

The Barcelona Declaration on European City Museums

Barcelona, 8th November 2013

In Europe today many cities fulfil important economic, political, administrative, social and cultural functions. These are often the result of a long historical tradition that sometimes even dates back to Antiquity. Cities in Europe are bearers of a unique urban history, tradition and culture. They also are places of creativity, innovation and change, crucial aspects for the economic and social future of Europe.

The Barcelona Declaration on European City Museums hopes to contribute to a clearer definition of these museums, and foster a growing and enduring mutual recognition. City museums are characterised by their diversity, so it is impossible to establish a single typology. Large and small, old and new, their collections vary considerably. Whether they display artistic, historical and archaeological objects, or photographs and immaterial heritage, they all aim to play a key role in society, by favouring civic dialogue, provoking unpredicted opinions and emotions. As places visited by residents and tourists alike, they reflect on the very concept of the city as a source of heritage and of future growth, to be cherished and shared. From this common ground, such museums can promote and visualise the role of cities in the future.

The Barcelona Declaration on European City Museums intends to offer common profile delineation for the various types of city museums. After all, what they have in common is their main theme and object of study: cities and their citizens.

History and Heritage

City museums collect and keep the material and immaterial heritage, past and present, of their cities and citizens. By shaping the chronicled and living memory of towns, these museums contribute to the dynamic process of writing and rewriting the city's history, actively involving citizens, who provide their own definitions of their urban history and heritage within a single historical framework.

Academic Platform

City museums carry out fundamental and applied research in a wide range of disciplines related to their mission of collecting, displaying and interpreting historical narrative. To do so, they collaborate with professionals working in different fields, such as urban historians, archaeologists, sociologists, ethnographers, art historians and museologists. Academic standards are crucial for the reputation of city museums as genuine and dependable institutions, capable of stimulating the academic world to link their research programmes to social urban issues.

Urban Network

A city museum is concerned with the history and heritage of the city as whole. This implies that it needs to cooperate with other related institutions such as archives, archaeological and monumental departments, etc. On a more local level, neighbourhood organisations that play an active role in the conservation and interpretation of heritage and history should also form a part of such collaborative networks. The democratic and public task of a city museum must be guaranteed by a free-flowing relationship with local authorities.

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Educational Function

A city museum involves citizens in its work in a number of ways. To begin with, both the museum building and the urban areas in which the museum is active should be welcoming spaces that arouse the interest of residents and visitors. This is a way of favouring citizen participation, increasing awareness and enhancing the quality of citizenship. Urban history is thus viewed from a new perspective that contributes to social cohesion in our modern multicultural societies. In this sense, the website of a city museum and its links to other urban sites can be important virtual tools.

Meeting Point

A city museum acts as an open platform and meeting point for citizens and visitors. Within its walls, critical and intercultural discussions can favour a new understanding of the city's history and heritage, of the large and small stories that configure its meaning, prompting new ideas that can trigger present and future transformations—in short, a city museum can become an urban laboratory.

R+D+i centres

As places of research and cultural production, city museums work as R+D+i, centres which are in a good position to connect heritage and urban economy in various cultural and creative sector.

Tourism

As an institution with a scope extending beyond its actual building to include the entire town, a city museum can offer innovative sightseeing strategies and help to develop more profitable and sustainable tourist programmes. City museums can contribute to interpret the fabric of a city, its monuments and its architecture, in new and stimulating ways.

City Museums and European Identity

Over the course of their history, cities have always played a key role in defining Europe. Moreover, cities played the lead in the most significant transformations of modernity. Therefore, city museums need to act and be recognised as relevant organisations in the construction of European identity.

This declaration is proposed by several European city history museums and other centres linked to history and heritage: This is an informal and non-institutional group, *City History Museums and Research Network of Europe* that meets regularly in Barcelona to debate about museums, cities and heritage.

On behalf of the network,

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Members:

Amsterdam Museum
Museu d'Història de Barcelona
Musée d'Histoire de Lyon- Gadagne Musées, Lyon
Historisches Museum Basel
Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum (Berlin)
Centre for Urban History (CSG) at the University of Antwerp
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