

Gained solidarity or loss of liberties: How our museums might address changes wrought by the Wuhan virus

Webinar of the International Committee of memorial museums for the remembrance of the victims of public crimes (ICMEMO), May 15, 2020)

Good morning to you in the Americas, good afternoon to our friends in Europe and Africa and good-evening to our colleagues and friends in Asia. Welcome to our participants in five continents and numerous time-zones at this webinar organised by the International Committee of memorial museums for the remembrance of the victims of public crimes, part of the International council of museums (ICOM).

We are grateful for your response to our invitation. In our previous webinar we had about 170 participants and we listened to our museum colleagues from Bangladesh, Nigeria, Slovakia and The Netherlands. Today, we want to spend an hour together on the question of How our museums might address changes wrought by the Wuhan virus with the title of

Gained solidarity or loss of liberties. For the the word 'or' you may of course use whatever you think is appropriate.

I am Kornelis Spaans, ICMEMO and I am your moderator. Our apologies for not being able to offer interpretation of this meeting. Everything will have to be said and done in the English language.

We had 170 participants from a wide range of countries and institutions in our first webinar on April 28th. As there are new participants today please allow me to briefly introduce you to the background of these webinars.

We are all affected by this deadly virus that originates in Wuhan, China, but all to varying degrees. It rather depends on where you are in the world, on your age, the means or absence thereof to defend yourself against this virus, whether you are dealing with an unpleasant inconvenience that will pass or with a deadly menace that is a direct threat to you and your loved ones. In the latter case one is again reminded of the plight of the Yezedi, victims of genocide by the Islamic State, in a dreadful situation and with few defenses against this virus.

As memorial museums who commemorate victims of genocides and similar atrocities we are sensitive to how social strain may develop into conflict and confrontational societies. A threat like this may bring people together for a while but it may also help to create an environment in which people feel scared and abandoned. And in which politicians and bureaucracies of different shapes and sizes instrumentalise this virus threat for their purpose.

In the last few months we see democracies and not so democracies establish political and economic straightjackets through the restriction of civil liberties and freedom and through information adjustment without so much as a whisper. All for a good cause. We, as memorials, are aware of how these things start, and perhaps end, not necessarily with a loud bang and boots on the streets, but almost as a matter of course. We see in some countries an age-discrimination emerge against the elderly that in its matter of factness quite closely resembles dictatorships of the past that considered certain groups and segments of society as surplus to requirements.

We are all affected, professionally and personally. We want to use this opportunity as memorial museum professionals to get together and benefit from each others thoughts. We have asked Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Chief curator of the Ronald S. Lauder Core Exhibition, at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw to present some thoughts on how they manage the crisis. Ursula Muenzel, a historian from Germany, will then briefly respond from Brasil, where she is currently located.

We have one hour and we aim to have about 15 minutes for questions and answers. With so many participants, our webinar system will not be able to handle questions and comments with the use of our microphones, so all our microphones, except those of the speaker. If you have a question for the speaker, please write your question using the Q and A button at the bottom of the screen. You can do that while the speakers are speaking. Please include your name and e-mail. Please use Q&A for questions only. If you want to communicate with other participants or just say hello, please use the chat button at the bottom of the screen. The whole webinar will be available online in streaming in a few days. So please keep an eye on our website and facebook.

Many museums have already had to close as part of national lockdowns. A number of them now offer virtual tours of their collections. Some of them are

re-opening with strongly restricted access for the public. All are struggling and looking for creative solutions.

Speakers

Q&A

Closure

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