session was opened by **Markus Moors** (Session co-chair).

Kateryna Chuyeva Ihor Poshyvailo, of the Maidan Museum (Ukraine), discussed how the initiative transformed from an NGO to a state museum. Although the museum is founded, it is still in its infancy and consists only of a director and assistant. The aim is to remember the victims of the Maidan protests, educate and communicate a culture of freedom. Next, **Carla Prat Perxachs**, of Museo Memoria y Tolerancia, (Mexico), discussed the creation and interpretation of significance, or finding meaning in objects. She explored transforming things into objects for "an object is not in itself a form of reality, but a product, a result or equivalence". In that sense, she explained how museums assumes a certain responsibility for what objects they present. "Objects can help offer authenticity", she said, "but museums should take caution because objects are always socially-possessed".

The architect **Philip Norman Peterson**, of Holzer/Kobler studio (Zurich), presented the new exhibit designed for the Büchenwald museum. The exhibit also focuses on how the political system was able to activate itself and how such a situation of violent crime was created in order to serve as a warning for today. While keeping the original building volume,

the space has been transformed, shifted horizontally in order to divide the exhibition into two distinct spaces.

Erik Somers, of NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (Amsterdam), discussed how the culture of memories of the Holocaust and the persecution of Jews has developed in the Netherlands through the history of the site of Westerbork. After the camp was used during the process of Dutch decolonization of East Indonesia, the remnants were destroyed in the 1960s. With the rise of anti-Semitism in the 1980s came the establishment of the museum and the need to assign meaning to the past and represent human rights issues. In the 1990s, information was added to focus more on the history of the camp itself and the commemoration of Jewish victims.

Kornelis Spaans, of The Gaon Jewish State Museum in Vilnius (Lithuania), explained a project to establish a genuine Holocaust museum in the historic centre of the city. The new museum will be built in the former Jewish ghetto, taking the place of the current museum which is in poor condition. According to Spaans, although Holocaust suffering has been overshadowed by Soviet occupation and terror in Lithuania, there are plans to establish a new Holocaust museum once funding is secured in order to amplify the voices of those seeking to remember the Holocaust.

The last part of the session was a roundtable discussion on the Reproducibility of Memorial Heritage. It began with a presentation by **Jordi Guixé**, director of the EUROM, and **Marcello Flores**, director of INSMLI, who analyzed how current debates on memory issues in the European Union label public policies on memory as a reaction to the European project crisis. While tension between different memories strains threaten to

exclude the diversity of past conflicts, Guixé encouraged "new methods to develop memory politics based in fostering and defending the citizenship participation, new ways of transmission and participation". Flores argued against the neutrality and permanence of memory, stating "memory is no longer a storehouse but a reconstruction of the past". They concluded by raising some questions on identity. "In the past, memory was constructed by the political elite and monuments were used to reinforce national identity. But what identity should we purport today, identity which often causes people to commit horrible deeds in the name of their nation?", said Flores. "We must address this issue but identity remains an important facet of memory, and historians should take care to be "traitors of identity", to not have loyalty to a specific identity in order to search for plural truths."

Next, **Simon Levis Sullam**, Professor at the University of Venice, and **Ilaria Porciani**, Professor at the University of Bologna, presented some issues on the memory of Jews in Italy, from the Venezia ghetto to Jewish persecution during the Second World War. The first Ghetto in history was established for Jews in Venice. According to Levis Sullam, while Italy was often represented as a paradise for Jews, the ghetto shows that this was not the case as it has become a metaphor for a space of segregation, isolation and demarcation. These sites of memory, the ghetto and its long afterlife as a metaphor for segregation, as well as Fossoli di Carpi and the Trieste rice factory, serve to provide a different view of Italy and demonstrate the weakness of the Italian collective memory. Porcini focused on the memory of forced migration and the new trend of museums to focus on victimhood. She suggests that we should compare Italian museums dealing with migration across borders with the German and French examples in order

to unblock or unfreeze time, and allow the museums to exist as catalysts that trigger oral memorial projects and encourage the remembrance of memory.

To close, **Paolo Pezzino**, Professor at the University of Pisa, and **Stefanie Endlich**, of the Universität der Künste (Berlin) discussed memory, witnesses and the process of memorialisation. Pezzino spoke on the civilian massacres of Sant'Anna di Stazzema and Marzabotto, committed by Nazi Germany, in order to address how institutional politics of memory, collective memory of communities, and eyewitnesses can meet in dialogue. There was no recognition of the massacres until the 1970s and the number of deaths at Marzabotto was only established in the 1990s. In the literature on the massacres, there is no distinction between memory and history, "the former becomes the latter" while Resistance literature leaves little room for these victims' memories. Endlich argued that the role of witnesses ought to be more precise.

Endlich also spoke of the difference between memorial museums and monuments, the latter often self-financed and involving survivors to a greater degree in West Germany, while East Germany established large state memorials in order to highlight the anti-Fascist basis of the new state. Although the public memory was initially well-known, it soon faded in the post-war only to be rediscovered and transformed through Topographie des Terrors. Young people looked toward survivors in order to open up a transgenerational, contemporary dialogue. "The work of witnesses in memorial museums is of utmost importance", she said, and "while the opportunity to speak to witnesses is fading, archives and collections have been created to preserve these narrations in an accessible way."

Ex-Campo Fossoli · Museo del Deportato · Modena

Site visits
July 7, 2016

Marzia Luppi, Director of both Ex-Campo Fossoli and the Museo del Deportato in Carpi, arranged an English-language tour of Fossoli. At first, the camp existed as a POW camp for English soldiers from the North African campaign. After the Armistice in September 1943, it was divided in two, one for northern Italian Jews and the other for political opponents. An SS visit in February 1944 resulted in Nazi takeover of the Jewish part of the camp. From 1948-1952 the camp was used as a community of orphans (Nomadelfia), and until the 1970s by refugees of World War II. In 1984, the Italian government gave the camp to the city of Fossoli and works began in 2001. Primo Levi was in this transit camp from January to February of 1944, before he was transferred to Auschwitz.

Next, the group visited the Museo del Deportato in Carpi. The visit was guided by architect Alberto di Belgiojoso, founder of BBPR Architects Studio (Banfi, Belgiojoso, Peressutti, Rogers**)** which in 1973 designed the museum located in the historical building of Palazzo dei Pio.

Belgiojoso explained that his father was sent to Fossoli camp, and later Mauthausen and survived. The outside space contains the names of deportation camps in Nazi-occupied territory. Inside, quotes from letters of deportees to family members carved into the walls "lets the people speak" and creates a clean and simple style that evokes empathy from the viewer. Another room is dedicated to the 14,310 Italian Jews (those known to Italy in 1960) whose names are carved into the walls as well and whose multitude translates the magnitude of the situation

"There are two kinds of memorials", he explained, "those that provide information, documentation, numbers, photographs, and those that focus on works of art that communicate the incubus." When asked what he would change about the museum if he were to redo it in 2016, Belgiojoso answered that he wouldn't include more information because he wants visitors to "act on feelings". Although he would make the information that already exists at the entrance of the museum more visible, he champions the emotional aspects of the museum.

The day was closed with a walking tour of Modena by Claudio Silingardi (Istituto storico di Modena), and a visit to the Synagogue of Modena.