**Guidelines for**

**Women’s Museums and/or gender oriented Museums**

**by the She-Culture project group**

**July 2015**

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# Introduction

"She-Culture" is a project funded by the EU Culture Programme 2007-2013 and co-funded by the Italian [Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Activities and Tourism](http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/index.html).

The project partners are:

* ECCOM - European Centre for Cultural Organization and Management (IT)
* [Interarts (ES)](http://www.interarts.net/es/)
* [Centre de Cultura de Dones Francesca Bonnemaison (ES)](http://www.labonne.org/)
* Frauenmuseum/Women’s Museum (IT)
* [Kvinnemuseet/Women’s Museum (NOR)](http://www.kvinnemuseet.no/?q=node/45)
* Kvindemuseet i Danmark/Women’s Museum (DK)
* Muzeu-i-Grave/Women’s Museum  [(AL)](http://www.womenmuseum-albania.com/)

The project has researched the issue of support and visibility provided to women through their active role in the field of arts and culture, education and lifelong learning. It has also promoted a campaign regarding toys’ *genderization*, in the framework of which five videos by young European artists have been produced (http://www.she-culture.com/en/toys-genderization).

The research[[1]](#footnote-1) initially focused on the European network of Women’s Museums (WMs), since they not only have a strategic role in urban spaces but also provide arenas for participation, communication and sharing of knowledge, experiences, interpretations among different cultures and generations. WMs constituted a meaningful starting point to analyze the relationship between cultural and gender policies, producing not only social and cultural values but also providing a strong input not only social inclusion and lifelong learning processes, but also to active participation to community life.

The project working group[[2]](#footnote-2) decided to prepare the present guidelines.[[3]](#footnote-3) They provide first-hand material, tools and indications for WMs all over the world to strengthen their role in society.

# Statement

WMs are based on ICOM’s definition of museums: “*A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment”* (According to the ICOM Statutes, adopted in 2007).

Women’s Museums:

* promote women’s visibility in history and culture and support policies addressing gender issues. Prior to creating a WMs or gender-oriented museum, it is necessary to define a female and a gender perspective appropriated to the social context in which the specific museum will be created;
* take political position for diversity, gender sensitivity and social inclusion for minorities;
* promote a gender perspective also in other museums;
* acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit the tangible and intangible heritage of women’s history, life and culture;
* promote a different perspective on the world, history and culture;
* develop professional research on gender-related issues;
* practice gender-oriented communication;
* are active partners of the local, national and international networks of museums and related cultural, scientific and social institutions;
* are based on a clear vision/mission as regards goals, strategic development and audience involvement in the museum.

# Intent

## 1. Positioning

WMs decide what is historically and artistically significant, as well as what is worthy of collection, exhibition, and storage. Therefore, they also position themselves regarding that which is less obvious: what is excluded and forgotten, and what is unimportant. This includes thousands of years of the culture of women, their activities, and their achievements.

A number of European and American WMs were founded in the 1980’s and 1990’s. As different as they are, all of them approach female representation, experience, knowledge, perception and women's history from a broader perspective as an essential complement to the already existing cultural heritage approach by museums and galleries. Founding women’s museum or gender-oriented museums, and continually developing them, is an on-going research and an experiment in new ways of interpreting society and communities.

Indeed, many WMs are cultural centers active in contemporary world and society and they often play key roles in network development.

In addition, the European Network of WMs[[4]](#footnote-4) has now reframed the discussion on women and museums in a much wider context by regularly inviting women from the museum sector who do not necessarily work in WMs - including historians, art historians, education researchers, activists, and artists - to join the discussion and participate in the network's meetings and conferences.

The Viennese curator and cultural scholar Elke Krasny draw attention to another innovative dimension of WMs: "WMs do not merely manage our heritage. Instead, WMs are a living forum in which contemporary stories are made, and a platform for reflection on our culture and our society is offered" (Krasny/Schönweger/2010).

**Many WMs originated, and still originate, from feminist[[5]](#footnote-5), women’s and human rights’ movements. Although the fundamentals of museology have not been a constituting element of WMs they should, nevertheless, be progressively incorporated. In fact, whilst remembering the specific features of WMs and continuing to actively take part in current and public discussions regarding gender issues, the former should be done to guarantee that the minimum standard requirements of a museum are met and that WMs are duly recognized by the museum sector. Indeed, WMs should comply with standards related to collections, staff, services to the public, documentation, etc., following ICOM‘s standards and guidelines[[6]](#footnote-6).**

## 2. Training of staff and volunteers

Very often museums have limited economic resources; this is also true for WMs. Consequently, as with other museums, WMs very often have to rely on the help of volunteers and/or staff without professional training. Still, given that WMs specifically approach gender issues this situation is most often very challenging. Therefore, WMs need to organize professional training courses for staff members and volunteers, particularly within the fields of collection management and research[[7]](#footnote-7).

Training for staff and volunteers should mainly include:

* Gender-specific organization of the exhibition and gender-specific language: to ensure that exhibitions and guided tours etc. offered by WMs are in accordance with each WMs gender focus, professionals subcontracted/engaged should be trained in gender issues;
  + - Communication and use of new media/new technologies (see next paragraph);
* Collections and their preservation: WMs should ensure that staff attend standard museum collection management courses held in the country where the WM is situated;
* Research and documentation: WMs should send staff to academic training courses, preferably those for museum workers, to learn about existing research methods suited for museums andthe use of sources/references;
  + - Public relations: WMs should try to reach out to the public in various ways, following a systematic and thus time-saving routine.

## 3. Communication

WMs are an excellent model by which to explain issues relating to equality, human rights and civilization as well as to relations between men and women in society.

In terms of communication, and with specific reference to the use of the new technologies –which could be fostered in this area as well as in other areas of museum management- the She-Culture project group recommends that women who lead WMs should be:

* connected to women’s movements, in order to create links between culture and other women’s actions;
* visible and be a clear role model for the community.

Furthermore, WMs should, according to their own possibilities:

* be visible in the public arena and in the media, as well as at local and central government levels;
* establish positive cooperation links with local governments;
* create stable and strong cooperation links with the media, not only for specific events;
* establish fruitful and continuous relationships with civil society – NGOs, artists, intellectuals, etc;
* cooperate with the education sector at all levels, from compulsory education to higher education centers;
* use specific methodologies in order to bring the museum closer to society, for example through activities fostering active participation, representation, and creativity;
* Foster works which aim at in-depth knowledge of minority cultures and traditionally marginalized groups as well as on different sexually oriented groups/individuals as LGBTQIA movements[[8]](#footnote-8).

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## 4. Evaluation

Today museums are clearly visitor-oriented; therefore, they are interested in evaluating visitor satisfaction, which is supposedly proportionate to an institution’s ability to meet the objectives, expectations and motivations of its audiences. Evaluation exercises recognise the social value of museums as intrinsic and instrumental “cultural” contributions to society by, for example, promoting knowledge, attitudes, inspiration, creativity and empowerment of individuals and communities, but also social cohesion, active citizenship, health and well-being, equality and justice, and integration of marginalised citizens[[9]](#footnote-9).

Evaluation represents a challenge for museums: museum impacts may take different forms at different times; they are often unpredictable and outcomes are not easily identified, let alone measured. Moreover, museum audiences are very diverse; visitors indeed vary in terms of their general intellectual background, expectations, pre-existing knowledge or ideas on what to look for in a museum, or on what museums are about.

Few attempts have been made to develop evaluation methods for museums: clear evaluation goals and systematized questionnaires could help museums improve their knowledge on their impact on visitors and users[[10]](#footnote-10).

**In order to better understand their relevance within society, the She-Culture working group highly recommends WMs to carry out an analysis aimed at producing not only quantitative but also qualitative data which – according to already existing indicators measuring the cultural and social impact of museums – could inform WM policies and strategies.**

## 5. Sustainability

Innovation is considered a crucial element for human development and also for the promotion of a better quality of life for all European citizens. Museums can innovate by improving, through different means and strategies, museum experiences but also by providing groups and individuals who usually have no “voice” in society with an opportunity for self-expression.

Innovation characterizes also the professional competencies developed and tested within various frameworks: not only museum-specific competencies but also, and most significantly, competencies in communication and the use of new technologies, social relationships, intercultural dialogue, local community problems and cultural exclusion of individuals and groups.

Visitors define as innovative those museums which they perceive as places of diverse and inclusive knowledge; as places of social interaction and exchange, mutual understanding and respect for the diversity of cultures, languages, life experiences and fates; as places where personal creativity is not stifled by authoritarian, rigid and formal styles.

Innovation is an element present in the new mission statements and accountability methods that museums develop and which are based on values and indicators usually defined in the organization’s “social audit”.

Museum innovation can be fostered through new partnerships with other museums and organisations of the private or public sector: the social impact of museums on the surrounding community is still largely untapped, and it should encourage museum professionals to keep on exploring it and to make it stronger.

Finally, new perspectives should be unfolded for culture as a whole, as a crucial factor of individual and socio-environmental sustainability, of dialogue between citizens and institutions, of mutual understanding and peace: indeed museums have an enormous potential in sustaining positive changes in the quality of life of individuals (Council of Europe 2005).

There is one aspect that can be specifically attributed to WMs: their innovative spirit. Ruge­ Schatz, president of ICOM’s International Committee for Training of Personnel, confirms the fact that WMs have indeed fulfilled their original goals and brought about real changes: "WMs overcame institutional and substantive barriers earlier than other museums, and have contributed significantly to the evolution of traditional museums from 'temples of the muses' to places of learning. WMs learned more quickly than classical museums how to put on programs, exhibitions, and events in spite of under-funding. This changed their own concept of what a museum is, a development that has meanwhile been perceived throughout the museum world. [ … ] WM have never been afraid to take on taboo subjects [ … ]" (Ruge-Schatz 2009: 8).

**The She-Culture working group believes that WMs foster a new museum “culture”, through their research activities, training of staff and consultants; new approaches to educational practices; new cultural exchanges with project partners. WMs management should be based on sustainable principles: a new management and relational culture (both internal and external) should be co-produced with other civil society institutions, by exchanging and sharing competencies, working methods, reflections on the well-being and quality of life of users/participants (and also new forms of solidarity and understanding between museum staff and operators from other institutional contexts).**

## 6. Accreditation schemes

Accreditation schemes aim at encouraging museums:

* to achieve common agreed standards as regards the management of collections and the experiences of users;
* to operate as organizations that manage collections for the benefit of society and manage public funds appropriately;
* to strive towards a shared ethical and professional basis.

These issues are particularly sensitive in the case of WM, due to their variety in scope, size, typology and activities. Furthermore, a WM’s specific accreditation scheme would be extremely useful to define what a WM is and what it is not, against the framework of the statements expressed in this document and taking into account also national rules and legal requirements regarding museums.

**The She-Culture working group suggests the implementation of an accreditation scheme specifically dedicated to WMs.**

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1. <http://www.she-culture.com/en/outputs> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The working group was formed by Elsa Ballauri, Cristina Da Milano, Mona Holm, Merete Ipsen, Bodil Olesen, Sigrid Prader, Claudia Rosignoli, Astrid Schoenweger and Marta Vergonyós Cabratosa. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. These guidelines have been translated into Albanian, German, Italian and Spanish. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. IAWM, http://www.womeninmuseum.net/en/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a definition of feminisms, see http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/terms/feminism.html [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://icom.museum/professional-standards/standards-guidelines/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For the role of volunteers within museums see C. Da Milano, K. Gibbs and M. Sani (eds.), (2009), *Volunteers in Museums and Cultural Heritage. A European Handbook*, Slovenian Museum Association, http://www.amitie.it/voch/VoCH\_Final\_Publication\_EN.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For a definition of LGBTQIA, see https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/LGBTQIA. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Particularly, as for impact/change indicators, the Generic Learning Outcomes-GLOs and the Generic Social Outcomes-GSOs, produced by MLA-Museums and Libraries Association (http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/toolstemplates/genericsocial/), comprise qualitative and interpretive, as well as quantitative, categories: awareness, knowledge and understanding, engagement and interest, attitudes, behaviours, skills and “other”. GLOs recommends further indicators within the five main categories, “Knowledge and understanding, Skills, Activity behaviour progression, Enjoyment inspiration creativity, Attitudes and values”. The key principle underpinning GLOs is to gather information on what visitors assert/think they have learned, experienced, changed through the museum experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Nina Simon, *The Participating Museum*, 2010, Chapter 10: Evaluating Participatory Projects. Download: <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/>; Ida Brændholt Lundgaard and Jacob Thorek Jensen, [*Museums - Knowledge, democracy and transformation*](http://www.kulturstyrelsen.dk/english/publications/museums-knowledge-democracy-and-transformation/), 2014, Danish Agency of Culture, http://www.kulturstyrelsen.dk/english/publications/museums-knowledge-democracy-and-transformation/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10)