



# City Museums and Globalization

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Kent Müzeleri ve Küreselleşme

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## Abstract

*City museum is a new issue in museology, which has been discussed for a decade. Important discussions have been carried out about the museum and its relationship to the urban environment and urban life, the relationship between the city, society and the museum, and the changing city and society. The changing city is considered in the context of globalization. In the literature, there are several ideas about the relationship between globalization and its impacts on today's cities and societies. On the one hand, globalization is discussed as a negative normalizing process; and on the other hand, it is considered a process of development. Although there are different thoughts on globalization, there is a common approach to the relationship between globalization, city and the city museum, which is that the city museum should display the analogous relationship with the past, present and future.*

**Keywords:** *city, urban life, society, city museum, globalization*

## Özet

*Kent müzesi müzecilik alanında son on yıllık süreçte tartışılmaya başlanan yeni bir konudur. Bu tartışmalarda müzenin kentsel çevreyle ve kent yaşamıyla ilişkisi, kent-toplum-müze ilişkisi ve değişen kent ve toplum öne çıkan konulardır. Bu bağlamda değişen kent küreselleşme kavramı etrafında ele alınmaktadır. Literatürde küreselleşmenin bugünün kentlerine ve toplumlarına etkisi üzerine çeşitli görüşler sunulmaktadır. Kimi yaklaşımlarda küreselleşme olumsuz bir normalleşme süreci olarak ele alınırken, bazı görüşler de küreselleşmenin geliştirici bir süreç olduğu yönündedir. Her ne kadar küreselleşme ile ilgili çeşitli görüşler öne sürülse de, küreselleşme, kent ve kent müzesi ilişkisi hakkında ortak bir yaklaşım ön plana çıkmaktadır: kent müzesi geçmişin, bugünün ve geleceğin analogik etkileşimini sergilemelidir.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *kent, kent yaşamı, toplum, kent müzesi, küreselleşme*

## **City Museums and Globalization**

City museum is a new phenomenon in museology which is discussing for a decade. Since 1977, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) as a non-governmental organization of museums and museum professionals has been working on museums and their contribution to society. In 2004, the International Committee for the Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities (CAMOC) was approved by ICOM's Executive Council during the ICOM General Conference held in Seoul. Then, at a meeting in Moscow in April 2005 organized at the Moscow City Museum delegated from 13 countries, the Committee's aims and objectives were drafted. So, CAMOC (2005a) "owes its origins to the initiative of Moscow City Museum and museum professionals in other countries who felt the need for a Committee which would focus on museums of the city." CAMOC (2005a) explains its focus in the website as follows:

The Committee also reflects the growing focus worldwide on cities: their economic importance, their spectacular growth and the problems and possibilities they present. The matters for debate on the city are almost endless: pollution, regeneration, the private car, public transport, the flight to the suburbs, the destruction of heritage, insensitive development. The Committee aims to be at the centre of this debate, not least through supporting and encouraging museums of cities in their work of collecting, preserving and presenting original material on the city's past, present and future, work which can reinforce the city's identity and contribute to its development.

Additionally CAMOC (2005b) states in the website that "It is a forum for people who work in or are interested in museums about cities, urban planners, historians, economists, architects or geographers," and that "all of whom can share knowledge and experience, exchange ideas and explore partnerships across national boundaries. In short, CAMOC is about cities and the people who live in them."

Tatiana Gorbacheva, the deputy director of the Museum Association Moscow City Museum, calls these reflections on city museum as a new

process in museology and discusses the aspects of contemporary activities of city museums. The first aspect is “the relationship between the museum and its urban environment,” the second one is “the change of the city over time,” and the third one is “the relationship between the museum and society today” (Gorbacheva, 2006, p. 50).

Gorbacheva (2006, p. 50) states that “the development of a city and a city museum have in common is that they both result from a strong individuality and unity,” so “urbanology, a new science about the development of urban culture is very close to museum activities.” According to her, “the city’s unique features depend on the peculiarity of nature, landscape, building, and of the cultural variety of its communities [and] the urban process is not only continuing but quickening and the number of megalopolises in the world grows” (Gorbacheva, 2006, p. 51). So she claims:

In this context, the city museum cannot remain within the confines of its traditional activities, formed in the past century. During the twentieth century, the activity of the city museum traditionally occupied one building or one complex located in the city centre, and the basis of the museum exhibitions was the artefact. The city museum remained valued, reflecting a city’s image, expressing its essence and helping its inhabitants in their self-determination. The new museum practice is based on working with space and wide areas. This means that many urban museums are now complex structures, which consist not only of individual buildings, but also entire urban territories and settlements (Gorbacheva, 2006, p. 51).

Gorbacheva (2006, p. 52) also argues that “the concept of ‘heritage’” should be worked on “rather than of museum objects to create images of the historical periods.” According to her, the museums are no longer composed of buildings and objects, “but encompass heritage as a whole,” and in that way “the museum interpretation of space provides new value to the sense of the place and of inhabiting it” (Gorbacheva, 2006, p. 52). “Sense of the place” is important for her, and she contends that it is about the relationship of past-present-future of the city. She

states that "(i)n the urban environment and urban life, time is not divided into the past, present and future – it is united. The here and now, heritage, contemporary life and spots of future are presented in urban life" (Gorbacheva, 2006, p. 52). So according to her the museum should reflect "the past, present and future development of the city itself and its community" (Gorbacheva, 2006, p. 52).

### **Globalization as Homogenization**

Gorbacheva (2006, p. 53) also states that the museum should have social missions, such as "the preservation of the living environment, the negation of violence and extremism, assistance in adapting to urban life, and the defence of cultural diversity." According to her, "defending cultural diversity" gets more importance in the age of globalization. In that respect she states:

Urban life, especially life in capital cities, undergoes the rapid influence of globalization. The global networks of communication, world fashion and especially, the development of mass culture directly threaten the retention of the diversity of culture in large cities. The new generation of immigrants or steady ethnic diasporas, consciously preserve their own cultural traditions. The mission of city museums is to help these people to express themselves and to preserve the material artefacts of their culture in museum collections (Gorbacheva, 2006, p. 53).

Like Gorbacheva, Georges Prévélakis discusses globalization as a threat for cultural diversity. According to him, globalization is about "circulation." Prévélakis (2008, p.20) states, p. "Globalization is nothing else than the explosive growth of circulation on the scale of the globe." He claims that "(t)he extreme destabilization produced by successive waves of globalization creates the need to develop new modes of stability, adapted to new conditions" (Prévélakis, 2008, p. 20). According to Prévélakis (2008, p. 17), in order to overcome "the destructive influences of circulation, a balancing power must therefore exist; otherwise it would

be difficult to explain the survival and continuity of human communities and their capacity to combine innovation with accumulation.” At that point, he takes Jean Gottmann’s term “iconography” for the balancing power and describes it as “society’s self-defence mechanism against destabilization by circulation—a “glue” linking the members of a community with each other and with a parcel of geographical space” (Prévélakis, 2008, p. 17). He states that today “national iconographies are weakening” and “regional and city iconographies are rapidly reappearing” (Prévélakis, 2008, p. 20). Accordingly, he describes the condition of the cities in the age of globalization as follows:

In their efforts to attract capital, talent, and international attention, cities are in competition on the global stage. They rely to a large extent on their image. Culture becomes an essential asset. [...] Cities are today in the forefront of new opportunities and dangers. Their growing global role creates responsibilities at a moment when the world is under stress through the generalization of circulation, while national and international institutions appear more and more irrelevant and inefficient. In order to promote new forms of cooperation between cultures, cities need to invent and to propose new cultural and political models. They are in an excellent position to become laboratories of the “dialogue of civilizations,” in order to counterbalance the effects of the “conflict of civilizations” raging in the surrounding sea of the global archipelago (Prévélakis, 2008, p. 21).<sup>1</sup>

He discusses the role of city museums as the “the forums of iconographic exploration, the crucibles of iconographic construction, and the focal points of iconographic diffusion” (Prévélakis, 2008, p. 23). He mentions the tasks of city museums to create the city iconography as follows:

Their task will be to bring together the various elements of city history that the previous period dispersed, in order to demonstrate their essential unity,

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<sup>1</sup> Prévélakis (2008: 20) defines the term *archipelago* as “Cities are seen as islands emerging out of seas of rurality, connected among themselves in the same way that sea routes link islands”.

based on the spirit of place. City museums must reconstruct the memories of city autonomy or independence. They must stress the importance of those periods of city history when the city did constitute a political entity, the story of its struggles against other political actors—kings, empires, nations. At the same time, museums of cities need to illustrate and defend the openness of the city, its inclusion in larger networks of cities, the linkages that connect it to the world (Prévélakis, 2008, p. 23-24).

His last comment on globalization and city iconography is: “Contrary to the ideology of globalization, this archipelagic iconography will not sacrifice rootedness, the sense of place, and the sense of belonging to openness” (Prévélakis, 2008, p. 24-25).

### **Globalization as Heterogenization**

Jack Lohman (2006, p. 15), the director of the Museum of London, states in his article “City Museums: Do We Have a Role in Shaping the Global Community?” that “(w)e live in an age of profound cultural transition, a time in which the complexity of our multicultural world confronts us with challenges.” He adds:

The role of culture in the twenty-first century has become central to the discourse on how an increasingly ‘global’ world can survive without the threat of some being swamped by the overpowering cultural force of others. It is also a time in which the managing of cultural diversity has become a skill and a competence, which is sought after in just about every sphere of human endeavor (Lohman, 2006, p. 15-16).

In Lohman’s view (2006, p. 16), globalization, “though a modern term used to describe the consequences of extraordinary rapid technology-driven, information-based advances over the past two decades, is not a new phenomenon”; it is “the story of the meanderings and coming together, the exchanges, the giving, the taking and the sharing in the long process of human encounters and achievements”; it is now “the age of identity politics in which the conflicting interests of preserving cultural

identity, and that of absorbing and being absorbed by prevailing dominant cultures, clash with bloody force” as it was throughout the human history. About the situation of this century Lohman (2006, p. 17) states that “increasing diversity and consequent conflict mark the spirit of the infant twenty-first century, leaving hardly a corner of our world untouched.”

He explains the effects of globalization from the perspective of the “centripetal force” of globalization, “which refers to the phenomenon of the world’s cultures being increasingly thrown together, leading to an undermining of a sense of territorialism and an increase in a sense of collectivism and a shared reality” (Lohman, 2006, p. 18). According to him, the world is now controlled by the global forces of media, communications, information and technology, but this situation is not advantageous for everyone. Lohman (2006, p. 18) claims that “(t)he divide is clearly defined between the West and the Rest. The power of global integration is felt by the Rest as threatening, as overpowering, a threat to the uniqueness of the already marginalized masses.”<sup>2</sup> Lohman (2006, p. 18) adds the condition of “West” in this situation as follows:

On the other hand, we are witnessing the ever-increasing struggle for particular cultural, ethnic, religious and other identities. The centrifugal forces of narrow group identities, of blood and belonging, the deep ties of language, religion and race all conspire to mitigate against the forces of ‘centripetalism’.

He comments on the increasing diversity of cultures, giving reference to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. As UNESCO (2002) mentions in the Declaration, “the process of globalization, facilitated by the rapid development of new information and communication technologies, though representing a challenge for cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Although discussing the effects of globalization with the words “the West and the Rest” is very problematic in post-colonial discourse, this issue is not the focus of this paper.

diversity, creates the conditions for renewed dialogue among cultures and civilizations." UNESCO (2002) in the Declaration describes cultural diversity "as a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, [which] is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature." In that respect, for UNESCO (2002) "it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations."

Regarding the idea that "cultural diversity is the common heritage of humanity," Lohman (2006, p. 18) claims that "(w)e are not able to stand apart from the societies in which we exist, to interpret and reflect diverse society to itself," and so "we are more than 'actors,' we are 'interactors' who present the multiple, diverse interactions between nature, culture, history, art, craft and indeed everything that makes us who we are." To acknowledge difference is important and that "respect for cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue is one of the surest guarantees of development and peace" (Lohman, 2006, p. 19). The cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue is "the global richness" for him; he acknowledges the city's diversities in that respect. "The recognition of the centrality of culture in peace-making, the pursuit of full liberty, individual and societal meaning and expression provides cultural institutions such as city museums a rare opportunity" (Lohman, 2006, p. 19).

In his article "The Prospect of a City Museum," Lohman (2008, p. 61) asks the question of "what sort of institution we might want to represent a city that we first understand what sort of a city it is that we wish to celebrate." Firstly, he emphasizes the importance of "the spirit of the city"; the city museums can convey "a sense of a city's ambitions, of its sense of itself as a city." Secondly, he emphasizes "the civic character" of the city, namely, the city's culture which "is already present [and] exists, both as a living past that can be explained now, and as a thriving presence in the city's cultural capital" (Lohman, 2008, p. 62-63). Then he claims that "any city museum worth its salt must never try to restrict that character by boxing it into narrow display," and adds that "it must

establish a living connection with the past and present environments that are all around us. It must draw power from the thriving city life we feel the very moment we step onto the streets” (Lohman, 2008, p. 63).

According to Lohman (2008, p. 66), “the power of the city, its living presence, the way in which history continues as part of any present urban landscape” is important. “The new urban settlement is more fluid, and one would like to think, more responsive to the varieties of cultural difference and change,” so “any new museum building needs to find a way of creating a new national and civic identity” (Lohman, 2008, p. 66). At this point, he gives as an example the Capital Museum in Beijing which is designed by the China Architecture Design and Research Group with the French practice AREP. Lohman (2008, p. 66) states that “(w)hat the building does magnificently is to represent local tradition within an international aesthetic. It manages to say something old, but to say it in a completely modern way.”

His second example is an exhibition in the Museum of London. In that exhibition, the outfits of ethnic groups (such as *salwar kameez*, *chuni*) are displayed. Lohman (2008, p. 68) states that “(o)ne such outfit is displayed at the Museum not just because it shows the shirt, trousers, and *chuni* (the scarf) that can be seen on the streets of London today, but because it has become part of the capital’s culture.” His main argument on these examples is important regarding his approach to the global and local: “An international outlook is therefore essential. City museums must not be parochial. Whether it is outward-looking design such as that of the Capital Museum, Beijing, or displays such as the *salwar kameez*, the aim must be to establish local interest, but within an international outlook.” In that respect Lohman is close to Roland Robertson’s (1995, p. 28) concept of “glocalization,” which “is formed by telescoping *global* and *local* to make a blend” and “a global outlook adapted to local conditions.”

## **Conclusion**

There are several approaches to globalization (Frederic Jameson, 1998, p. 66). As Robertson (1995, p. 26) indicates, in the globalization theory, there are two mainstream approaches, one of which sees globalization as homogenizing, and the other one, on the contrary, regards it as heterogenizing. Jameson (1998, p. 64) states that the former one discusses globalization as standardization of culture, the destruction of local differences, and the massification of all the peoples on the planet." For the latter, Jameson (1998, p. 56-57) states that globalization is the "celebration of difference and differentiation [of] all the cultures around the world [that] are placed in tolerant contact with each other in a kind of immense cultural pluralism."

In the issue of city museums, we see these different ideas relating globalization. Gorbacheva and Prévélakis discuss globalization as a factor of "unification and standardization." And they place city museums acting against this normalization, defending the city's iconography and cultural diversity. In contrast, Lohman sees globalization as the global richness of the dialogue of cultures. And he discusses city museums as the places where the local cultures integrate into the global aesthetic, creating cultural pluralism.

Although their approaches differ on the issue of globalization, they both emphasize certain common points regarding the role of city museums. They think that the city museum should reflect the sense of place and the sense of belonging of the city. In that respect the relationship between the past, present and future of the city is important. It is not only about who was in the city, but also who belongs there now. So the city museum should display the analogous relation with the past, present and future. The city is also an ever changing entity composed of different ethnic and religious groups; and within the global networks, it is in a relationship with other cities and cultures. So the city museum should reflect and respect the multiculturalism of the city. Accordingly,

the city museum is an important ground for discussing the relationship/interaction of local and global cultures.

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