

1007

1947

Iconi 42 DK

ICOM/Conf./2
MEXICO CITY, 30 October 1947

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS
(MEXICO, 7-14 NOVEMBER 1947)

REMARKS by CHAUNCEY J. HAMLIN,
President of INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS,
Delivered at the Third Session of the INTERIM
GENERAL CONFERENCE held in Mexico City,
November 11, 1947

The subject of this morning's session is Museums as Active Educational Institutions. It is not my intention to discuss this problem from a philosophical viewpoint but rather to suggest various practical methods of developing a museum's educational service in the community within which it is located.

From a practical and financial point of view the greater the service that a museum renders to its community, the more assured it will be of obtaining popular support, - particularly that necessary financial support which it is essential to secure in the first instance in order to be able to start to enlarge its educational services. This may appear to raise that time-worn question as to which comes first, the chicken or the egg. However, I must leave the final answer to this intriguing problem to the ingenuity, courage, leadership and enthusiasm of the museum director who has determined to make a start in this direction. It is sufficient to point out that the museums that have been fortunate enough to have had such leadership have grown and have won their just awards.

There is no set formula as to how this end can be achieved. Museums derive their financial support from many different sources. Some are national institutions receiving their support from the central government. Others receive their support from private endowments, while still others are privately financed by memberships or private donations. Many receive their funds from all three sources, public appropriations, interest on endowments, private membership and donations. This latter method is by all means the most satisfactory and should be the ultimate aim of all. Even now certain public institutions, national, state and municipal, supplement the public appropriations which they receive through interest from substantial endowment funds as well as by support obtained from private sources through donations and through such devices as the organisation of membership groups known as "friends of the museum" or "museum associates" or by some other similar title. There can be little doubt that enlarged service results in the long run in interesting

MUS

more people in the museum's activities which in turn should contribute to more general popular support of the museum, resulting in either increased public appropriations, additions to the endowment or increased donations or memberships.

The eventual success, however, of any educational work projected by a museum depends in the first and last instance upon the co-operative and intelligent teamwork of its staff. There can be a splendid museum building and fine and valuable exhibits. Unless, however, there is sympathetic and co-operative effort under intelligent leadership on the part of its staff, no extensive educational programme can be undertaken nor succeed in its purpose. Staff work is just as important as the museum building or the exhibits it contains. The museum's staff is truly the heart and soul of every progressive museum.

What now are the educational services to its community to which I have been referring? They divide themselves into five general categories -

1. Exhibition programmes
2. Intra-mural activities
3. Extra-mural activities
4. Co-operation with other groups
5. Public relations.

These I will now discuss.

Exhibition programmes

This subject is a large one and thorough discussion of it from all its various angles would consume much more time than we can devote to it this morning. It will, fortunately, be treated at much greater length and in some detail in tomorrow morning's and afternoon's sessions. I now have only the time to make the plea that public exhibitions presented by museums should be designed primarily to interest the layman in the subject matter presented rather than to evidence the wealth of the museum's possessions or the eruditeness of the curators and to make the further pleas that the permanent exhibitions presented by museums should be subject to constant change and improvement, (they should never remain static), and that there should be a constant flow through museums of changing special exhibits. Every visitor to a museum should carry away with him the impression when he leaves the building that every time he visits the museum he finds something new and interesting. This challenges that inertia which unfortunately prevails in too many museum visitors' minds, that once they have visited a museum they do not have ever to visit it again.

One could further discuss at length the proposal that museum exhibitions should fundamentally be planned to present ideas and the exhibition material be used as illustrations giving point and emphasis to such ideas as opposed to the presentation of museum

objects in series or in quantity, simply because the museum happens to possess them. All I desire to say in regard to this, however, at this time is that ideas do rule the destiny of man and are much more thrilling than inanimate objects. Every effort, moreover, should be made to utilise these modern techniques of exhibition, which will be discussed in a later session, to strive to make the exhibitions beautiful, understandable and interesting.

Finally, we live in a rapidly changing world where many events are taking place which are currently of great interest to the public. Many of these events lend themselves to temporary exhibitions of one kind and another. An effort to present timely special exhibitions even though they may comprise only a few objects illustrative of the event and properly publicised will tend to create the justified impression that the museum is alive, up to the minute and abreast of its times and not a dead and sleepy institution dealing sedately only with the past.

In summary, therefore, exhibits generally, (1) should be designed to interest the layman, (2) should be subject to constant change, (3) should be designed to present ideas rather than objects, and (4) should be beautiful, understandable and interesting and so far as possible, timely.

Intra-mural activities

The children of today are the adults of tomorrow. Interesting the children of the community in the work being carried on by a museum is not only fundamental to any educational programme but is also a safeguard for the museum's future. If all of the children of a given community can be brought in contact with the museum's activities, then through the passage of years as the children grow up to be adults, it will mean that practically every adult in the community will have had an opportunity of knowing about the museum and the opportunities for education it affords, and hence will be all the more likely to lend it his informed support.

At one of the subsequent scheduled sessions of our Conference this subject of working with children will be given more detailed consideration. The most practical way of reaching the children of any community is through co-operation with the schools. Many museums and school systems have developed a co-operative programme whereby all the school children of the community are brought to the museum by their teachers on a regular schedule of visits. In this way every child in the community has an opportunity of learning about the museum and the opportunities and advantages that it offers to him or her personally. In many museums these advantages include the opportunity of attending out of school programmes especially arranged for children, as Saturday morning story hours, the playing of museum games, joining organised groups or clubs and the attendance after school hours of voluntary classes. Where such opportunities have been afforded, it is astounding how eagerly they are being taken advantage of by large numbers of children. Arranging to have all the children of a community so brought to the museum thus exposing them to the museum's strong attraction operates like a selective

magnet in drawing to the museum those children who by inclination and desire are best qualified to take advantage of the opportunities offered. It is democracy at work in offering equal opportunity to all in the process of combing the whole community for self-selected talent.

Wherever possible in working with children, an effort should be made to develop such activities as may directly and individually be participated in by the children themselves. This can be done through the organisation of field clubs, reading clubs, sketching clubs, pet clubs, orchestras, choruses, dramatic productions, marionettes, museum games, the preparation of exhibits, the making, arranging and labelling of collections, the keeping of illustrated notebooks, classes in drawing, painting, modelling and the various crafts, working in gardens or greenhouses, etc. By doing things oneself, one learns the more readily and one's interest grows with achievement.

This same rule applies equally in the development of programmes for adults. It has been the experience of many museums which have developed such programmes that those in which there is active participation by individual members of the group prove to be the most successful. While children's activities can be conducted during daylight hours, it is necessary to schedule adult activities, especially class work, for the most part in the evenings. In many communities there are various organised adult groups ranging all the way from businessmen's associations and women's clubs to fraternal organisations and labour unions. Each one of these organisations affords an opportunity for co-operative effort upon the part of the museum. Evening group visits by these clubs or organisations to the museum can be arranged for special guided tours and explanation to their membership of the various educational opportunities afforded by the museum for individuals. Many such individuals have developed possibly through their own initiative or training or by contact with one or another of the varied programmes offered by the museum a special interest in some subject with which the museum itself is concerned. Through the leadership of the museum these people can oftentimes be brought together as a group to form a club or museum section for the purpose of continuing and further developing their active interest in the subject of their choice. The museum can further aid such clubs or sections by providing them with headquarters and a meeting place.

This kind of activity has generally proved to be mutually advantageous to both the group and the museum. With the same object in view, the museum can oftentimes find it possible to provide headquarters and meeting places for still other already organised groups, whose purposes are closely akin to the museum's aims. In this connection, the museum often finds itself in a position of being able to still further assist such groups through co-operating with them in arranging special exhibitions in furtherance of their aims and programmes. Through the development of such a programme, the museum has an opportunity of becoming, to all intents and purposes,

an active centre for the service of all community interests which lie within its special field.

In further worth-while aid to its community's interests, there is in addition the whole field of a museum's service to industry and commerce. This very important matter deserves far greater elaboration than we have time to give it now and should be made the subject of a full session of ICOM at some subsequent conference.

Extra-mural activities

By all means the most important of the extra-mural activities of most museums is their lending services. Such services take the form of the lending of motion picture films and lantern slides and equipment for projection of the same, books, paintings, prints, posters, pictures, charts and all sorts and kinds of exhibit material. The other important phase is the organisation and operation of lecture lyceum bureaux and the provision of lecturers or speakers, conducted field trips and excursions to points of interest, co-operation in the preservation of artistic, scientific and historical monuments and co-operation with the local park systems and summer camps in the development of trail-side museums and nature trails, etc. etc.

Through this type of extension service it is possible for the museum to reach out into every nook and cranny of the community and bring its activities directly to the attention and to the assistance of many people in a community who have never yet visited the museum itself. There is not any limit to the development of this kind of service other than the capacity of the museum staff and its resources to satisfy the demand. The rule should be, nevertheless, that wherever there is a request for such assistance, every effort should cheerfully always be made to grant it. It is extraordinary how much can be done if one really tries. Here is where teamwork on the part of the staff really counts.

Co-operation with other groups

A number of the ways in which a museum can co-operate with other organisations within its community have already been mentioned. These, however, by no means exhaust the list of possibilities. Co-operation should, of course, be sought and obtained between the different museums located within the community, and as a matter of fact, with all the other established cultural institutions including universities, colleges, educational departments, schools, libraries and private societies whose field of interests are akin to those of the particular museum. Such co-operation can take many forms from the organisation of adult education councils, museum councils and social service councils, to joint employment of personnel, joint participation in various educational projects, and joint publication of informative guides or folders.

Public Relations

Many of the activities that have already been mentioned involve so-called public relations, particularly the suggested co-operation with other institutions and organisations and many of the other extra mural activities including the sending of speakers by a museum to various clubs and organisations to explain to them about the museum's programmes. Beyond these there is, of course, its relations with the public through the use of the daily newspapers and other publications as well as by the use of the radio, direct mail contact, the museum's publications, posters and special exhibits arranged in downtown stores, public buildings and other places where large numbers of people gather. I take pleasure in referring you to the excellent discussion of PUBLIC RELATIONS prepared by Mrs. Grace Golden, Director of the Indianapolis Children's Museum, published under that title in the Handbook for Children's Museums, that has been especially prepared for our conference. This discussion contains many excellent and practicable suggestions.

Thus we have briefly reviewed some of the factors that contribute to a museum's educational work within its own community in this modern age in which we live.

Its educational exhibit programme
Its work with children and adults
Its extra-mural extension work
Its possible co-operation with other organisations, and
Its public relations programme.

The result of any such active dynamic programme as I have described will be measured not only by increased museum attendance but by that kind of attendance which will bring to the Museum's educational efforts active and informed support, and make of its community a better place within which to live and carry on one's work. In many cities throughout the world where active progressive museums are carrying on such planned educational campaigns within their own communities, the combined annual attendance of the various museums located in such cities often is found to exceed the total population of the city. Hence, it can be confidently asserted that museums are truly serviceable as valuable media of communication to masses of people. Furthermore, as a rule, museum visitors comprise a large self selected group of intelligent and hence influential citizens - the kind of a group that sympathetically and intelligently would understand and appreciate the high purposes, programmes and aims of Unesco. It is for this very reason that Unesco has included the work of museums in its programme. It is for this reason that we are meeting here now in Mexico City.

The Constitution of Unesco states

"that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed: that ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of

that suspicion and mistrust between the people of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war:"

Museums throughout the world, organised as they are as popular educational institutions designed to reach through their exhibits and educational programmes masses of people, both young and old, thus have an important mission to perform in helping to carry forward Unesco's programme. This they can do in part through the promotion of international travelling exhibitions and lecture courses, international exchange of exhibit material and personnel, including travelling fellowships and training courses, and through the organisation and presentation of museum exhibits and lectures exemplifying the United Nations or Unesco itself or still other even more fundamental exhibits truly and sympathetically representing the cultural background, customs and living conditions of the various people of the world, showing how the people of each nation have taken advantage of the opportunities or surmounted the difficulties which lay about them. Such exhibits would contribute directly to clearer appreciation of other people's problems in relation to one's own and hence to that mutual understanding which necessarily underlies international co-operation. It is only through such international understanding and co-operation that the world can build the structure of permanent peace

To this cause we are happy to pledge our support.