

Deconstruction of Museum Landscape

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Theses proposed for the 44th ICOFOM symposium transfer the horizon of museological problems into the field of politics. This turns us away from comprehending the problem situation we have in museums now. However, it is obvious that the changing role of the museum in society demands an analysis of the museum mission from a cultural standpoint, not from a political one. It seems important to me to emphasize the links between what we do with the heritage and how we talk about it. We should be attentive and use correct terminology in this case. My over 30 years' experience as a senior researcher in the State Tretyakov Gallery as well as an experience of teaching in Moscow State Lomonosov University prompts the relevance of such a statement.

The theme announced at the 44th symposium continues the line of discussion that had begun during 40th ICOFOM symposium in 2017. The articles published in the 46th volume of ISS after that symposium reflect the huge range of museum thoughts concerning politics in the museum field in different countries. And according to the opinion of the guest issue editor, they do not clarify situation faced by many museums, but rather raise even more questions (Mairesse 2018).

In the last three decades in Russia a scientific direction has arisen that regards a museum as a social institution (Petrunina 1991, Aculych 2004q etc.). This point of view has been based on the deep historical analysis of the process of organizing museums in our country. Thus, the art collector's movement that emerged in the 18th century under the influence of European Enlightenment ideas, of which Empress Catherine II was a fan. Private collections of the nobility indicated their desire to follow the Empress's fashionable example and served as a public evidence of the owner.

In the second half of the 19th century, after the reforms of Emperor Alexander II which significantly changed the economic system of Russia, we observe the increasing activity of various social groups. The new class of industrialists and traders that established itself in the economy came to the forefront of cultural life and used museums to demonstrate its significance in the society. At that time such museums as the Historical Museum in Moscow, the Ostroukhov Gallery and the Moscow City Art Gallery of the Tretyakov brothers were founded.

In the last third of the 19th century *zemstvos* appeared in the cities as a form of urban local self-governance, and in this framework numerous local cultural societies were organized. They in turn accumulated various public initiatives of teachers, engineers, doctors, merchants, etc. Societies of art amateurs appeared

in Astrakhan', Vladimir, Kazan', Saratov, Smolensk, Odessa, Kharkov, Novgorod (Bityatskaya 1953, Pivnenko 1990, etc.), and on the basis of those societies the new self-sufficient museums were founded. The emergence of such a network of museums reflected the claims of these intellectual groups to enhance their role in culture and society.

This pre-revolutionary network of museums had become the basis of the state museum network in Soviet Russia. Unified in accordance with the state demand and financed by the Ministry of Culture, the network of local historical museums acquired uniformity in structure and thematics. Museums started to play an educational and enlightening role for the population and an ideological role for the ruling party nomenclature.

After the dismantling of the Soviet system in the 1990s, the diversity of cultural life has reappeared. The changing social and economic situation has entailed the increase in self-awareness of local communities, so they have accepted responsibility to take part in the museum activities. Along with the state and municipal museums, numerous private museums of various subjects have been founded not only in both capitals, but in the provinces as well (ACM, 2019).

During last two decades, museums working with "difficult themes" have appeared. The most famous of these are the Museum of the History of the GULAG in Moscow and the "Perm-36" Museum. They present the stories of the destinies of 40 million Soviet people who suffered under the state repressive system in the USSR for over 40 years. These State museums arose under pressure from the Human Rights movement, Memorial Society, and some projects such as "The Last Address" onto the governmental structures.

In 1995, by the initiative of the Nobel Prize winner A.I. Solzhenitsyn, who at that time returned to Russia, the House of Russians Abroad was founded on the basis of Library No. 17 in Moscow. The activities of the House were diverse: emigrants' descendants were invited to transfer their ancestor's archives, which had been removed during the process of forced emigration after 1917; some documents were purchased by the House at auctions; numerous discussions, exhibitions, meetings, concerts, films, etc., were organized. Under pressure from the House activities, which had a great international public response, the Ministry of Culture had to agree to the foundation of the Museum of Russians Abroad. In 2015 this Museum was opened in a special complex, combining the museum building and the archive building (Moskvin V. 2015).

The appearance of such museums in Russia reflects processes similar to those described in theses proposed for the 44th ICOFOM Symposium in Canada. As we can see, such situations of public activities leading to the organization of museums representing the interests of certain social groups are not unique. They are repeated at different times in the different countries. The problem should therefore be reformatted: can such processes be considered as the decolonization of the cultural field? I think, no, they cannot. First, the term decolonization has enduring connotations in scientific discourse, and it is used

by political science to describe another group of events. Secondly, we should use our own terminology for our description of cultural processes. The way we describe the problem and terms we use are also reflected in our social practices regarding tangible and intangible heritage. Today in a multicultural society, various discourses can be offered in discussing a problem. But the politically colored narrative proposed for the 44th ICOFOM Symposium introduces an element of contention and aggressiveness into the field of culture, in opposition to the goals of sustainable development of society. It is important not only what we do with heritage, but also how we talk about it, how we argue, and how we assess its value (Waterton, 2006).

In the theses to the 44th ICOFOM symposium, the questions were formulated in the form of opposition. However, museums have already gained the experience of otherness. Inclusion programs for people with disabilities are available in many museums around the world. The socialization of large groups of migrants is occurring through museums in many countries—there are museums of migration in Italy, Germany, Australia, Ireland. The adoption of otherness led to a democracy, equality and sustainable development. In a multicultural society the museum is the most important communication platform that can conduct dialogue with any cultural community. During the symposium, we can discuss the deconstruction of mainstream discourses in the museum field rejecting hierarchy in the interpretation of heritage and using discourse analysis of intangible heritage proposed, for example, by the Australian researcher L. Smith.

The history of organizing museums in Russia reveals the instrumental capabilities of museum which are used by different social and professional groups to attain their goals within society. Such goals might vary tremendously: from patriotic aims in the Museum of Russians Abroad to technological goals oriented to developing strategy for certain corporations. “A Corporate Museum helps us to find the answers to construct the activity of concern in order to be useful for society in the future”, the chief of the company Avesta said at the international conference of corporate museums in Russia (ICOM Russia news 2015).

The major trend transforming museums today is a broad engagement of local communities, volunteers, “friends of the museum” societies, and sponsors in the museum’s activities. It shows that now the activity of the museum is not built around a museum object, but around a person’s activities. The analysis of the Materials for Discussion proposed for the symposium in Kyoto assures us of this. Significant inclusion of various social groups into the museum’s sphere necessarily makes heritage a subject of multilateral discussion of what values and meanings it gives birth to. Heritage includes an important process of creative narratives helping us to comprehend our present through our history. Heritage raises complex communication questions about the transfer of knowledge and memory, allowing everybody to gain identity.

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