



Museums and Local Development: An Introduction to Museums, Sustainability and Well-being

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Museums and Local Development

An Introduction to Museums, Sustainability and Well-being

by Karen Brown, Guest Editor

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Costa Rican teenagers celebrate the EU-LAC-MUSEUMS bi-regional Youth Exchange¹ on top of The Quiraing, Isle of Skye Ecomuseum Druim Nan Linntean (Ridge of Ages, Scotland). © Karen Brown

The ability to ‘Think global, act local’ (Patrick Geddes) has never been more pressing for museum and heritage professionals. In recent years, museums, natural and cultural heritage sites and their communities around the world have been acutely affected by natural disasters, migration, conflict, war, lack of security, youth unemployment and related societal and environmental challenges. The situation is exacerbated in low- to middle-income countries where maintaining equilibrium, well-being, and community resilience is an urgent necessity in the face of global imbalances and rapid change, and for communities in remote rural and island locations, the challenges of globalisation are intensified by socio-political and environmental instability, lack of access to resources, depopulation and unethical development. Viewed in this context, museums and heritage organisations bear a huge responsibility for the communities they serve in the 21st century. Studies have shown that museums are among the most trusted public institutions around the globe (Museums Association 2013;

Aksoy, in *Report on Policy Round Table 2019*, p.5), and they therefore have an ethical obligation to support social cohesion and development, as well as to maintain traditional standards in collections care and management. As a result, museum and heritage professionals have increasingly found themselves asking: ‘what are museums for?’ If museums in the 21st century are coming to be understood as ‘polyphonic spaces’ concerned with ‘planetary well-being’ (ICOM website, ‘Museum Definition’ page), then in addition to paying attention to traditional concerns, museology as a discipline needs to keep abreast of debates in global challenges and sustainable development.

Sustainability

'Sustainability' is a word used increasingly by academics, policy makers and communities but seldom well-defined for museology. ICOM recently adopted sustainability as one of its priority areas. A working group was established in 2018 with a mission 'to help ICOM consider how to mainstream Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement across its range of activities, and to support its members and member museums to contribute constructively in upholding the Sustainable Development Goals and towards climate change adaptation and mitigations' (ICOM website, 'Working Group on sustainability' page; Transforming Our World 2015; Paris Agreement 2015). Through its regional alliances, and international, national and specialist committees, ICOM is also focusing more and more on the role that museums can play in solving urgent and intractable global challenges such as climate change, emergency preparedness and response, migration and decolonisation.

However, this positioning of museums and culture on a global stage within sustainable development action has not always been so clearly articulated. The ground-breaking World Commission on Environment and Development of 1987 (known more commonly as the Brundtland Report) defined sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Our Common Future 1987, p. 8). The Report codified what would become known as the three 'pillars' of sustainability – environment, economy and society – to include culture as a fourth pillar (UNESCO 1998; Agenda 21 2004; Nurse 2006). Since then, ecological economics has prompted new ways of visualising sustainable development through concepts such as 'strong sustainability' in which environmental limits provide the boundaries within which we must act (Neumayer 2003; 2012), or the 'Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries' (Raworth 2017) that develops constructive ways to critique the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The aim of achieving healthy, just societies in which its members live with ecological integrity must be kept to the fore.

Museums and heritage organisations are attempting to sustain a range of assets, including community and economic assets as well as heritage itself. At the same time, by reflecting on the macro and micro levels of climate justice as a systemic problem, museologists and museum professionals are learning to question prevalent political ideologies in order to grow as organisations and to do so in more ethical ways by reducing consumption and

decolonising their collections. In the words of culture and sustainability specialist Douglas Worts, 'given how tightly our economy is tied to consumption, and how consumption is tied to carbon emissions, and how carbon emissions drive the climate crisis, it can be argued that any economic growth at micro-economic levels which increases macro-economic growth essentially propels societies in very scary directions at the global systems level' (Worts 2019, personal communication; see also de Varine 2006; 2008; 2010; Sutter 2006; Worts 2006; 2011; Dorfman 2019).

In recent years, the field of Heritage Studies has been increasingly prescient about sustainability issues, and this has opened up a wide range of debates about the impact of climate change, the ethics of tourism development, loss of biodiversity, the heritage of war and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, amongst others (Gegner and Ziino 2012; Cameron and Neilson 2014; Akagawa and Smith 2019). Lately, the international museum world, too, has begun to step up by acknowledging its ecological responsibilities and obligations towards cultural landscapes as fundamental resources for sustainable futures (Siena Charter 2016; Mac Devitt 2017; Riva 2017; Davis and Smeds 2018). Activist approaches to sustainability are also gathering pace in response to societal change (Brophy and Wylie 2008; Chaumier and Porcedda 2011; Janes and Sandell 2019; 'Culture declares emergency' 2019). These actions are based on the premise that museums can provide places for communities to meet, work, share and mediate ideas, build social sustainability and foster personal and collective well-being for the common good. To understand their role in the broader global context means transforming our understanding of museums in all their diversity – from large national museums in multicultural urban settings to small community museums in native or indigenous settings – and seeing them as places where we humans can seek balance between our well-being and the health of planet Earth.

Such a holistic approach towards local development was debated almost 50 years ago at the historic Round Table of Santiago de Chile (1972) and in the subsequent report by UNESCO (UNESCO 1973; Do Nascimento Junior *et al.* 2012). Bringing together a range of actors from the worlds of museums, agriculture and development at a time of socio-political unrest and movements such as liberation theology and pedagogy of the oppressed (de Varine 2017, pp. 24-25, p. 147), this report recommended that museums focus on their social role. As Hugues de Varine, one of the organisers,

observed, the event offered ‘a great opportunity to bring together the two categories of specialists, experts in museums and in economic and social development to solve one problem: integrating museums into development’ (Do Nascimento Junior *et al.* 2012, p. 206; Hennelly 1990; Assunção 2010, p. 5). As is well documented, the Round Table of Santiago gave birth to the so-called ‘Latin’ *nouvelle muséologie*, which challenged existing structures in society and worked towards cultural decolonisation through its anti-elitist ideas and practices. As elaborated elsewhere, this approach to social development should be distinguished from New Museology in British literature (Desvallées and Mairesse 2005; Assunção and Primo 2010). Since then, community-based museums and ‘ecomuseums’ have been created around the globe, often developed at grassroots level as agents for local development and defined by Peter Davis as ‘community-driven museums or heritage projects that aid sustainable development’ (Davis 2007, p. 199). In view of the global challenges of today, the 1972 Round Table of Santiago recommendations, alongside the World Heritage Convention of the same year bringing together discussion on natural and cultural heritage, assume inordinate resonance. This is because community-based museums linked into their distinctive natural environments are among the most community-engaged, well-being-oriented catalysts for building social sustainability and resilience.

One of the stand-out features evident from ongoing research into ecomuseums and community-based museums – from the point of view of progressive museums and local development agendas – is the attention paid to the role of cultural memory and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), or ‘Living heritage’, in community heritage processes (UNESCO 2019). The UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) demands that ICH (including oral traditions, traditional craft skills, performing arts, social practices, and knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe), are key to community resilience throughout the world as people seek to engage with the past, understand the present and plan for meaningful futures. The Convention proved especially important for indigenous and native populations living in areas of natural significance and, at the time, the Convention was widely supported by countries from the so-called global South – not least Latin American and Caribbean countries – as the agreement validated their heritage and worldviews. While the

Convention itself has since been widely criticised for, at worst, reinforcing dichotomies (Western and indigenous; tangible and intangible), the concept has nevertheless proven productive for deconstructing prevalent ideologies affecting our understanding of heritage and ‘uses of the past’ (Smith 2006; Erll 2011; Stefano *et al.* 2012; Akagawa and Smith 2019). Building on ecomuseological research methods developed thus far, therefore, necessitates a shift away from subjective, individual health and well-being issues and museum ‘audience development’ to focus on embodied learning, spirituality and the collective good within a given territory. In this way, the academy and the museum can offer an active museological research prism that has the capacity to impact on emerging international debates relating to well-being and the Anthropocene.

Well-being

Humankind’s relationship with nature and culture is understood very differently around the world – Western ontologies are not global ones. Museological research has the potential to destabilise Western anthropocentrism and the thinking that sustains it by demonstrating, among other things, how integral relationships between tangible and intangible heritage, processual collective memory, traditional cosmogonies and intergenerational transmission of knowledge can work together for sustainable museum and heritage communities. Acknowledging an ICOM museum community ever-more concerned with ‘planetary well-being’ (ICOM website, ‘Museum Definition’ page), community-led heritage processes value heritage as both natural and cultural, tangible and intangible. Research into museums, health and well-being is gathering pace in the Anglophone world. Notably, a new line of research is currently emerging that considers landscape and nature closely in the realm of well-being, such as Julie Taylor’s ‘Wild Places as Therapeutic Environments’ (2016). Other recent studies demonstrate how public engagement with museums can bring about significant health benefits to people, and leading to impacts such as reduced social isolation, positive emotions, increased self-esteem and sense of identity. The UK has established a National Alliance for Museums Health and Wellbeing, and since 2011 the popular ‘Happy Museum’ project, led by Tony Butler, has brought together thinking about the role of museums for well-being and sustainability, focusing on encouraging active citizenship and

subjective well-being (Happy Museum website; Fujiwara 2013). Interestingly, art therapy emerges as an important strand (Silverman 2010; Froggett *et al.* 2011; Renaissance North West 2011; Chatterjee and Noble 2013; 2015; Dodd and Jones 2014; Newman 2016; O'Neill 2017; Goulding *et al.* 2018; MBAM website 2019).

Today, cultural and heritage institutions are under increased pressure to prove their value to society, and the UK Museums Association (MA) has, in many respects, led the way in shaping public thinking around the debate. The MA has identified a list of main categories for museums to consider in relation to health and well-being: mental health, older people, marginalised people, learning disabilities and rehabilitation. In 2018, it published a report on *Museums as Spaces for Wellbeing*, based on a sector-wide survey launched by the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing (MA 2018) that builds upon its previous manifesto, *Museums Change Lives* (MA 2014). The initiative stems from a drive towards partnership working primarily with the healthcare sector and a recognition that participation and volunteering in the museum sector promotes well-being and self-confidence and broadens people's horizons. Similarly, the Arts and Humanities Research Council invested in the Cultural Value Project to build research evidence on the impact of arts and culture on our lives (AHRC 2018), and a number of multi-disciplinary projects concerning dementia in particular have been led by Andrew Newman (Newman 2018). One of the major findings in these reports is that, for many museums in the UK, engaging with well-being has meant navigating or building partnerships with the health sector.

In 2018, ICOM and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) entered into partnership and developed the resource *Culture and Local Development: Maximising the Impact. Guide for Local Governments, Communities and Museums* (hereafter OECD-ICOM Guide), in which health and well-being are stated as one of five strategic aims, to which I shall return in the Editorial to this issue. The OECD-ICOM Guide was launched at the OECD Conference, 'Culture and Local Development', held in Venice, Italy, 6–7 December 2018, in cooperation with the European Commission and UNESCO. A number of measurement and framework tools are shared therein, including the University College London's 'Museum Well-being Measures Toolkit' (UCL Toolkit 2013), and 'Arts for Health and Well-being, An Evaluation Framework' (Public Health England 2016).

Indicators of change towards well-being can be challenging to measure, but not impossible. Thomson and Chatterjee have worked on a 'Museum Well-being Measures toolkit' (2014), and in the same year a UK *Taking Part* survey calculated (based on the average visitor in the UK being 47 and in employment, visiting 3.4 heritage sites a year) that the impact on well-being by visiting heritage venues was equivalent to £1,646 per person per year (Heritage Counts 2014). Measuring well-being in society can also become a political issue and has assumed a greater urgency through the 2018 Wellbeing Economy Governments group involving Scotland, Iceland and New Zealand. Seeking to tackle issues of climate change and inequality, Nicola Sturgeon has propounded a well-being approach to measuring a society's wealth rather than focusing primarily on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Nicola Sturgeon TED Talk 2019). Indeed, well-being is a key funding priority in the UK by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, among other funding bodies in the sector (National Lottery Heritage Fund 2018).

The OECD-ICOM Guide advocates collaborations with institutions such as employment agencies, social service centres, hospitals and prisons, and multi-disciplinary research projects. The efforts of economists to try to quantify the value of heritage for people has similarities with the efforts of the OECD-ICOM initiative when it recommends advocating local government as partners and enablers, to 'reach out to decentralised national or state government services at the local level responsible for education, training, employability, health and well-being' (OECD-ICOM 2019, p. 12). One area discussed in the Guide is volunteering in museums and how it can support local development, 'not necessarily because of the financial savings on wages or as a substitute for staff, but because volunteers bring new skills and help to link communities by connecting people with their heritage, as well as providing opportunities to increase social capital and, for some, improve employability' (OECD-ICOM 2019, p. 47). It continues: 'volunteers [...] help bridge gaps between the perspective of museums and local development issues' (OECD-ICOM 2019, p. 49). In practice on the ground, volunteering can fulfil such goals, but can also create issues for heritage communities where volunteering is prevalent. For example, in the face of economic recession and lack of employment opportunities, or where the majority of community heritage projects are run by elderly retired volunteers with a great deal of experience to offer but who struggle to recruit

a younger generation to carry the work forward (Community Heritage Scotland 2019). Moreover, while growing tourism can be an aid to developing local economies, it does not come without risk, for example when the exploitation of traditions or cultural landscapes (UNESCO 2019) become predatory to the detriment of local well-being (Girard and Nijkamp 2009). It is for these reasons that a number of contemporary ecomuseums are exemplar, such as the innovative links being made between Italian ecomuseums and ‘Slow Food’ Italy (Strategic Manifesto 2016), or the cases of the Isle of Skye and Cateran ecomuseums in Scotland (Community Heritage Scotland 2019). Ultimately, thinking globally about the challenges facing our planet can and should lead to acting locally for sustainable development.

Community-based museums

As a material for development, heritage should be managed as a non-renewable but creative resource by the community itself as a whole, and by each one of its members or groups of members. This should be recognized by all other actors of development, whether public or private (Hugues de Varine, in Brown et al. 2019, p. 35).

In recent years, the processes of globalisation have increased people’s search for the ‘local’ and a ‘sense of place’ (Davis 2011), as well as a ‘sense of self’ through community heritage (Onciu, Stefano and Hawke 2017). Therefore, one of the motivations for this issue is to think around how the international concern with sustainability and well-being outlined above translates into local contexts and views. In this regard, ‘local development’ will be seen to have multiple interpretations in the texts that follow, except for the community-based museum case studies where a more general sense of community participation and action are key to sustainable local development.

Over the past decade or so, the field of Museum Studies has begun to look more closely at the relationship between museums and communities (Crooke 2007; Watson 2007; Golding and Modest 2013), with a number of scholars focusing specifically on the responsibility of museums towards social inclusion, participation and activism (GLAMM Report 2000; Sandell 2002; 2007; 2011; Black 2012; Janes and Sandell 2019). However, within this emerging corpus, scholars and policymakers have not yet adequately addressed museums and community through cross-regional

comparison. Community museums have been defined in a number of ways in different contexts, not least in Latin America (Morales Lersch 2019), and the most constructive way of thinking about this topic is arguably to speak of ‘community-based museums’, and to articulate community museology for local development.

What often characterises these small grassroots community heritage initiatives is that they lie outside the official ICOM definition of a museum (2007) and consequently suffer from a lack of access to national, regional and international advice, financial support and attention (Brown and Mairesse 2018; Brown, Bralon and Nazor 2018). In order to become more sustainable and to strengthen each other, these kinds of initiatives work best when they network both within their own territories and with each other across national boundaries and regions. The manifold benefits of these efforts are evidenced in the International movement for a new Museology (MINOM) founded in 1985, La Red de Museos Comunitarios de América formed in 2000 (Camerena Ocampo and Morales Lersch 2016), the Italian Ecomuseum platform launched in 2016 (Drops website) and (presented in this issue), the Balkan Museum Network, and a new Saskatchewan Ecomuseum Network. A new grassroots community heritage network for Scotland is also being scoped at present (Community Heritage Scotland 2019).

Community museology engages with communities by fostering parity of esteem and breaking down systemic hierarchies associated with the museum and the academy, and often overlaps with heritage work. Researching community-based museums, deploying what Bruno Bralon Soares calls a ‘reflexive approach’ to museology, involves being critically aware of one’s own subject position and working in collaboration with actors from other cultural backgrounds – encompassing heritage communities themselves – acknowledging that Western thought cannot constitute the sole foundation of contemporary museology. This is the approach adopted by the bi-regional project EU-LAC Museums (2016–2020), of which ICOM is a legal entity partner along with seven others from Scotland (Coordinator), Portugal, Spain, France, Peru, Chile, Costa Rica, and the Anglophone Caribbean (EU-LAC Museums website). It is represented in this issue by the Peruvian case study owing to its focus on local development outside the capital city of Lima, in a Northern region of outstanding archaeological significance but historically affected by the El Niño phenomenon. Good sustainable development agendas recognise the

need for community engagement, action and development, and community-based museums can play a key role, not least by co-creating narratives and stories of who we are as a community or nation. ‘The act of collective self-interpretation is a creative act, which is both affirming and transformational’, explains Project Advisor Teresa Morales. ‘An adolescent may feel connected instead of isolated to her community; an elder is perceived as a source of collective strength and knowledge instead of a burden. [...] The telling of the story can transform how a community perceives its past, and in that way it can transform the impact of the past’ (Morales, in Brown *et al.* 2019, p.40).

Editorial

This issue of *Museum International* on the topic of Museums and Local Development aims to debate the role of museums in fostering social sustainability and well-being in local communities. The journal commission follows on from the high-level intergovernmental collaboration between the OECD and ICOM seeking to highlight the role that museums play in local development. As described in ICOM’s Annual Report, the initiative carries on, in many ways, the advocacy for the value of museums for society that is enshrined in UNESCO’s Recommendation Concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society (2015) and in ICOM’s Strategic Plan 2016–2022 (ICOM Annual Report 2018).

The OECD-ICOM resource *Culture and Local Development: Maximising the Impact. Guide for Local Governments, Communities and Museums* aims to serve as a road map for local governments, museums and museum professionals to help them define a joint local development agenda in order to promote sustainable futures. It does so under five main themes: economic development and innovation; urban regeneration and community development; cultural development, education and creativity; inclusion, health and wellbeing; and managing the relationship between local governments and museums to maximise the impact on local development.

One of the Guide’s main aims is to facilitate communication between local governments and museums, two bodies that do not always speak the same language, thus helping local museums to advocate for their institutions and projects. It advocates collaborative working between museums and local government agencies by pointing out, among other things, that the pooling of ‘back-end’ services can be an efficient way of working. By embedding museums in the social fabric of a local area, the Guide’s authors argue, these institutions can become not only more economically sustainable, but also more socially sustainable and relevant. Achieving forms of ‘sustainability’ through culture, therefore, can be understood as one of the principle aims of the Guide, and has led to the reflection on the topics of sustainability and well-being provided above.

Of the themes listed in the OECD-ICOM Guide, regional community development, inclusion and well-being are prioritised in the essays that follow in this issue, because they are the ones that are most difficult to ‘measure’ and because they embrace cultural diversity as a factor in development (UNESCO 2001). They are also the themes more likely to slip through the research net and are therefore important to consider through the lens of humanities and social sciences research. The essays included here therefore consider what well-being means in different global contexts and the role of museums, from developing

collaborative strategies with the health care sector to establishing cultural sustainability in biodiverse settings.

The perspectives represented tend to adopt a bottom-up approach to the topic by starting with the communities themselves, and they represent ICOM country categories in the global South and the global North in order to interrogate and test the impact of ICOM and OECD debates and recommendations around local development.

Part I features projects that have specifically utilised or tested out the OECD-ICOM Guide in developing their museum or project management in Greece, Poland and Italy. In Part II, the narrative turns to consider the specific ways in which museums are working with local and regional governments to increase sustainability in Peru, Canada and Finland. The focus in Part III shifts to look at difficult heritage and ways of dealing with past conflicts in Nigeria, the Balkans and Colombia. Part IV examines how issues of ICH and community well-being are currently addressed by different museums in Croatia, the UK and Pakistan.

Part I:

Managing museums for local development

Opening the issue is Marlen Mouliou's text '*Athens as a Museum of Possibilities: Reflections on Social Innovation and Cultural Production*', wherein the city of Athens is presented as a complex ecosystem in the frame of urban resilience through systems thinking. Arguing for the 'emergence of new order', the essay looks at how the city's inhabitants seek to understand social innovation through culture following a period of recession and austerity. Mouliou describes how actions in recent years have sought to understand social innovation through culture including a participatory platform, a social innovation project, and policy plans. Asking the question how local government can work productively with citizens to promote the well-being of the city, Mouliou proposes reflections on the role of social innovation for addressing critical challenges including regeneration and migration.

Moving to the context of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, in '*Museums and Local Governments in Poland: Partners in Local Development?*' Monika Murzyn-Kupisz, Dominika Hołuj, Jarosław Działek and Katarzyna Gorczyca discuss cooperation between museums and local governments. Their review takes account not only of economic changes, but also of qualitative and social transformations in the context of decentralisation and devolution of responsibilities from central to local governance since the 1990s. The case study aligns with the aspirations of the OECD-ICOM Guide in many regards, such as promoting financial and organisational links, sharing resources between museums and municipal governments beneficial to local development, and tourism development. Indeed, the authors were involved in interviews and data collection as part of the OECD project '*Culture and local development. Maximising the impact*'. This research took place across a wide range of museum scales from city museums to small, local museums to investigate the ways in which local authorities can provide support and the untapped potential of museums for local development.

Concluding this section, Lanzinger and Garlandini's essay, '*Local Development and Sustainable Development Goals: A Museum Experience*' also considers a range of scale in museums. Maintaining that the five themes of the OECD-ICOM Guide reflect the policy options for local governments in relation to museums, and the leverage potential of museums as regards their relationship with local governments, the authors present frameworks

within which to act by bringing together the principles of the OECD-ICOM Guide and the United Nations' 2030 SDGs to argue that museums need to 'Think globally, act locally'. This was the outcome of an interactive world café and role-playing game conducted in Trento's MUSE-Museo delle Scienze. They also illustrate innovative ways to connect with a full range of SDGs, such as creating a Social Balance Sheet to show the activities of the organisation in an accountable way. A Local Development Balance Sheet (LDBS) is also proposed and demonstrated, and a number of recent Italian ecomuseum initiatives towards sustainable development are highlighted.

All of these texts follow a line of thinking following on from a trend noted 17 years ago by Stephen Weil whereby museums came under increasing pressure to prove that they mattered to communities because they drew on the resources of a given society (Weil 2002). In the past, museums were asked to prove their value in terms of visitor numbers and spending, tax revenues and employment statistics, but today we see a shift towards measuring value by capturing broader social and economic impacts, including 'community development through improved social capital, urban regeneration, place branding, inclusion, well-being, innovation and creativity' (ICOM-OECD Guide, p. 49).

Part II:

Museums and regional development

One of the rationales behind the OECD-ICOM Guide is to highlight the role of local governments in partnership with museums towards local development. Focusing on case studies of local museums in the La Libertad and Lambayeque regions of northern Peru, '*Museums as Tools for Sustainable Community Development: Four Archaeological Museums in Northern Peru*' by Luis Repetto Málaga and Karen Brown presents the results of a bi-regional consortium research project on the topic of '*Museums, Community and Sustainability in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean*', by focusing on local museum development projects outside the capital city of Lima. As Repetto elaborates, the museums involved work towards local development in their safeguarding of outstanding archaeological findings, and they promote tourism to a part of Peru that is often overshadowed by the regular tourist attractions (such as Lima and travel to Cusco and Machu Picchu).

With project action affected by the catastrophic El Niño flooding affecting the Chan Chan and Huacas de Moche site museums in La Libertad in 2016, the case study offers a timely exploration of ways to link endogenous knowledge with contemporary research innovation towards achieving resilient community development.

In his 2019 essay entitled ‘Sustaining Sense of Place and Heritage Landscapes’, Peter Davis offers a reflection on the latest thinking around nature-culture relations as they relate to ecomuseology (Davis, in Brown *et al.* 2019). Also taking an ecomuseological approach to nature and culture, but focusing explicitly on pressing environmental issues affecting humankind, Glenn Sutter advocates for ‘cultural evolution’ in order to address the Anthropocene in his text ‘When Global Changes Hit Home: Museums as Catalysts for Local Development’. Therein, the author considers a range of museum types working towards local development and emphasises how museums that demonstrate active community engagement prove the most relevant and viable. His text provides a fresh and engaging view on museums as ‘calm spaces’ capable of allowing people to explore adaptation through engagement with local histories, current circumstances, and potential futures. By taking local heritage assets as a basis for sustainable community development, Sutter argues, ecomuseums in the landscapes of the Saskatchewan prairies offer effective processes in the face of the Anthropocene.

Emerging discourse on nature-culture relations resonates equally strongly with the next essay, ‘Nature Represented: Environmental Dialogue in the Finnish-Karelian Historical Museums’ by Maria Lähteenmäki, Oona Ilmolahti and Alfred Colpaert. Aligning itself with approaches to environmental history, the essay considers the case study of a transnational cultural region which continues from Finland across the border as Russian Karelia. Deploying a survey methodology together with analysis of secondary literature including exhibition catalogues, the authors address themes of memory loss and reclamation through nature, culture and museums from the 1970s to the present day. More than half of the Finnish-Karelian museums are small-scale, local open air and specialty museums, and ecomuseology is discussed as well as analysis of prevalent exhibition topics on the culture-nature relationship such as the forest, waterways and cosmologies. Potentialities for a new network are further teased out in the multi-cultural and diverse natural environment of the European East-North borderland.

Part III: Museums, local development and reconciliation

Collectively, the essays in Part III seek to move beyond the implicit priorities of the OECD-ICOM Guide to better understand the socio-cultural, ecological and spiritual dimensions of local development through the lens of regional and community-based initiatives in museums and heritage sites around the world. In her essay ‘Redefining National Museums in Nigeria for Social Inclusion and Cohesion: the NCMM Perspective’, Louisa Nnenna Onuoha speaks to a number of initiatives in tune with the aspirations of the OECD-ICOM Guide that have taken place in Africa over the past number of years. Using three museums as case studies, the essay demonstrates how social inclusion and cohesion can be fostered through working in partnership with local entities, including prisons and schools, by going out into communities, such as the Luvu camp in Maraba near Abuja, to work with migrants using object handling sessions and teach self-reliance skills acquisition training. In the process, Onouha identifies a shift from an object-focused museum to a people-focused museum – in line with recent trends around the museum definition, purpose and function – and demonstrates how this can enable national museums to become tools for local development in Nigeria.

Looking more closely into the role of museums and heritage in post-war and fragile situations is Diana Walters’ and Aida Vežić’s essay, ‘Join Us in Joining Hands: The Balkan Museum Network and Grassroots Activism’. Walters and Vežić chart the creation and value of The Balkan Museum Network, an independent grassroots network that now reaches 200 museums across 13 countries and functions in one of the most politically volatile areas of Europe. The essay illustrates, among other things, the positive impact of networks for under-represented and marginalised groups, and echoes the recent clarion call for museums to make the most of their role in society towards activism. As the authors argue, ‘voices from the margins of the international museum world are often unheard, despite their obvious relevance to issues around resilience, cooperation and partnerships’ (Walters and Vežić 2019, p. 125).

The above-mentioned essay speaks to the theme of Museums and Contested Histories (*Museum International* 2018, Vol. 70, No. 3-4), but brings new focus to issues in local development, as does our next essay, ‘Words on Returning: Narratives on Displacement and Returning in Indigenous Communities in Colombia’ by García Jaramillo, García Cano and Cadavid González, which examines forced migration. It takes as a case study the role of the House of Memory Museum in Medellín, a museum for indigenous peoples forcefully displaced by armed conflict. Using participatory methods, museum facilitators worked with individuals to co-create a collective narrative of tragic events around forced displacement and the effects on their lives. The project evidenced the community’s efforts not for a physical return to their place of origin, but for a symbolic return to recover and maintain cultural practices connected to their ancestral identity. Participants came to recognise that their families and children, rather than a physical place in the Colombian countryside, now formed their roots. Therefore, while land forms a part of their identity, it is physically absent, meaning they can only experience it through memory and by maintaining practices that formed part of their previous way of life.

Part IV: Museums, local development and well-being

Ideas about the role of well-being in museums and local development are deepened in the essay by Katharina Massing, ‘Learning to let go – the process of establishing an ecomuseum in Southwell’. Focusing on a new participatory ecomuseum project in Southwell, England, Massing highlights the role that ecomuseums can play in enhancing well-being and sense of place through community-led, bottom-up processes, as well as by deploying tourism and other measures to bring about economic improvement. This essay draws out the difficulties that can arise in consulting a community about their needs and wants without having a specific outcome in mind for people to buy into, and reflects on the level of community involvement necessary to enhance well-being.

The themes of well-being and sense of place are also at the heart of the essay by Ratković Ayemir, Tolić and Jagić Boljat. ‘Intangible cultural heritage as a catalyst of well-being and a tool for development of Pleternica, Croatia’ offers a specific case study of post-war heritage and sustainable development through ICH – the local *bećarac* song. As a living tradition, the *bećarac* song is posited as a

means for the community to realise a number of unexpected outcomes, such as traits of their local sense of humour. The authors outline how, through a participatory community-based methodology, they strengthened the local sense of identity, belonging and togetherness in the process of creating a museum, but they stress that to work in an effective manner, heritage interpreters need to practice ‘empathy’ with the local community, a concept of increasing relevance to museum studies today (Gokcigdem 2016). ICH is also discussed as key to the development of community museums elaborated in the essay, ‘Integrating Cultural Lanscapes for Community Museum Development: Design, Practice and Strategies’ by Zahra Hussain. Only by fostering a sense of community, identity and belonging, Hussain argues, can community museums build resilience in the remote mountain community in Laspur, Northern Pakistan. Taking an ethnographic approach, she then outlines a project whereby she deployed participatory strategies around the practices of everyday life, including tea gatherings and communal construction of a new museum. Interdependencies and inter-relations between human and collective practices and the environment are especially highlighted as ways to experience belonging and form a sense of community in the landscape understood in the frame of cultural landscapes.

The closing text by Hussain therefore resonates especially closely with the themes of sustainability and well-being elucidated in the Introduction, by proving that they are integral to each other and need to be considered in a holistic way through the landscape. Prescient research questions concerning relationships between culture and nature – not least concerning the role of ICH – continue to be grappled with for sustaining diverse heritage communities. However, these nexus requires deeper cultural understandings as we work together between regions and between disciplines. Museology, sustainable development, anthropology and management are among those prioritised in this issue, but others will need to join the debate in order to fathom the bigger picture of museums and local development past, present and future.

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➤ NOTES

- 1 For more information on the EU-LAC-MUSEUMS bi-regional Youth Exchange, see: <https://bit.ly/36iImOz>

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