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Cultural Landscapes and Museums

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The three years of preparation for the ICOM General Conference, which was held in Milan in 2016, required both aspects of the conference theme to be considered: cultural landscapes *and* museums. An in-depth theoretical study of the concept of cultural landscape has finally led to including that of the museum. This, in turn, led to the conclusion that in the future emphasis should be laid on landscapes. For this reason, in the title of the present article, cultural landscapes are evoked first, and museums second.

What has changed? Instead of wondering how museums can open up to territory, context and community, and what they can do for the landscape, our point of departure is that today, at all latitudes and longitudes, the safeguarding of cultural landscapes in their diversity constitutes a general priority and that this requires all available instruments, including museums, to be rethought.¹

In this article, I will first consider the concept of 'cultural landscape' and then the reasons why cultural landscapes are an inevitable priority. I will then highlight the aspects that are or may become part of cultural heritage, and proceed to examine the ways of protecting and transmitting cultural heritage, including, in this context, the transformations that museums must implement if they mean to play an active role in safeguarding landscape.

What is a landscape?

In recent years, we tried to depart from the literal or ordinary understanding of landscape definitionally, which—in keeping with the origins of the term—associates it with something beautiful, especially if natural, to be admired and preserved, like ‘postcard landscapes,’ although these are only part of the many existing landscapes.

One of our points of departure was the UNESCO definition of cultural landscapes. We discarded the distinction between natural landscape and cultural landscape, recognising that in their variety they represent ‘the combined works of nature and man’ and ‘express a long and intimate relationship between peoples and their natural environment’ (see UNESCOa online). We also accepted and shared the approach to landscape as inherently connected to its social and cultural perception, in correlation with the 2000 European Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe, which proposes, to consider the landscape as ‘a certain part of the land, as perceived by people’ (Council of Europe 2005).

This is why we distinguished between ‘territory’ and ‘landscape,’ even if in common usage the words tend to be used as synonyms (Jalla 2004). Territory is the physical and tangible dimension of the landscape, with its characteristic natural and/or anthropic features. Landscape is not merely the image of a territory, even if the term has long been and continues to be used to refer to a painting, drawing or photographic representation. The term ‘landscape’ refers ‘both to a way of viewing the environment surrounding us and to this environment itself,’ and ‘the appeal of the idea of landscape is that it unifies the factors at work in our relationship with the surrounding environment.’ This definition led us to conclude that landscape is the present as we perceive it, and that landscapes ‘whether of aesthetic value or not, provide the setting for our daily lives; they are familiar and the concept of landscape links people to nature, recognizing their interaction with the environment’ (Rossler and Tricaud 2009, p. 17).

All of these elements, contained in the Resolution on Cultural Landscapes adopted at the end of the Milan General Conference 2016, are found in various documents and texts drafted prior to the Conference itself (ICOM 2016a) .

Why is landscape a priority?

Landscape is the great priority of our time, if not a real emergency. In truth, it has been so for a long time, and even the history of ICOM shows how museum professionals have been concerned about the impact of the great contemporary transformations of cultural heritage (Jalla 2015). Climate change, population growth, migrations, conflicts and new technologies are increasingly affecting global landscape.

If each of us thinks of the continent, country, city or region in which we live, we can evaluate how intensely and deeply the landscape around us has changed in the last half century alone. There is no corner of the world that is as it was for the previous generation, and in just the space of their lifetime, the generations born after the World War II have been the protagonists and witnesses to an acceleration of the context—global and local—in which they used to live and currently live.

The rhythm and extent of these transformations reinforce the need to compare and adapt heritage policies with the present and global dimension of the reality within which they operate, and the contradictions and conflicts that mark the landscape of which cultural heritage is part.

Landscape and cultural heritage

Cultural heritage is an integral part of the landscape that surrounds it. Heritage is the present of a more or less distant past, as a memory, tangible and intangible, or from other times. As such, heritage is one part of a whole that, out of historical and social consensus, is protected and preserved for its overall symbolic value as a material or immaterial testimony of a civilisation's history, so as to pass it on to future generations.

The process of transforming a thing into a 'heritage object' inevitably requires its enucleation, separation and extraction from its original context, whether it is a physical act (as is the case for tangible and mobile 'musealised' objects), or a mental one (as is the case both for immovable goods and intangible goods).² It is an operation that heritage professionals, scholars or even people who share a given culture, in the case of tangible heritage, also do just by looking. It is the process that corresponds to the recognition, detection and identification of an object as a heritage object and that depends on the vision they have of cultural heritage in the general sense.

When an object is physically isolated from its context (by a fence, if *in situ*, by a building or by a showcase in a museum) to be protected and exposed to view as a heritage object, and identified as such (by a sign, a plaque, a caption, etc.), heritagisation also involves non-specialists, society and the public. The same is true of intangible goods. Perhaps the most obvious example is given by food and food cultures. From their initial status of individual or collective 'objects of affection', pertaining to an oral or written tradition and transmitted directly and informally, they became 'heritage goods' subjected to heritage-oriented forms of protection and safeguarding, that is to say, cultural objects in their own right.³

The enucleation, separation and extraction of goods from their contexts corresponds to their crystallisation into a state, in the name of the more justified need to preserve them in their integrity, to which an element of consecration is associated with their qualification as 'cultural goods', depriving heritage of that vital confusion with the cultural landscape these objects are part of, confining it to a sphere—mental, if not physical—and separate, far removed from a common, shared feeling (Babelon and Chastel 1994, p. 108).

Are there alternatives to a heritage that is constantly threatened by development, an ignorance of its values, economic interests or the growing gap between needs and resources? Another approach to cultural landscapes can be envisaged, giving priority to the cultural landscape and articulating for cultural heritage protection and preservation practices that take into account the need to minimise the extraction and the isolation of cultural goods from their original contexts, to confine them in separate spaces. This approach requires to maintain, as far as possible, heritage—in the vital context of the landscape—with the inextricable intertwining of past and present that characterises it. This is a conceptual perspective rather than an operational one. The next section will elicit how this is done, first by analysing the process of producing (or constructing) cultural heritage.

Producing heritage

The 'heritage' logic is altogether *exclusive*, because it extrapolates selected objects from their context, *authoritarian*, because it entrusts formally invested specialists with the power to determine the cultural value of the goods and *fragmented*, because it is differentiated according to the typologies of the goods and the scientific knowledge associated with them. If all this is true, the alternative lies essentially in on the most minimal enucleation of goods from their context possible, which relies on the recomposition of the heritage in order to restore its unity, and an integrated set of relations.

These are ideas that have been circulating in our field for at least 40 years. Nevertheless, they proved unable to establish themselves to date because, on a national and international level, standards have hindered their implementation. In addition, a number of culture and power patterns have only very recently been questioned on an international level. The 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage articulated the concept of cultural heritage as 'cultural' and 'natural' heritage, segmented into subcategories (monuments, agglomerations, sites for its tangible elements, natural monuments, geological and physiographic formations, natural sites or natural areas for its intangible elements).

In 2003, the concept of 'intangible heritage' was added to the main definition when UNESCO approved the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which included a new set of cultural goods: 'intangible' goods (UNESCO 2003). Prior to that, UNESCO had updated its approach with the approval in 1992 of the Guidelines for the Recognition and Protection of Cultural Landscapes and their inclusion in the World Heritage List (UNESCO 2001). However, they were unable to produce feedback on the Convention of 1972, merely creating a new category of goods: cultural landscapes. In response, ICOM decided to focus on the theme of museums and cultural landscapes for the 2016 Milan General Conference, to elucidate the role museums are to play in protecting and valorising cultural landscapes. This logic comes from a 2005 document, which only came into force in 2011 when approved in Faro (Portugal): the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Council of Europe 2009).

The Faro Convention (2005)

The Faro Convention proposed an innovative approach to cultural heritage, both in terms of its definition and identification. According to the Convention, cultural heritage consists of: 'a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions.' It also 'includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time.'

The notion of 'resources', which encompasses environment as a whole, does not distinguish between tangible and intangible heritage, but above all entrusts the identification of heritage to people, and more specifically to the 'heritage communities', i.e. 'people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations.' It is explicitly recognised that, before the law, cultural heritage is identified on a social level and on the basis of its value, which is attributed by a given community evolving over time to become a 'heritage' community (Melot 2005, pp. 5-10).

Heritage communities must operate within the 'framework of a legal action', which alone may endow a work requiring standards and rules, means and apparatus, legitimacy and continuity. From this point of view there is nothing utopian in a logic that turns traditional models on their heads. It is actually firmly based on an obvious, even undervalued principle: the most effective protection of heritage has never been guaranteed by the albeit essential existence of standards and rules, means and apparatus, but rather by a more or less widespread social consensus on its value. This, indeed, is the only way to guarantee its preservation as well as its transmission. Public interest in whether cultural heritage corresponds to it or belongs to it remains an abstract concept, and in the end an unnecessary one.

From the Siena Charter to the Siena Charter 2.0

This approach, which is an indisputable legacy from New Museology long before that of the Faro Convention, informed and directed the drafting of the *Siena Charter on Museums and Cultural Landscapes*, in preparation for the ICOM General Conference in Milan. The Charter proposed to open up museums to context and community, extending the responsibilities of museums to cultural landscapes, having an eye for the present as well as for the past, and employing a logic of participation in managing the cultural heritage (ICOM 2016b and 2016c).

Within ICOM, the drafting of this document triggered much debate, as it focused on the museological and museographic discussions of the relation between museums and context (Jalla 2015). This led to a reinterpretation of the history of museums. Three ages of the museum were identified. The point made was that the horizons of museology, in determining their theoretical and practical scope, have defined real cultural landscapes. These differed in time and space: the 'territories', physically and ideally delimited, populated and animated by the figures that contributed to creating, modifying and inhabiting them.

Assuming as a criterion to identify these landscapes the relationship between museums and context, it was concluded that there were essentially three types of landscape. The first type is limited to the museum and its collections, the second type is extended to the cultural heritage and finally the third type is focused on a visitor-oriented perspective and on audience development through the renewal of museum communication.⁴ Each of them also corresponds to an age of the museum: an ideal age, because every age leaves a sediment in places and institutes that lasts well beyond their time. Thus, in every era there are more museum landscapes side-by-side, some already 'fossils', others are still 'living', while other new and different landscapes appear on the horizon, as a reality or as a tendency.

The three ages of the museum⁵

The first age: museum and collections landscape

Until the mid-20th century, the horizon of museology remained circumscribed to the space defined by the collections and the building that were designed to accommodate them. It took a long time for them to come into being, from Samuel Quiccheberg's *Inscriptiones*, published in 1565, or Caspar Friedrich Neickel *Museographia*, published in 1727, or even from the rather late birth of the modern museum in the second half of the 18th century.

This horizon, contested only by a few voices, such as that of Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy in 1796 and a few others between the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, defined the landscape of museology throughout the early age of the modern museum. It consisted of the museum's landscape and collections, both physical and ideal, inscribed and enclosed within museum walls. Museum specialists became a new breed of professionals responsible for the protection of monuments and other goods preserved *in situ*.

In addition, theoretical and practical exchanges focused on the aims and functions of museums, their internal organisation and on the preservation, care and presentation of collections. While distinguishing and increasingly distancing itself from collecting issues, as disciplines, museology and museography came to distinguish themselves from mere collecting issues. Yet, they have ultimately not distanced themselves from their horizons at the very moment when they have chosen to separate museum goods from their context of origin, intentionally creating a universe different to and distinct from this: the museum context (Mairesse and Desvallées 2011, pp. 582-3).

The appeal of the product of both of these works of decontextualisation, delocalisation and construction of new sets is indisputable. Collecting endows it with an aura of legitimacy, as collecting accepts and enhances, precisely, the fictitious character of its product: the collection. By contrast, museology and museography have focused more and more on the issue of how to compensate for perpetuation by re-contextualising the 'heritagisation' of goods.

This led to a recurring reflection on the relationship between museum and context, and the study and implementation of multiple means to recreate—at least virtually—a link between museum goods and their original backdrop. In most cases these have remained and persist as an expression of a mode of action entirely within the museum and its logic, from a predominantly ‘museum-oriented’ perspective, which mainly characterises the cultural landscape of the museum in its first age (Jalla 2015).

The second age: cultural heritage landscape

In the 1970s, the criticism of the ‘collection museum’ became so radical that the existence of that institution was questioned on a global scale. Thus, the second age of the museum came about. It was characterised by a new type of museum landscape: a landscape that programmatically superseded the museum walls in order to encompass the entire surrounding cultural and natural heritage that existed outside of it. New figures emerged, such as ecomuseums, ‘extended’ museums, ‘territorial’ museums, all united by the desire to connect the museum to its context: to a territory, a community, and a cultural heritage.

The decontextualisation and delocalisation of the goods from museum theory and practice in the past sought to replace *in situ* preservation wherever possible. The museum has been given the task of thinking and operating in an increasingly ‘context-oriented’ perspective, assuming direct responsibility for sites, monuments, territorial portions characterised by a ‘heritage’ value. When it did not take the form of a ‘context museum’—that is, of a portion of an overtly musealised space—the museum was asked not only to enhance its collections, but to extend its responsibility to heritage as a whole. It thus assumed the form of a ‘centre of interpretation’ to enhance its historical, cultural and natural context, rather than its collection.

Active players in this new landscape also changed. Indeed, the museum of the second age was also a museum founded on community participation, which in turn was no longer simply seen as a passive recipient of museum activities, but as a protagonist in the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage. What occurred in museums was also happening on a broader scale: the ‘democratisation of culture’ that had inspired the educational activity of the museum of the first age, was replaced by a perspective based on the ‘democracy of culture’ and made to coincide in the museum with the active involvement of the community in its management (Gattinger 2011). The tradition of ‘friends of the museum’ was coupled with the work of volunteers who, inside and outside the museum, began to join more and more professionals in their work, or implemented activities as museum managers, thus contributing to the creation of a new museum landscape on a global scale.

The relationship of this new museum landscape to its context is no longer comparable to that of the first age museum. Much like protected species and natural parks, museums and surrounding portions of territory became subject to a special legal and tangible protection system. Thus they were transformed into distinct ‘heritage islands’ that needed to be protected, preserved and made accessible to the public.

In the 1970s also, a new vision of heritage was established that encompassed cultural goods, which until then were considered more or less unworthy of specific protection (Heinich 2009, pp. 15-34). This broadening of perspective led to increasingly frequent talk about museum and territory, identifying it, beyond facts and ideas, with heritage. The focus, at this stage, was still more on the local past than the present, on the past local community more than the present one. However, this new museum landscape remained a minority landscape. It involved only one part of the museums, excluding the great institutions, and only minimally affected the existing ‘museum collections’, anchored as it was to a predominantly—if not totally—museum-oriented vision (Mairesse 2000, pp. 42-43).

The third age: new museum landscape

The dawning of a third age of the museum had taken place over a single decade. It became more focused itself, favouring once again a 'museum-oriented' vision. However, this was not a nostalgic stance. The 1970s not only questioned the relationship between museums and context, but their erecting of temples, the disregard for the role of the public, the 'collection-oriented' rather than 'visitor-oriented' nature of many museums, their rigidity, the shortcomings of their communication with respect to publics other than those of the past.

Criticism of the 1970s led museums to reflect on their social role, and to renew and reorganise themselves using quality standards, update the presentation of collections, develop communication and give new impetus to the educational and teaching offer. The results, positive in terms of credit, attention and even success with the public, are obvious. It is clear that since the 1980s, the widespread prejudice against museums as antiquated places has been receding.

Updating our conception of the museum was certainly part of the new focus on its relationship to the context as much as to the presentation and interpretation of collections, as well as its relationship to visitors, users, and to those who are inelegantly defined as the 'non public' (Fleury 2004). While this third age of the museum has been rich in critical thinking on past and innovative proposals for the future, it would be a mistake to consider the third age of the museum as a regressive phase as to the trends of the 1970s, although it has been characterised by media and commercial degeneration. Working against these latest trends is the reality and perspective of a fourth age of the museum. This reality is exacerbated by the current context of economic crisis that has reduced public support for museums and centred on the economic success of museum activities. This new age is characterised by a museum landscape that is increasingly integrated into the overall cultural landscape.

The fourth age of the museum

The very nature of the cultural landscape requires its governance to be the subject of overall (sustainable) development policies, which consequently include the safeguarding of its original characters in their multiplicity and diversity.

In a globalised world where threats to the future of humanity itself are ever increasing, cultural landscapes—as understood in their broader sense—should be embraced as a fundamental resource for a sustainable future. This is true of all cultural landscape types, including those that must be radically modified because they are a threat and not a resource for the future: landscapes to be restored, repairing the damage produced by development as much as possible, those to be safeguarded or protected in their entirety. With respect to this global perspective, museums can offer diverse contributions.

1/ Museums may maintain and develop their historical role as an institution and centre around which preservation, research and communication of tangible and intangible traces of humanity and its environment revolve. They would therefore be able to develop their vocation of placing museum objects (mainly tangible, mobile, displayable) in relation to their contexts of origin (i.e. to the cultural landscapes from which they are produced and expressed) to stimulate attention on the latter instead of the objects themselves, as is still usually the case today.

While remaining consistent with a traditional conception of the well-established museum, museums have a duty to deal much more than they have in the past with the cultural landscape that surrounds them in at least two directions. Firstly, they contribute through their growth and presentation of collections with objects that testify to their contemporaneity, identifying them within the context in which they act, and not falling back on themselves and the past. Secondly, they challenge the public's representations of heritage, of the communities they belong to, and of the society of their own time. All museums can be open to the present. They can actively participate in the construction of a constantly evolving cultural heritage. At the same time, they must develop this action through a continual dialogue on the way communities perceive heritage. These are expressed as a right to difference and cultural pluralism, which considers heritage as primarily useful to sustainable development.

Museums are institutions that by definition are in the service of society and its development, reaching their fourth age. As such, they cannot simply confine themselves to transmitting a heritage they have received, but must also look to the present: it also deserves to be protected, preserved and safeguarded. In expressing values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions they indeed see in it a resource for the future.

2/ The ICOM *Code of Ethics for Museums* states that museums 'preserve, interpret and promote the natural and cultural inheritance of humanity'. Insofar as they implement it into their practice, museums can—given their nature and ability—extend their responsibility to the goods that surround them, part of a more or less vast context, of the cultural landscape that their collections represent.

Again, this idea is not new. Some museums bear this responsibility in their respective missions, such as ecomuseums and extended museums. As such, they integrate both the 'museum-oriented' and 'context-oriented' perspective, which no longer oppose the museum's activity, but rather complete it. This action extends to the territory and involves the community not only in its knowledge, preservation and promotion, but also in identifying what is or can be defined as heritage. In addition, it collects and interprets that community's needs, expectations, stimuli and proposals.

Regardless of their differences, ecomuseums and extended museums created a new and different form of museum because they exceed a building, and embrace an entire territory. They become a different kind of institution if their subject matter is the cultural landscape understood as 'the country we live in and which surrounds us with images and representations that identify and connote it.'

In the landscape, past and present coexist in that inextricable combination that corresponds to the 'framework of our everyday life'. Everything is landscape irrespective of whether or not it has an aesthetic value, with all the contradictions and conflicts that characterise it. That is why ecomuseums and extended museums are not only called upon to manage, in addition to their own collections, some selected unmoveable goods, but also to identify what is worth saving, what is and can be changed, how much it will and can be updated.

3/ Museums are also changing in form. As a 'heritage responsibility centres', the museum is not a collection or a building but, primarily, a team and its activities: research, reporting, management of certain goods, communication, participating in the choices the governance of the territory faces, listening to and interpreting the needs and wishes of the reference heritage communities.

Thus, the heritage responsibility centre can perform the traditional functions of the museum: heritage conservation, the collection, interpretation and communication of museum goods or 'those collected' *in situ*. This said, it is above all an institute—which integrates the functions of the museum with those of the archive and the library of conservation—which collects, develops and communicates the knowledge of the cultural landscape in its entirety.

It should be observed that it is a new kind of heritage institution that also preserve the promiscuity value of the heritage, the vital coexistence between heritage and landscape, including its dissonances and contradictions. The heritage responsibility centre's mission is to reduce the isolation, to ensure that goods are not erected into monuments, by limiting limit physical and mental barriers and the fences (physical and mental) separating what is heritage, or not by a societal approach interpreting and developing the heritage community values and needs.

As a 'collection', a cultural landscape is truly a living collection that can be managed and preserved in its vitality because it is not only, by nature, constantly changing and evolving, but because it also includes the people who inhabit it, whose very existence is determined by the perception they have of it. By acting upon and within the landscape, their tasks go beyond identifying, protecting and managing the cultural heritage and embracing all aspects of the context in which they operate: its contradictions, conflicts, and development choices. Together and in collaboration with all the actors of the technical governance of the heritage, they can offer the vision and specialist knowledge of those who are intimately familiar with the cultural heritage in its entirety and complexity.

These 'heritage responsibility centres' can be called, arguably, 'museums', and may be considered as either the result of a spontaneous action of groups or associations that are present in the territory and free from any constraint. However, they may have been rendered fragile by the voluntary nature of the participation, both as true public offices, constituted by the administrations responsible for a territory, within the framework of a regulatory logic, no signs of which exist at present. One can expect from a heritage responsibility centre above all the ability to reverse the tradition—global despite state legislations—of exclusive, authoritarian, fragmented 'heritage' logics, in order to affirm an approach to heritage and to its inclusive, participatory and unitary objects.

These three scenarios are not contradictory. They can coexist in the fourth age of the museum, where museums coming from the past, present and anticipating the future are present and offer form of relationship to cultural landscapes according to a vision of the museum that keeps on evolving as it is open to change, to the present and to the context, thus honouring needs and expectations of contemporary society.

This vision, starting from the reflection on cultural landscapes and the profound revision of the notion of cultural heritage, proposes to redefine the very identity of the museum (rather than the collection) as rooted in the heritage, thus extending its scope to cultural goods, tangible and intangible that form an evolutionary part of it over time.

This would have a ripple effect in other fields as well, such as monuments and sites, documents and texts, intangible goods. The hope for this vision would be that from this confusion of competencies, a new type of heritage institute would emerge, which will altogether work as archive, library and museum, research and study centre, in addition to listening to and interpreting the heritage communities. It will be a guardian of the legacy of the past, but also an actor in the present because it anticipates the future.

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NOTES

1 'Safeguarding' and 'protection' have distinct meanings. The term 'protection' is applied to only tangible goods through prohibitions (destruction, modification, trade, export etc.) and obligations (of authorisation by competent legal bodies). The concept of safeguarding was introduced by the 2003 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage to designate measures aimed at 'ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage' (UNESCO 2003, Art. 2, Paragraph 3).

2 Here, the term 'heritage object' is proposed to define each distinct element of cultural heritage, tangible or intangible, with a distinct identity. It is not 'in itself a form of reality, but a product, a result, or an equivalence [...] that which is placed, or thrown forward (*ob-jectum*, *Gegen-stand*) by a subject, who treats it as different from himself, even if he considers himself as an object'. This implies that the concept should be broadened as in the definition of a museum object proposed in ICOM's *Key Concepts of Museology*. Therein, a museum object is distinguished from a thing, 'which is related to the subject as a continuation or an implement' and affective. If 'a museum object is something which is musealised; a thing can be defined as any kind of reality in general', then a heritage object is a thing that has been heritagised, thereby invested with a heritage (cultural) value that overrides its other values, past and present. It is therefore subject to special protection (tangible or intangible, including legal protection) and conserved so as to transmit it.

3 Man Ray used the expression 'objects of <my> affection' to designate keepsakes and memories that an individual conserves primarily for their symbolic value. It is an initial form of private heritagisation. This led me to reflect upon the objects of affection as they are presented by Pietro Clemente (2009).

4 'Context' seems to be the most appropriate term to define the entire set of elements and circumstances that surround a fact or situation. In its primary (linguistic) usage, the term also defines the relationship between a part of the text and its entirety. If we consider the museum as a text, the fullness of its meaning can only be understood by identifying its multiple relationships with the context, not just tangible, in which it is located, and which determine the meaning and role not only of its collections but also of the museum as an institution. The context museums are a part of and located in is multifaceted and interdependent: spatial, temporal, economic, ideological, political, social and pertaining to heritage. The relationship between the museum and its context is therefore an expression of a complex dialectic, which, in its simplest form, has a two-way orientation going from context to museum and museum to context. Because the museum receives and gives, takes and returns, absorbs and releases, there results a complex exchange of goods and values that define its role and function, which differ in time and space.

5 This part of the text sums up the speech given at the preparatory meeting to the 2016 General Conference in Milan, 'Museums, territorial systems and urban landscapes' held on 27-28 November 2015.

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