

[tópicos da intervenção de Luís Raposo, representante do ICOM Europa, no debate final do Projecto EUNAMUS]

NATIONAL MUSEUMS CAN ACT AS FORUMS FOR CONTESTED ISSUES

1. National Museums (taking the expression in the sense of museums representing national historical narratives, holistic in nature, encompassing all past times and all relevant disciplinary fields - history, archaeology, anthropology/ethnology/ethnography, human geography, etc.) are not passive representatives of national identities; they rather are active promoters of national identity.

- In state-countries, or dominant nations inside multinational state-countries, where national ethno-historical identity is strongly established, "National Museums" (in the substantive sense referred before and not in the merely administrative one) are commonly absent. Example: Portugal, as one unitary nation and state-country; England, as a nation inside a multinational state-country.

- On the contrary, in state-countries where sentiments of national belonging are weaker, often due to the fact that the country itself is recently build mostly based on circumstantial geo-politics arrangements than on national long rooted claims, National Museums are politically encouraged and assume active roles in promoting national feelings. This can be done in democratic environment and throughout democratic instruments, but it can and often is also accomplished in dictatorial environments, throughout repressive mechanisms. That's why National Museums are commonly used by dictatorship regimes as their most iconic legitimatising institutions. Examples: most of the post-soviet countries, for recent (re)build state-countries; most of Central and Eastern European countries, for state-countries (re)configured in older times.

- But... National Museums are also favoured, as a kind of mirror effect, in cases of strong ethno-historical established nations, when these are still subject to state political unifying powers. Examples: Spain (Catalonia, Andalusia, Galicia...), Great Britain (Scotland, Wales) and so on

- National Museums can also be especially useful in the evaluation and negotiation of effects of state succession, as those occurred in the post-Cold War context in Europe. Example: former Soviet and Yugoslavian countries.

2. National Museums are places of confronting expectations, either positive as negative, in relation to the past, in order to better understand the present.

- Past is not only a "foreign country"; it is also often a "difficult country". National Museums can act as exorcising places, where past ghosts can be exposed in their fully human, and consequently historical, nature. Throughout this exercise, present convivial relations can be reinforced and new alliances can be rooted. The Deutsches Historisches Museum, for instance, is an example of a National Museum adopting this responsibility; it promotes the critical conscienceless about difficult pasts, including genocide episodes in recent times, and the more recent transformation of the modern democratic state.

- Discussion of present tensions can benefit from the framework given by National Museums, because they are the privileged institutional arena where short time political and long standing ethnic configurations meet, where history meets everyday life and is seen throughout memories (objects and knowledge) with strong empathic ties with the present. Um sum, National Museums are places of encounter for and based much more on common past and present people, rather than on distant abstract (often instrumentally generated) ancestry and present epidermic discourses of legitimacy and authority.

3. National Museums are places of resilience and future building, especially in times of crisis.

- Even in countries with long established national unitary conscienceless, National Museums can act as "refreshing and relegitimating memory places" in times of crisis. Example: in Portugal the only moment when a project of National Museum (in the sense of long standing ethno-

historical roots, not in the sense of recent political configuration of the state, being it nevertheless one of the oldest, if not the older, state in Europe) has been considered, was the crisis succeeding the declaration of bankruptcy in late XIX century, after the nationalistic reaction to a British *ultimatum*, in eighteen hundred and ninety, dictated because of colonial empire interests.

- Maybe the current crisis in Europe will also act in the benefit of National Museums, if not from an immediate financial perspective, at least from an ideological and political one. Maybe new National Museums, holistic in nature, or disciplinarily oriented, will arise in this context.

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