PLURALISM AND ITS CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

INSTITUTIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY : 1

MUSEUMS

Report of a meeting sponsored by
The Rockefeller Foundation
and
The Aga Khan Trust for Culture

MAY 13 - 14 1993
ISTANBUL TURKEY

Table of Contents

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INTRODUCTION

Background

In November 1992 a conference was held in Bellagio, Italy, under the joint auspices of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Rockefeller Foundation as part of an on-going effort to understand and respond to issues of pluralism and culture with particular reference to the Muslim world and North America. The conference was entitled "Pluralism and its Cultural Expressions,"[1]

The conference ranged widely over such issues as beliefs as the basis for culture, the destructive effect of cultural stereotypes and the value of exchanges across and within the Muslim world and the role of civil institutions in such exchanges. Such institutions were identified as those which serve community interests but are not, in origin, creatures of the political system but part of the civil society of a nation This is not to say that they cannot become agents of the political system or be put at risk by their adoption of critical stances in relation to the political system. Indeed, part of the interest in examining their role and operation lies in understanding how such institutions can become articulated with political issues.

At the conclusion of the conference it was decided that it would be valuable to examine the role and activities of such institutions, and museums, journals of opinion. and cultural studies and research centres were selected as three cases upon which to focus such specific attention. They were selected on the basis that they represented the class of civil institutions which the sponsors sought to understand and possibly support in some constructive way. Meetings were arranged to examine and compare how these selected institutions appeared to deal with issues of culture and pluralism in their national contexts.Two meetings have been held to date, on museums and journals of opinion. The third will be held in October 1993. This report is an account of the first meeting on museums.

The purpose of the meetings as a whole was described to participants as threefold. It sought to develop a better understanding of the constraints and opportunities for pluralistic cultural expression throughout the world; they sought to give special focus to Islam as an increasingly significant and visible force in the rapidly changing international world; and they sought the sharing of ideas which might lead to some deliberate and concrete actions in relation to specific institutions throughout the world,

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[1] Conference report "Pluralism and its Cultural Expressions" prepared by Keens Co. April 1993

Focus of the meetings

The specific focus areas under which questions would be raised were identified before the meetings and selected participants were asked to address them through a prepared presentation which was then followed by a general discussion. Though the individual presentations clearly drew on the specific experiences of the particular speaker, the general discussions revealed the commoness and variation of that experience amongst the participants. It needs to be understood, however, that within the time and resources available, the meetings were not intended to give, nor could give, comprehensive coverage to all the issues which the discussions raised. What they did provide was a series of important insights on the challenges and opportunities facing institutions of civil society in both the developed and developing world. It is in the response to these challenges and opportunities by such institutions that the Rockefeller Foundation and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture seek their own opportunities for support and participation.

The language of the discussions

At the two meetings held so far concern was expressed by participants about the language used to distinguish different parts of the world in terms of their level of development and their religious orientation. Thus exception was taken to the use of such terms as "third world," and "underdeveloped" or "developing countries" to draw distinctions between them and the "developed world" of Europe and North America. It was agreed that some more realistic and meaningful terms needed to be found. Similarly exception was taken to the term "Muslim world" to distinguish areas where Islam had a significant political, social as well as religious presence from areas where it did not. Again, it was agreed that a more appropriate term was called for if the distinction was to be useful. The inclusion of such terms in this report represents the difficulty at this stage of finding alternatives and the consequent - though often qualified - use of them by the participants themselves.

The structure and content of the report

Since the focus areas and their related questions represented the broad interests of the sponsors and their view that discussion around them would reveal and elaborate upon issues of culture and pluralism the report of the proceedings is structured accordingly.

The report is not a transcript. It identifies the general patterns and themes of the ideas and observations which the meeting generated. As far as possible it follows the order of the discussion as it occurred but there has been some occasional re-ordering in the interest of avoiding

duplication or to achieve a smoother presentation of the proceedings. In none of these instances has the re-ordering changed the sense or meaning of the associated discussion.

There were a few cases where a particular discussion was clearly relevant to another focus heading than the one under which it occurred. Where it could be done smoothly and without disjunction such a discussion is accounted for under the more appropriate heading. As far as possible the accounts avoid repetition but occasionally some was necessary in the interests of giving proper coverage to the particular and separate points to which it was related.

Since several participants spoke in idiosyncratic terms or of very personal experiences such as imprisonment or personal threats, individual speakers and the countries to which they referred are not identified other than where a particular exemplification seems necessary. Nevertheless, as far as possible the voice to be heard throughout the report is that of the participants and though they have not been cited directly it is their language and emphasis which prevails.

MUSEUMS AS PARTICIPANTS IN CIVIL SOCIETY
Meeting held in Istanbul May 13 to 14 1993

Introduction

The meeting on museums was held at the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul. Five representatives of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Rockefeller Foundation were joined by twelve invited participants who represented museums or museum related institutions in Turkey, Jordan, Pakistan, and the United States or represented museum interests on a more international basis.

The selection of **the museum** as a case for examination as an institution of civil society was explained to participants in terms of its potential as a showcase for pluralism and cultural expression. In its activities the museum was able to convey meaning as well as delight and the AKTC and the Rockefeller Foundation were concerned to understand, and provide to others understanding of, the obstacles and opportunities surrounding the delivery of meaning both operationally (in terms of the autonomy and independence of the museum, for example) and in the context of public education and the participation of the community as audience.

Accounts of the meeting presentations and discussions are presented under the focus headings given to the participants by the sponsors. A brief summary of its coverage opens each account.

THE FOCUS HEADINGS

1   "The role and intentions of the institution within its society
and how it interprets national culture."

   Summary

It was clear that the current role and intentions of any musem and
the interpretation of national culture were not separate matters but
were interrelated in ways which largely reflected prevailing political
conditions. Under authoritative or nationalistic political systems
the museum was more likely to be a tool in the confirmation of a
particular national identity than an interpreter of national culture.
Under these circumstances, and where it was able to do so, the
museum might still act as a means to prevent total loss of cultural
memory. Under more democratic conditions or where the museum
was able to exercise some independence towards the political
system, it could be more explicitly pluralistic with respect to the
local culture.

Despite consensus that pluralism was a vital objective there was
some uncertainty about how far the museum should be responsible
for its pursuit and what role it might need to take towards its
achievement. This uncertainty did not depend entirely on local
political conditions but also concerned such matters as knowing
what cultures to represent and what weight to give to each in their
representation.

Even where the pursuit of pluralistic expression was possible, efforts
to define desirable museum roles and intentions, particularly in the
developing world, were seen to be complicated by several,
sometimes contradictory, factors. These included the absence of a
general museum tradition in the East (including a lack of training
opportunities for museum professionals and little attention to the
visual arts) and a heavy reliance on Western models, conservative
attitudes amongst administrators and curators about the purpose of
museums and their fears about popularising activities, the risk to
the appreciation of tradition of too eager an adoption of
modernisation - both culturally and within the museums, the risk of
too extreme a focus on regional and local culture at the expense of
other cultures, and the priority of survival over art in poor parts of
the world.

It was agreed that the museum had an important educational role
to play in extending itself away from narrow collecting and

displaying activities towards greater communication and exchange with the community. However, for this to be successful better understanding and co-operation was needed between the museums, education authorities and teachers, in addition to the necessary operational resources. There were questions also about the continuing relevance of the traditional, usually Western, model of the museum, particularly in the developing world. Here such matters as the youthfulness of the population, educational and literacy levels and availability of free time, as well as the nature of the heritage to be exhibited and explained, might call for different models of the museum.

Proceedings

Cultural institutions as a whole, including musems were seen to be dependent in their development and operation on the particular **model of the state** in which they resided. The **complexity of the relationship between role, intentions and national culture** reflected the quality and concerns of the prevailing political system, its stance towards national identity, and the history of the country in terms of its dominance by other cultures (as in the case of colonial occupation), or in terms of its efforts - successful or not - towards more democratic government. The role and intentions of any museum would therefore be determined by whether they allowed the institution to express variance in national culture and reflect the more independent, internally generated ideas of museum officials, such as boards or directors or curators, or whether they were used as a tool for the development of a politically inspired monistic or universal culture and thereby made subject to the pressures and constraints of externally generated political objectives. In the latter case national culture tended to be decided and defined by the centralised authority, assigned to society and expected to be adopted without criticism, often as part of a process of national modernisation and political reform.

Museums, it was asserted, can only grow and survive where a society takes pride in its past and has confidence in its future. Like most cultural institutions **museums need conditions of peace and stability** in which to grow and develop their professional capacities. Many museums in the third world and even parts of Europe have been exposed to war and political instability and the pressures and constraints these have imposed on resource availability and deployment, administrative activities and the respect of local and regional heritages

For countries still operating under authoritative, centralised regimes intent on promoting a **particular image of national identity,** the interpretation of that identity from a traditional or historical perspective was likely to be compromised by politically-based efforts to deny or ignore a complex cultural experience (in ethnic or religious terms, and with respect to regional arts, crafts and literature, for example). Such a

denial of a more complex cultural experience, it was asserted, was not only unlikely to succeed in bringing about the intended monistic national identity but in some cases it could well prompt **reactionary behaviour** such as that associated with the advocacy of fundamental religious ideas. In cases where traditions are being reasserted in the interests of pluralism or the effort to resist the imposition of a monistic national identity the challenge, therefore, was seen to be one of seeking to harness the potential of pluralism and pluralistic cultural expressions without prompting the development of repressive, reactionary political forces.

For countries still dealing with the shedding of colonial occupation and authoritative governments, whether in the move towards more democratic processes, or a more direct effort to establish an independent national identity, there tended to be a number of **conflicting or polarising forces** at play which were seen as leading to cultural confusion. These forces included the efforts towards liberalism and intellectual freedom and the emergent valuing of tradition (particularly in its orthodox form in the case of religious tradition). They also included the parallel conflict between valuing and wishing to resurrect an often repressed past (often, though not always, in a nostalgic way) and the risk to that past and its cultural meaning of too unquestioned an adoption of modernism and technological progress. Such progress remains very attractive to many third world countries and, ironically, is often defined in terms of the replacement (i.e destruction) of traditional ways of doing things.

Where an effort was being made to establish national identity in the wake of political upheaval or the shedding of particular political regimes a difficult consequence for cultural institutions was seen to be that of **searching for and reasserting a past with what was in effect a washed out memory or cultural amnesia**. In these circumstances such institutions as carriers of national meaning were seen to have an important role in the retention of that meaning. Where democratisation and decentralisation of government does occur it was seen likely to become increasingly difficult to define and assert any single national culture. Instead national culture, where the term was meaningful at all, was more likely to comprise a bundle of different, pluralistic, cultures based more on geographical than historical factors. In this transformation of meaning one role of cultural institutions such as museums would be that of linking past and present in the restoration of cultural memory.

Where the museum was caught in the middle of efforts towards more pluralistic expression and greater respect of local and regional diversity under a not entirely sympathetic political system then it faced the problem of identifying its role in terms of the **degree to which it was able to promote such pluralism and how it might do so.** Even museums in the West were faced with this problem, though in their case

resistence to a more varied cultural expression tended to come from conservative interests who regarded such moves as populist and destructive of the "true" role of the museum.

All the participants accepted that a more pluralistic approach to cultural expression was desirable in response to broad political and social movements in the world towards respecting the heritages and aesthetic contributions of all ethnic and cultural groups, and that **pluralistic approaches were to be valued over over elitist positions** in relation to museum display, scholarship and exhibitions, and over nationalistic, monistic views of what does or should represent the national culture of a particular country. It was not clear, however, how these objectives could be pursued in the musem. There was some uncertainty, for example, about **how far the museums should be seen, or see themselves, as the site of multi-cultural expression and responsible for its achievement.** Were they, for example, to act as leaders of democratic processes, or simply as the reflectors and implementers of changing attitudes towards cultural values in the wider society ? Were they to be protesters of policies that result in the supression of culture, or more modestly act as a force that tries to hold on to cultural memory until it has a chance to be revitalised? Other uncertainties concerned **how to identify other cultures** and **how to give appropriate weight to different views** in a cultural context (such as the creationist's view of the origin of life in a natural history museum, for example, a dilemma all the more complicated by such comparable calls as that to respect the American Indian view of religion in a historical museum).

Even if it were possible to identify all cultures relevant to a museum's potential audience there remained the issue of **relativism** - should every culture be represented and equally so simply because it can be identified? Such a question in the end was seen to be an ethical one and as applicable to the developed world as to the developing world It was seen to pervade all questions of cultural expression and pluralism, of what and how to display objects, of how to explain them and convey their values, and what to do about cultures that have been repressed or under-represented or inadequately explained. Thus museums that display the art of the American West, for example, have come under pressure in relation to the place of the American Indian in US history, and dilemmas arise in dealing with the broad historical and cultural meaning of exhibits as in the case of the Smithsonian's display of the Hiroshima bomber the 'Enola Gay'.[2]

The problem was also seen to embrace the issue of **essentialism** or the **deliberate focus of the museum on one culture** or one specific set of ideas only, with only one way of looking and explaining that culture

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[2] This example was also seen as having an ethical component in relation to the large numbers of Japanese visitors that visit the museum and the increasing investment of Japaenese interests in US civil institutions.

(such as might occur in any special ethnic group museum). Such museums have meaning and value to specific audiences but there iwas seen to be a risk of becoming too local or too native in meaning with a resultant lack of communication and sharing.

A further problem in identifying the role, and to some extent the intentions, of the museum was seen to lie in the fact that in all but a very small number of Arab or predominantly Muslim countries there is **no tradition of appreciation for the visual arts,** and museums are of relatively recent vintage. Where they exist they tend to be more associated with the display of antiquities than with the visual arts, though there are some with an ethnographical focus. Many such museums **reflect the inspiration of Western or European archeolological interests** - often deriving from past conditions of occupation or colonisation - and their association with Arab collectors. Thus most of these museums resembled musems in the West and their audiences were mostly specialised and were often visitors and tourists rather than local people. Though some progress has been made in recent years in bringing a broader and more culturally varied approach to the development of museums in association with the emergence of a greater conciousness of the Arab and Muslim heritage, new and more sensitive approaches towards the formation and display of collections and the training of curators are still called for. In particular there was seen to be a need for careful reconciliation between modern technological techniques for the display and care of artifacts and the cultural context and potential audiences of the museums.

For all museums it was seen to be important to **guard against too extreme an adoption of regional or local relevance,** whether in pursuit of pluralistic objectives or to make museum more representative of local traditions. In these efforts there was a risk that too extreme and exclusive a focus might in fact work against the desirability of more pluralistic approaches.

For the developing world there was seen to be a similar risk in **too extreme an effort to shed dependence on Western art and Western traditions,** particularly where this resulted in limiting the number of outside exhibitions from the West in the interests of giving greater emphasis to local culture. Many people in the third world could not travel and such outside exhibitions represented one of the few opportunities they had to experience and understand other cultures.

Museum adminstrations and curators sometimes saw a risk to the **quality of the exhibitions** themselves where they were under pressure to include objects of cultural meaning that might have less aesthetic value than fine art, for example. This could occur where objects were included as examples of " folk art." Older and more traditional works of art have always been validated by scholarship and academic debate. The opening up of museums to new and different works of art in the interests of

pluralism and cultural expression was seen to raise problems of provenance and authentication.

Where it was able to do so it was deemed to be an important part of the museums's role (in both East and West) to demonstrate sensitivity and receptivity to all branches of art and to broaden the public view by demonstrating the variation and similarities of culture and cultural traditions, and that artistic and cultural expressions that are unfamiliar can be beautiful and interesting.

The role and intentions of museums are also **influenced by the resources available** to them. Many in the Arab and Muslim worlds are heavily dependent on the generosity of collectors and those who sit on their administrative boards. Many have few resources in terms of employees or trained staff, including qualified curators, and budgets are minimal. Few receive government support. There is often **no curatorial tradition and little training is** available for conservation or museum management.The future of the museums in these parts of the world may well depend on how far resources can be developed towards remedying these deficiencies, whether through the participation of government or through private sources or both. However, at the present time the focus of government policy and activity tends to be " bread before aesthetics."

Education was seen a part of a wider role which museums should be called upon to play **in the interests of pluralism.** Where once they were simply keepers of objects accessible to specialised and often elite audiences they can now be called upon to extend their activities towards communicating, educating and exchanging both with a wider, more general public and across the Arab and Muslim worlds as a whole.

Some museums do have **educational programmes.** They are often tied in with local schools and some are very successful. However, the educational intention is often lost despite the production by the museum of special programmes and aid material. The museum is often seen as a potential playground by schoolchildren who are left free to wander around while teachers. who are often not highly trained themselves, regard the opportunity as one for a well earned rest, **Better understanding of the educational role which museums can play** on the part of government and ministries of education was seen to be essential to any progress in this respect.

Many issues concerning of the role and intention were seen to depend on the continuing relevance of the common **model of the museum.** Museums in the developing world tend to be similar to museums in the West for reasons to do with their origin under colonial influences or the absence of any local museum tradition or their focus on foreign rather than local audiences. Questions were asked, however, on how far this model continued to be relevant under pluralistic influences and in particular regional contexts and on whether it was in fact what

audiences really wanted, particularly as places where their culture and the cultures of others would be visible.

One set of factors to take into account in determing what model of museum as most appropriate, for example, concerns **relative youthfulness of populations in the Arab and Muslim worlds**. Many young people do not complete formal schooling programmes and the museums may have an important role to play in terms of offering easily taken educational opportunities to such young people - even though they are not generally seen as part of the museum audience. Another important set of factors factor lies in the **definition of the heritage** which is to be preserved and displayed by museums. There has been a long term acknowledgement of the classical heritage of the non-Western world but little reference to its urban or its craft/industrial heritage, for example, or its contemporary heritage. These were also important to preserve and acknowledge. Similarly the **content and media** through which the museum displayed its exhibitions can be made more varied and relevant to particular audiences.[3]

The model of the museum is also determined by how culture itself is conceived. It is very often simply **seen in terms of a past** in which foreigners as tourists will be interested in and the museum is designed and operated in these terms. But there are arguments for reorienting the museum as an institutions which related also to the present and the future. This is particularly important in relation to attracting new audiences. However, it is not as yet clear how this might be achieved.

If the effort towards pluralist relevance on the part of museums means trying to widen museum audiences to include all ethnic and social groups then there are wider considerations to be taken into account particularly in the third world but also relevant to parts of the Western world. They include **levels of literacy** and the **availability of free time** and its use amongst different groups. There is also the question of what may or may not be represented as part of any culture in terms of social **taboos** as well as **political constraints**.

Given the main interests of governments and the immediate needs of those who are seen as potential and desirable audiences in the developing world, the question of determining the most appropriate model for the museum becomes whether it can be reconceptualised so that it is integrated with the fact that the priority of many people lies in the struggle for bread.

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[3] A case was given for example of a planned Museum of Everyday Life in Turkey which would include oral history recordings and references to the lives of working people in the country.

2   "The <u>autonomy</u> of decision-making, programming, funding etc, and the <u>relationship</u> of the institutions to NGOs, governmental bodies and other museums."

Summary

Reflecting the often turbulent political and social contexts of many third world and even some Western institutions, and the need for self-determination in the expression of pluralism, views were expressed that museums should be as autonomous as possible in their activities and decision processes. This is not always possible or easy given the political and financial realities with which they are often faced. Such institutional autonomy needed to take several forms.

As it became transformed from a place of things to a place of ideas intellectual autonomy was important to the meaning which the museum was able to give to its exhibits and the information and interpretation which it conveyed to audiences.

The moral autonomy of the museum was important in the display of controversial works of art, for example, or with respect to the conditions that donors might attach to their gifts.

The financial autonomy of the museum was was important in a more general sense but was difficult to ensure, particularly in the developing world where there is no tradition of endowment or foundation assistance, for example.

The autonomy of any museum can also be constrained by the conventions of its possibly non-pluralistic, external context (as in the definition of jobs or hiring conditions) and the status of museum professionals in its community of decision-makers, as well as by internal pressures such as those exercised by boards and managers in the definition of art and the determination of what shall be displayed.

Proceedings

Ideally, it was felt, all institutions of civil society should have an **automous position in relation to the state,** particularly if they were to take more pluralistic approaches to their activities and preserve their role as repositories of historical truth. Such distance and autonomy has not always been possible, and disquieting examples exist where even permanent museum exhibitions, under political pressures, have had to reflect the changing politics of the country in the alteration of labels and historical explanations attached to exhibits with a consequent confusion in terms of their "true" meaning.

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has identified a number of strong arguments in its own advocacy of the **autonomy of museums**, and its recommendation that museums should be guaranteed their **own moral authority** and that this be **embodied in legislation**. These arguments include the opportunity provided by such independence to allow better funding, income generation, fiscal accountability, management and planning. They also include the greater freedom and adaptabilty which, the Council asserts, the museum needs in order to evolve and develop. The Council also takes the position that any underwriting of museums by governments should not preclude funding from private sources and that any fees generated by a museum should be applied to museum activities rather than be absorbed into any general fund.

The question of autonomy has to be understood as being much more complicated than the matter of whether "he who pays the piper calls the tune;" it also involves critical intellectual and moral concerns .The immediate relevance of **intellectual autonomy** was seen to lie in the apparent **transformation of museums from places of things to places of ideas** which has occurred in one lifetime, from the museum as a place for the simple display of treasures to one of **information and interpretation** (a shift that might, it was asserted, go so far as to eliminate the display of things altogether in some cases).

Intellectual autonomy can be constrained by internalised and unwritten rules that dictate what happens in the museum field as well as by pressure from professional peers. It can also be constrained by the museum's relationship to funding agences (private donors as well as governments) where these are conditional - even implicitly - on some particular provision or approach being made by the museum itself. This could be particuarly telling for non-Western museums since they were so often desperately in need of resources. There are cases where such museums have had to face the dilemma of turning down offers of substantial financial assistance from private sources in the interests of retaining their independence of the particular conditions of such offers.

Matters of **moral autonomy** were seen to be crucial with respect to the museum's responsibility towards its audiences and to the ideas which it presented to them. Museums routinely face a wide range ethical questions of various kinds including decisions to exhibit controversial works of art, their responsibilities towards the acquistion of "plundered treasures" and their obligations to artists whose works are displayed. Moral and ethical issues are also raised by what was described as the "Philip Morris" factor which concerned the museum's dependence on resources the origin of which was itself controversial or politically uncomfortable. Similar problems could occur where the museum was asked to mount an exhibition on behalf of another institution, with guaranteed funds, for example, but without the guarantee of a balanced presentation. Museums needed to be able to take independent positions

on such ethical questions, though it was acknowledged that they were complex and not always easily resolvable.

Many US museums are under a general mandate towards cultural pluralism but the autonomy with which they can pursue this mandate can be influenced by **internal (often implicit) pressures from management and boards** about exhibitions and the purchase of new objects. These pressures have to do with such issues as the definition, and therefore acceptability , of art (for example, in terms of a distinction drawn between "folk art" and "fine" or "high art) or the meaning and identity of contemporary art in a more national, and non-European, context (for example, in defining "American art" while acknowledging the distinction that exists between "Afro-American art" or "Asian-American" art or "Latino-American" art). Any mandate towards pluralism also becomes complicated in the case of specialised museums. Does it mean, it was asked, that a museum of African art should not collect only in Africa or be compelled to display the art of other parts of the world ?

In a broader sense the autonomy of any museum in pursuit of pluralism can also find itself subject to **external constraints and pressures from the conventions of the non-pluralistic system** in which it operates. These may influence who is hired, for example, (in terms of what qualifications are acceptable), how jobs are described (in terms of traditional employment categories for example), and, importantly, the approaches that a museum may be able to take towards its educational role (in terms, for example, of standards and requirements about what constitutes an education or an educational programme).

The nineteenth century founding documents of many US museums were articulate about their role as **civic educators** and the need to keep an **equilibrium of power** between the people for whom they were created and those who ran and funded them - though their subsequent histories did not always reflect this philosophy. They were not seen as instruments of nationalism. In fact, in an era when there was seen to be little to treasure in so relatively young a country the museums were very largely stocked with the treasures of older and admired cultures. Only in very recent times has there been any strong movement towards the expression of national culture.[4]

It was seen to be arguable how far museums could, in fact, be autonomous where any part of their funding came from government or government related sources. Acknowledging that **financial independence** was an important condition of institutional autonomy it was noted that it was not easy to achieve in the developing world. In addition to concern about the conditions that donors might specify, or doubts about the source of offered reveue, there were more direct problems in ensuring

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[4] It was noted that even the museum which calls itself the " National Gallery of Art" remains stocked primarily with the art of countries other than the United States.

financial security. Cultural institutions, including museums are highly sensitive to economic cycles and they can survive only where they can be buffered against such cyclical changes. In the non-Western world there is **no general tradition of institutional endowment, foundations or patrons of the arts** which can help museums in their lean years. There are **no funds or mechanisms to ensure the continuity of museums** and donations are almost always absorbed by the immediate needs of maintenance as well as new acquisitions. Large sums are sometimes spent on exhibition openings or guest exhibitions but little is put aside for such longer term purposes as increasing the permanent collections or staff improvement.

Though there is little tradition of endowment or foundations in the developing world there are, nevertheless, **some traditional mechanisms,** some such as the Waqf, that could be extended to help museums. Some private individuals and groups have been established in recent years in Turkey, for example, whose activities focus on the conservation and resoration of cultural heritage including the operation of restored monuments from which return funds accrue to the Waqf.

In the United States almost all museums are dependent on some combination of public, private and internally generated funds (such as fees and membership subscriptions). The secret to their autonomy was seen to lie in keeping an **equilibrium between the funders and the institution** and a **useful uncertainty about where power and control** really lay. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged, there was always the tendency to relate differently towards someone who could provide the museum with something it wanted, whether this was money or a work of art or other exhibit.

Also important to the achievement of autonomy on the part of museums is the **status of professional staff** particularly within the framework of government. At present there are **no training programs** for middle-eastern museum staff. There is a heavy Western influence amongst those what are trained in some appropriate way, or who have worked previously in a Western context. It was seen to be necessary to raise the status of museum professionals in the developed world, as well as to make their training more locally appropriate, in order to address this imbalance.

At present there are few opportunities for exchanges between museums, either of their staff or their exhibits, and there is no real forum at which they can discuss their common problems and challenges. In the interests of greater exposure to a more pluralistic expression of art and cultural **more frequent and higher quality exchanges between museums** should be arranged and supported both across the Arab and Muslim worlds and between East and West. Historically such exchanges have tended to be predominantly one way only, to the West. It had been assumed that the transfer of art and cultural artifacts to the East was either not of interest or that exhibition conditions would not be

adequate. Many museums were now able to offer conditions equal to the best in Europe and North America, but in any event it is possible to design the exhibitions in such a way as to minimise the risks associated with the conditions that particular museums can offer : and important **benefits accrue to the museum in the communication between the institutions and staff who arrange and supervise such exchanges.**

3   "The ways and extent to which the collections of each institution are <u>presented/communicated</u> to the public (general and specialised) and used for educational purposes."

Summary

The issues of presentation, communication and education were seen to pose fundamental questions about the nature of the museum and the audiences it sought to serve. Historically museums had been seen as élitist institutions for the pursuit of research and scholarship. The effort towards a more pluralistic attraction calls for changing attitudes and approaches amongst museum professionals as well as audiences themselves. Many museum professionals remain conservative in their views on what the museum is for and who it should serve and are concerned that popularisation is likely to involve a dilution of meaning for their collections and too commercial a basis for decisions.

Little was known of audience motivation or about why people do not go to museums. Education activities are seen to have a key role in the attraction of wider audiences but greater cooperation is needed from education authorities, and teachers needed to be persuaded of the value of the museum experience and of their need to participate more fully in it. There are also practical issues such as resource availability to be taken into account.

Museums themselves have to ask what kind of audiences they want and what possible outcomes they want to achieve for those audiences (in terms of experience and information, for example) while at the same time not dictating what it is that audiences should seek.

In may parts of the developing world museums are seen as foreign and for the attraction of tourists. Though attraction to tourists has economic advantages, efforts need to be made to give the museums more local meaning and relevance. It would be a mistake, however, if in the overall effort to be up-to-date museums become too much alike in their activities and programmes. There is place for variation.[5]

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[5] Although the presentations under this heading referred to the history and conditions of specific museums the account focuses on general themes and ideas concerned with

Proceedings

In the US as recently as the 1980's the essential purpose of the museum was largely seen as that of collecting, cataloguing and preserving works of art. The nature of their display and presentation were not taken as seriously into account . The basic premises for their operations were that museums were **places for research and scholarship** and that only scholars and specialists were able to appreciate the collections. Educational priorities, therefore, were directed towards the already inititated. It was seen to be debatable, however, in light of the power seen to be possessed by museums to shape attitudes and values, and the potentially crucial educational role they could play in many parts of the world, whether so narrow a focus on the interests of specialists could or should continue.

There are **moves on the part of some museums away from this approach** (which gives the viewer little help in seeing relationships between objects or understanding what they say about a culture). Such moves call on museum-wide resources in terms of space usage and written materials, for example, as well as innovative use of readings, films, musical and theatrical performances and, where appropriate, attention to foreign language needs.

Attention to a wider museum audience with non-specialised, non-informed interests should not however, lead to **excessive simplification of the cultural knowledge** of the museum nor should the museum pander in this respect to the wider public.On the contrary, museums should seek to develop the visitor's ability to look at works of art in a meaningful way. The museum should **share its expertise** with the public and in ways that excite interest.

The move from specialist to wider audiences was seen as part of a cycle of change from the simple physical protection of objects to the protection of ideas and to education, or **from élitism to pluralism**. In this process specialists needed to open up the meaning and values attached objects and making them relevant to the present and to the wider society. The essential problem is how to **encourage audiences** to take a cultural leap in relation to museums, to slow down and look at exhibits with curiosity and a wish to understand. Progress on this is slow and new ideas and new understandings of audience needs and behaviour have to be developed.

Little appears to be known about why people visit museums and what they get out of their visits. Many museums have undertaken **audience surveys** and conducted focus groups. Though they have given some

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presentation, communication and education which emerged from both the presentations and the subsequent discussion.

information regarding demographics and so forth they have not been sucessful in informing museum policies. In particular they tell nothing about the people who do not visit museums and at whom outreach programmes might be aimed.

In many parts of the developing world there appears to be very **little interest in visiting museums,** even amongst educated minorities. Although museums have grown in number and changes have occured with respect to programmes, personnel, budgets and so forth, their relationship with society is often very different from that of museums in the West. Often museums are perceived as foreign, non-living institutions full of objects that are of prime interest to people of other cultures. Education has little place in many of these museums, largely because of **budget constraints** but also because it needs specialised personnel, long-term planning and a willingness to experiment. Education receives little government encouragement because objectives may not be reached within the time-span of a particular administration.

Despite the difficulties and the lack of support it receives, education remains one of the most powerful potential outcomes of museum activities. Musems can convey information and ideas and provide the opportunity for the multiple expression of culture and creativity. They represent a place where culture and values can be asserted, examined and understood. Despite the difficulties and lack of support, the educational potential of the museum was seen to be **important in the effort to reach wider audiences** and to **convey essential values and traditions**. This was seen to be crucial in a world where populations were shifting and growing in response to regional and even international incentives and pressures.

Educational authorities need to be encouraged to give greater assistance, and teachers needed to be persuaded of the **value of museum experience to students** rather than see it simply as an entertainment. The curriculum of teacher training should include art studies. Such efforts to enrol the co-operation of education authorities and teachers, however, have had mixed results in the developing world, (and to some extent in the West despite better programming and greater resources). **New approaches and experimentation** were seen to be needed along with changes towards a more **positive view of educational activities** as a whole. However, it also needed to be understood that approaches to education, and even the understandings of what is should comprise, vary widely and it may be that each museum has to articulate it own educational approaches and understandings with respect to its audiences.

Staff is also an important factor in relation to the promotion of educational activities, particularly in the developing world where such **resources are limited and there is no tradition of volunteer work in the museums.** In complex cultures **language issues** also become

important in relation to labelling and didactic materials. This is now true for museums throughout the world. Overall there is an enormous need for **broader and more intense training for museum professionals** in the educational field but also in other relevant fields such as design, conservation and management.

The role of curators was seen to be of particuar importance in the pursuit of education in the museums. Curators often operate with no audiences in mind other than their peers and tend to have conservative attitudes towards the meaning of the museum and what their own responsibilities in it. But the expertise of the museum lies with its curators. They understand the collections and are responsible for accounting for their meaning and why they are of value. Along with all other museum professionals they need to be persuaded that educational activities are important. It is not easy to imagine ways to change this and to add an educational dimension to those responsibilities. One way might be to reduce the distinction between the activities of curator and educator and create a new role of "curator/educator" to complement that of "curator/collector."

Other factors in improving educational activities in museums are more **operational or bureaucratic** such as the varying authority for the administration of ther programmes and the provision or availability of resources for student transportation, teaching materials and so forth.

In a broad sense it was seen to be important that museums ask what is it that they themselves want as the **outcome of educational programmes**. Are they in the main trying simply to build audiences (who may come to the museum for a wide variety of reasons) and a longer term constituency for their collecting and displaying efforts, or are they trying to inform young people about different types of painting (impressionism versus expressionism for example) or are they in the business of developing critical thinking skills, or visual literacy or cultural tolerance? The immediate answers questions of this kind may depend on the type of museum. It is easier to see a close educational relationship between the museum and a wider public in relation to a natural history museum, for example, than a fine arts museum. But art needs to be placed in a historical context also and educational efforts should seek to give students an understanding of such context as well as the meaning and significance of the art itself.

At the same time, it was seen to be a mistake to imagine that all museums should be the same, using the same ways of displaying things and the same programmes in the struggle to be "up-to date". In the age of sound bite television and multiscreen videos there may well be a **place for the traditional museum** with simple informational labels and lots of space and quietness to contemplate the displays.

There are also important questions about **what kind of audiences museums actually want to attract** and what methods are acceptable in the effort, particularly when museums are confronted with the perennial **need to make money**. There is some cause for discomfort if democratisiation of the museum translates only into hordes of people pouring through the museum and giving only short, casual attention to the exhibits and then rushing to cafes and gift shops to spend money. On the other hand great care needed be taken in determing **how far museums should dictate what audiences should get out of them** and why they should go to them. The notion that museums are becoming places of ideas rather than things, for example, has to take into account that fact that many people still come to the museum to discover the truth and don't necessarily want to find uncertainty about history, or participate in the asking of questions about it.

In any discussion about expanding audiences, it was noted, there always appears to be an undertone of **comparison between the élite visitor and the mass public** which is disconcerting, particularly where it seems to suggest the lowering of standards or the oversimplification of exhibits. Many museum professionals see such problems in **popularising the museum** and **catering to the masses** or the general public. Ways need to be found which will allow the intellectual quality of exhibitions to be sustained while generating interest in them on the part of a wider and possible not so intellectually concerned audience. Fine art museums in particular often develop predictable and largely élitist audiences and it becomes hard to extend audiences beyond this group. In many parts of the world problems of literacy and levels of education need to be taken into account in broadening the appeal of the museum (for example, through labelling, information material and so forth).

In the West the declared mission of museums may refer to broad public information and education objectives but their development has depended on their ability to attract the middle classes. In the third world this appears to be paralled by the ability of museums to attract an **audience of tourists**. It was said not to be an accident that most museums in the third world come under the jurisdiction of joint ministries of Culture and Tourism. In may countries the museum is seen simply a container for the things that tourists want to see, namely the artifacts of ancient cultures. In the main such museums are archeological in focus or contain the fine art of other countries. There are a very few institutional museums (such as a railway museum) and some university museums but these have very specialised audiences and few visitors even from outside the country.

In many parts of the developing world the museum is seen by local populations as something completely foreign and even where local people do visit them, once they have been they know what is in them are not likely to want to go again and again. But a focus on 'self' as well as 'otherness' that is implicit in efforts towards the expression of local

culture could bring a new focus to the activities of the museum. In fine art museums it means including the work of local or national artists and no only those whose reputations were made elsewhere. Unless the museum is seen to **pay attention to and serve its local community** in terms of the programmes and exhibitions it offers it is likely to remain simply a tourist attraction.

4 "Issues of <u>response</u> from the public and ways of evaluating the impact and judging success of the institutional activities."

Summary

Even though it might be possible to describe the ideal museum in terms of its engagement with the public, questions still arise about the exact nature of the responses to be sought, how valid these are and how they can be measured and evaluated in terms the "success" of the museum. Until relatively recently success in museums was judged in terms of their levels of research and scholarship and the quality of their collections. But not all visitors go to museums out of scholarly interest though little is known of the variety of reasons why they do go and this makes the evaluation of activities difficult. Many museums collect statistical material on audiences but these give no real measure of success. Anecdotal material about the effect of museums on people exists but this is of little use in policy terms. It may be that simple, observable, measures such as a wide range of responses and audiences and their clear enjoyment of the museum experience may be all that can be achieved in many cases, particularly given the cost of evaluative research, though this may continue to be called for.

Ideas are emerging about greater and more complex interactions between museums, audiences and their collections and exhibitions but there may be diffficulties in pursuing them. These difficulties include the fact that administrative and managerial boards tend to remain élitist and are likely to be reluctant to cede power and the fact that it is likely to be difficult to represent audiences adequately given their diversity and th fact that so little is known about them.

It is also possible that efforts may be being made to get complex responses from audiences are sometimes excessive. Responses should be allowed to include, though not be confined to, pleasurable viewing of beautiful objects.

In the efforts to understand and attract audiences sight should not be lost of the importance of the collections and the need for further acquisitions. These are the basis for anything the museum can do and any sucess it can achieve.

Proceedings

Much under this heading was seen to relate to earlier questions of how far the museum is, in fact, a valid site from which to address pluralism in a changing world. There were seen to be ways of describing **an ideal museum** - and thereby implicitly identifying criteria for evaluation - which would include openness to new ideas and the absence of taboos regarding what might be examined and questioned, a view that the museum was a resources, rather than a storage house, acknowledgement of multiple perspectives and parallel histories in the selection and display of object, greater focus on continuing questions and less certainty about answers, interdisciplinary approaches to museum activities, the sharing of responsibilities for decision-making beyond curators and art historians, audiences of parents and children as well as students and scholars and where an education department is made redundant through the embedding of education in the overall mandate of the museum.

Research and evaluation are expensive and new approaches can take a long time to have an impact. Even then, museums are uncertain as to exactly what impact they seek from their activities and therefore how to measure response. Surveys and focus groups are rarely informative in relation to understanding the responses of audiences or potential audiences (particularly those who do not go to museums and often seen to be seen part of a lack of success). Often **success** - especially, for example, in relation to a particular exhibition - is **measured in numbers of visitors**, though the important distinction between frequency of visits on the part of individuals and absolute number of visits is rarely available. Though many museums keep statistics about audiences and use these as measure of response or " success" in their activities, these are not really informative about the more significant effects which museum professionals like to think are the consequence of their actions and efforts. There is a lot of **anecdotal material** about claims, for example, that particular museums have changed people's lives, or artists who were deeply influenced by the accessibility of the works of other artists and so forth, but this is not helpful in assessing or evaluating specific museums or specific efforts within those museums.

By the criteria of absolute numbers many "block-buster" or special exhibitions of particular artists have to be judged a success. But from an evaluative standpoint questions need to be raised about **why people go to such exhibitions and what they get out of them** in terms of ideas and even sensory experience when they are elbowing their way through crowded galleries of people all trying to view the works of art at the same time. Such exhibitions, it was asserted, may achieve little more than the reification of a particular artist with little understanding being achieved of his/her place in the history or in the development of particular ideas, for example. These questions also apply at a different level to schools groups who come through galleries.

The issue of response and evaluation depends on what is understood to be **the nature of audiences and what can and ought to be expected of them.** For many years the only real measure of success which musems thought about was the **level of research and scholarship which they drew and the quality of their collections compared with others.** This may be changing but recognition still has to be given to the visitor who us not seeking information on particular artists or their place in history as a scholar or acedemic, but rather with questions about what is a work of art and what is one supposed to think and react to a particular object or exhibit. Museums tend not to be able to answer such questions about success in relation to the experience of general public.

Approaches to response on the part of museums themselves tends to assume a one way transmission of knowledge - from the museum to the audience. But questions are being raised in the US about this transmigration of meaning. They are contained in three current notions about the nature of museums which stress that **response is more a matter of process than product** and are backed by the idea that people are not just retainers of culture but also its creators. The first such notion is that of a **"dialogic" museum** where meaning is not held by the object the institution or the public but in the interpretative dialog that is to be encouraged between them. Thus what is given value and what those values are, emerges from the association and exchanges between curators, scholars, directors of education, parents, children and others in the community. The second notion is that of **shared authority** among these groups for the content and quality of exhibitions, particularly where the community interests are represented in those exhibitions. The third notion is that of presenting works of art in **new forms of cultural imagery** acknowledging the greater impact of such imaging on the the younger generation than on an older generation which was more influenced by the written word.

Although such notions stress the engagement of the audience in the decisions and actiovities of the museum caution was expressed about **how such audiences might be represented** in museum activities given their diversity and how little was known about their motivations with respect to museums. It was seen to be possible to experiment with a variety of ways to engage audiences, but there was a risk in not really knowing who they were to begin with. There were also questions about how far such ideas were practical in terms of the power structures of the museums. Although it was argued that managerial and administrative boards were not the fundamental obstacle to change, it was nevertheless acknowledged that they tend to be élitist in character and are likely to remain so given the usual criteria of their selection and the financial quualifications which they are able to offer. Their activities are not always open and they are likely to be reluctant to cede power to outsiders in the local community or to share decision-making with them and the

notion of open dialog is likely to be seen as threatening to them. Since they are in charge it is hard to imagine things will change quickly other than where a leader of courage might step in to make a difference.

With respect to the **notion of success** as a whole concerns were expressed about the idea itself in that it seemed to suggest a risk of excessive attention to providing educational programmes, constantly varying the experience of visitors, providing large quantities and varieties of informational material and so forth. Sometimes, it was asserted, these could be confusing to people. A museum which attracted a family, or a young couple and they obviously enjoyed the atmosphere and the experience then the museum had to be seen as a success. This view, it was claimed, did not invalidate the efforts to question the activities of the museum or the efforts to be more creative and open, but they should not be forced on people who come to the museum simply to enjoy the exhibits, maybe in a non-intellectual way. There **should not be only one set of expectations for audiences**. Museums should seek a rich and varied range of responses. Even though some people might go to museums simply to look at their collections, if they provided only a pleasant environment for the viewing of beautiful objects they were of little consequence in a world where museums needed also to be seen as places of ideas and for the promotion and expression of cultural diversity.

In a cultural terms one way to judge the overall success of a museum, it was asserted, would be if a museum could be seen, through the variety of its audiences and the interest generated in its activities to be an **acknowledged reference point for the community** in which its resides. Many museums. however, lose this potential by failing to make their collections and exhibitions relevant to the lives of their local community.

In the focus on audiences and the evaluations of success in relation to them it was seen to be it is important for the museum not to overlook the need to pay continuing and **adequate attention to its collections** and to be dynamic and up-to-date in its acquisitions since these are the basis to any success it can hope to achieve. They are the basis to all it can do and might wants to do and the reason why any visitor comes to the museum in the first place, Museums also need to pay attention to what is going on around them and the competing opportunities which are increasingly emerging for self-education, for example, or in commercially sponsored art or craft exhibitions. This should inform how far museums should go into popularising themselves and possibly compromising their scholarly standards.

There were acknowledged to be significant differences between the East and West in terms of the meaning and possible futures for museums and it was seen to be necessary to recognise that their **strategies towards pluralism and cultural expression may need to be different** and not

aways led by the West. It also needed to be understood that issues of cultural pluralism and its expression are not tied to a single set of institutions but pervade societies as wholes.

Some museums appeared to be dealing with issues of pluralism, but for many there are vast and complex problems of a political, cultural and resource-based nature. However, while it cannot be expected that they will all interpret the objective in the same way or deal with it with the same strategies, **museum professionals world-wide have much in common** in terms of the heritages they cherish and the values they try to enact. This shared experience should be used to advantage and the distinctions between East and West should not become critical in the exchanges that should be encouraged between them. These exchanges should keep the dialogue about pluralism and its meaning alive and current.

List of Participants

Ms. Albert Arthurs is Director of the Arts and Humanities division of the Rockefeller Foundation in New York. She is a former professor of English and College President. Her division of the Rockefeller Foundation encourages creative artists and humanities scholars whose work can advance international and intercultural understanding. Her support of the meeting bridges the Foundation's concern with the exploration of civil society issues and the role that museums, especially in Africa, can play.

Dr. Tomur Atagök holds the Chair of Museum Studies as Yildiz Technical University in Istanbul which conducts the only programme of its kind in Turkey. She is particularly interested in the connection between teaching and practice.

Dr. Emin Balcioglu is a project officer with the Historic Cities Support Programme and the educational activities of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Geneva. He is based in Ankara and is actively associated with its arts and cultural activities.

Mr. Suhail Bisharat is the Director of the Jordan National Gallery of Arts in Amman, Jordan. The Gallery has been developing its collection of contemporary art from all over the Islamic world since 1980.

Mr. Clifford Chanin is Associate Director of Arts and Humanities of the Rockefeller Foundation. He is working in programmes that focus on issues of pluralism and diversity in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies, and is interested in institution-building and cross-cultural exchange. He is co-coordinator of the joint 'Pluralism' excercise.

Ms. Oya Eczacibasi is a member of the executive Committee of the Dr. Nejat Eczacibasi Museum of Modern Aret currently being established in Istanbul.

Dr. Jale Erzen teaches Architectural History at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara. She is an artist and is well known for her writings in national newspapers and journals.

Mr. Tom Freudenheim is Assistant Secretary for the Arts and Humanities at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. His office oversees sixteen museums and advises the Secretary on issues related to museum policies, operations and advocacy. He is particularly interested in developing international links and outreach programmes and in museum education.

Dr. Nilüfer Göle is Professor of Sociology at Bogazici University in Istanbul. She is the author of several books including a recent publication in women in Muslim society. She appears frequently on televsion and often teaches in France. She is a member of the 'Pluralism' Consultative Committee and participated in the conference held in Bellagio, Italy in November 1992.

Mr. Hasan Bülend Kahraman is Advisor to the Minister of Cultrue in Ankara where he has special oversight for Turkish Museums. He has written extensively on nationalism, culture and the arts.

Mr. Hasan-Uddin Khan is Director of Special Projects of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and has been involved in many facets of its operations over the years. He has written extensively on architecture in developing countries and is particularly interested in expressions of culture in building and cross-cultural exchanges between Muslim and other societies. He is co-coordinator of the joint 'Pluralism' exercise.

Dr. Thomas Lentz is Assistant Director for Research and Collections at the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington D.C. He is a scholar of Islamic Art, especially Central Asian Art. He has been the curator of several important exhibitions and and is author of a number of monographs and articles in the field.

Mr. John de Monchaux is General Manager of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and Professor of Architecture and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He is particularly interested in the development of architectural education and in establishing a more effective relationship between teaching and practice.

Mr. Uxi Mufti is the Executive Director of Lok Virsa, the Folk Heritage Organisation based in Islamabad. He is the founder of Lok Virsa and as a cultural historian has been associated with other institutions in the country. Together with its support of a national museum Lok Virsa documents Pakistan's art, crafts and oral cultural traditions. It also publishes books, makes films and holds festivals.

Dr. Nazan Olcer is Director of the Museum of Turkish Islamic Arts in Istanbul. Over the years the museum has hosted major international exhibitions in addition to those originated by the museum itself. Several of the exhibitions have travelled abroad.

Ms. Elisabeth des Portes is Secretary General of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Paris. ICOM is the international body that promotes the cross-fertilisation of ideas between museums world-wide and helps to set standards for their operations. Most recently it has focused on African museums and is now examining those of the Arab world.

Ms. Constance Wolf is Curator in Education at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. She is particularly concerned with communicating and receiving feedback from the various exhibition - visiting publics. She is also working in public education which includes the study and observation of museum behaviour and critical thinking about how museums can best enrich the collective human experience.

Dr. Suzanne Beauchamp de Monchaux is a sociologist and urban planner with a special interest in institutional and organisational behaviour. She is the conference rapporteur and author of this report.