

## ABBRECIATED PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### **Ethical Collecting during the Pandemic: a shared space for museum professionals**

#### **1. Topic & Objectives**

The global crisis caused by the arrival of COVID-19 has not only forced us to rethink our daily lives and the way we work, but also the systems under which our societies have functioned. Moreover, the pandemic has exposed the shocking impoverishment that has existed, for far too long. And thus creating or increasing a series of pre-existing and concurring crises in all sectors of our societies: social, political, financial, and cultural. Museums and other collecting organisations around the world (like archives) have been confronted with several challenges pushing them to re-examine and change the way they work. Most museums were forced to close, museum staff faced redundancies or had to adapt to new ways and methods of working. However, right from the beginning of the global crisis, many museums developed projects to collect the pandemic and record this extraordinary situation that the whole planet has experienced. In some parts of the world, institutions have already worked on contemporary collecting and they relied for these collecting efforts on their previous experiences. However, this is not the case everywhere. On the other hand, even institutions that do have experience in contemporary collecting had to face new challenges regarding the ethics that this new situation has brought for individuals and institutions (transparency of goals; collecting protest, hate, or harmful material; rights and permissions; minimization of harm and representation of historically marginalized groups hit hardest by pandemic; collecting with sensitivity; collecting in an environmentally sustainable way, etc.). Therefore, COMCOL in collaboration with IC Ethics and partners from different parts of the world (see below) proposed this project, which main objectives are:

- To develop an international dialogue regarding collecting during the pandemic and concurring crises and aspects of them, as well as the ethical decisions that need to be made during this type of projects.
- To create an online resource/repository - in multiple languages (English, French, Chinese, Spanish, Finnish, Greek, etc.) - that museums could use to develop their COVID 19 contemporary collecting programs and other urgent collecting projects in an ethical manner.
- To provide training resources for the development of programmes focusing on the ethics of contemporary collecting.

The methodology of this project consists of the following:

- (a) an online survey that will be shared with museum professionals around the world (using the networks and platforms of all partners), collecting information about the practices and projects initiated by different institutions.
- (b) A series of 7 (seven) regional online round table discussions/webinars, hosted by partners institutions in different regions of the world (free for participants), which will serve as focus groups and opportunities of exchange of views and ideas regarding ethical challenges that museum professionals have experienced during their contemporary collecting efforts related to the pandemic or other events. For instance, in the event that will be organised by the National Museum of Australia we will examine contemporary collecting around the 2019/20 Australian bushfires – which were on a devastating scale, never experienced before, with international significance because of the way they were a visual example of the extreme effects of climate change, and on the scale of loss of habitat and wildlife. In addition, the Museum’s extensive experience in collecting during the pandemic, will also serve to frame the discussions and possible new methodologies, as its contemporary collecting reflects many of the ethical concerns expressed, both nationally and internationally.
- (c) Finally, a desktop research of publications, toolkits, project reports, audiovisual recordings, podcasts, reports and other outcomes of previous research, or any other available resources regarding ethical codes and approaches to contemporary collecting will be studied and used to frame the online repository/resource which will be produced during this project.

## **2. The programme (including information about participants/ hosts)**

Each of the roundtables will focus on a different topic of relevance to the partner institution that will hold the event and in relation to contemporary collecting in times of crisis - an effort will be made to cover aspects that their communities consider relevant to them. The main focus is on the COVID-19 pandemic, but other concurring crises will be also explored - based on the outcomes of the first part of the project, i.e. the online survey.

Each roundtable will be organised by one of the partners of this project and will focus on the region where they are located and adapting it to the local/regional context; different efforts in different parts of the world will reveal different circumstances that depend on local, social, historical, cultural reasons, or even the type of museum - natural history or science museums face different dilemmas when trying to document a situation like the pandemic, than, for instance, social history or archaeology museums.

The partners institutions (Illinois State Museum, Museum Casa de la Memoria, Museo MIO, District Six Museum, TAKO Network for Collections Management and Contemporary

Documenting in Finland, the National Museum of Australia and consortium of institutions from Taiwan, i.e. the Chinese Association of Museums, the National Taiwan University of Arts, the National Museum of Taiwan History and the National Chiao Tung University) will explore perspectives and approaches, dilemmas and concerns in North, Central and South America, Africa, Europe, Australia, and Asia respectively.

In these events, we will invite as keynote speakers colleagues from different regions who have already been involved in preparing work either on difficult collecting, or on ethics. The events will be an opportunity for professionals with different backgrounds and different perspectives from different institutions to liaise, interact and support each other based on their experiences and ideas. We hope that these events will be inspiring, networking opportunities.

### **3. Digital platform to be used and how it can be shared with others (museums/public)**

The platform for the seven round table discussions will be Zoom (unless one of the organising institutions decides to use another platform as more appropriate for the region they are working with). IC Ethics has established regular Meeting Room Events already and is very familiar with this kind of platform for gathering museum professionals for discussions and reflections about a concrete topic. The events will be live streamed via YouTube and other social media, so that there is the possibility for questions and answers from as large an audience as possible.

All resources and the outcomes of this research will be disseminated using the websites of both COMCOL and IC Ethics, as well as their online networks in social media. The existing online platforms of the partner institutions will be also used for sharing information and disseminating outcomes. This decision was taken considering the sustainability of the project: a multiplication of platforms and communication channels makes sustainability of them difficult as there are not always the necessary resources to keep supporting them in the future. By embedding the outcomes of this research in the already existing platforms, we support the maximum use of the already existing resources and we make sure that the legacy of this project will be strong and integrally incorporated in the next steps of all institutions and committees involved.

All resources produced from this project will be available free online.

### **4. Collaborating partners**

This is a joint proposal bringing together two ICOM ICs, COMCOL and IC Ethics, the Network for Collections Management and Contemporary Documenting TAKO in Finland, the Illinois State Museum in the United States, Museo MIO in Costa Rica, District Six Museum in South Africa, Museum Casa de la Memoria in Colombia, the National Museum of Australia as well as Chinese Association of Museums, Taiwan, the National Taiwan University of Arts, the National Museum of Taiwan History and the National Chiao Tung University (the partners from Taiwan will collaborate for the joint participation in this project).

COMCOL will undertake the overall management of the project in collaboration with IC Ethics. Both committees will together work on the bank of resources and share it on their platforms.

The list of partners in this project consists of:

ICOM COMCOL

ICOM Committee on Ethical Dilemmas

TAKO Network for Collections Management and Contemporary Documenting, Finland

Illinois State Museum, U.S.A.

Museum Casa de la Memoria, Colombia

District Six Museum, South Africa

Museum MIO, Costa Rica

National Museum of Australia, Australia

Chinese Association of Museums, Taiwan

National Taiwan University of Arts National Museum of Taiwan History, Taiwan

National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan

The countries involved in this project, via their institutions or the nationalities of the board members of the ICs are the following:

U.S.A.

Costa Rica

Colombia

Finland

South Africa

Australia

The Netherlands

Canada

Greece

Taiwan

Italy

Norway

The languages that will be used are: Spanish, English, French, Finnish, Chinese, Dutch, Greek, German. We will collect all resources available on this topic regardless of the language they are published in, and we will translate the reports to other languages; the webinars will have captions in other languages, too.

For further questions regarding the project, please contact COMCOL or IC Ethics.