

The British Museum

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ICOM Prague 2022: The Power of Museums



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▪ Introduction

Nevine Nizar Zakaria (Ph.D)- Alexander von Humboldt Fellow-University of Würzburg.

- My professional background is articulated around the museum world as I am a museum professional and academic lecturer in the field of Museology. After completing my Ph.D. in Egyptology/Archaeology, I generated an elaborate line of research on the contemporary demands placed on Egypt's cultural heritage with a focus on the museum's arena and its latest debates. I am a member of staff of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) and served as an Assistant to the Minister for both "Museums Exhibition Affairs" (2018-2021) as well as "the Development of Visitors Services at MoTA's Museums and Archaeological Sites" (2021). Having contributed to formulating policies and plans that aim at upgrading the museums of MoTA as well as leading and managing several museum projects (i.e. Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC), Egypt's Capital Museum (ECM), etc. I participated effectively in developing the exhibition content for the Grand Egyptian Museum (2004-2015) and supervised the institutional development plan for the Gayer-Anderson Museum. In 2015, I joined Helwan University as a lecturer in museum studies in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Currently, I am a Post-Doctoral Fellow from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at Würzburg University, Museology Section.
- The conference was so necessary as it has a two-fold benefit for me and my study:
1) My Post-Doc is addressing the field of cultural accessibility and social inclusion which is one of the main themes elaborated in many sessions at the conference.
2) Being updated with the latest research and theories in the field of museums and getting to know other people in the field.
- Attending the conference was very crucial for me and important for getting me more engaged in high-level debates in my research area. The conference focused on the capacity of the museum in building an inclusive society, museum actions for diversity, inclusion, social development, sustainable development, etc. These debates are very influential in optimizing my field study and thus contribute to my Post-Doctoral research that emphasizes the power of museums to change the world and build a better future for all.

- Once I knew that the ITP was offering fellows financial assistance to attend and participate in conferences, I applied for funding from the ITP - a **constant supportive driver for all ITP fellows**. As for my institution - Wurzburg University- it was very difficult to get funds from the university to attend the conference as it only offers limited grants for doctoral research projects and thesis (focused on specific areas) with no funding opportunities for conference or research support in the field of material culture or museums. The ITP's grant was very sufficient for me as it covered all of my expenses including the conference registration, accommodation, and daily activities. I didn't need any further funds.



<https://www.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/museologie/museologie-und-museumswissenschaft/>
(The link to the Museology Department, Wurzburg University)

<https://www.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/museologie/team-und-raeume/team/zakaria-nevine/>
(the Link to my profile at the university)

<https://prague2022.icom.museum/>
(The Link to the Conference)

▪ **Conference experience**

The conference program was vibrant with so many overlapping sessions, panels, round tables, working groups, and committee meetings. The conference started on the 20th of August with a pre-program that offered cooking lessons and guided tours to explore the city of Prague. I arrived on the 21st afternoon, so I couldn't manage to attend one of these tours as I went to the conference venue - (Prague Congress Centre-PCC) - to register and receive the conference program and agenda.

○ **First Day:**

- The first day of the conference (Monday 22nd of August) was amazing and overwhelming, I recognized so many people in my contacts. We all got connected and were so enthusiastic about the conference sessions and discussions. There were thousands of attendees from different geographical areas and cultural experiences, not to mention the online participants. The conference was indeed a worldwide museum hub for exchanging ideas, challenges, and innovative solutions in the world of museums.
- The opening ceremony of the conference addressed topical issues museums tackle today including the promotion of solidarity and peace, fostering cultural exchange, and strengthening international cooperation, etc. A Czech traditional folklore dance was performed as part of the celebration during the opening ceremony of the conference. Several keynote speeches and panel discussions were addressed by renowned speakers and world-class experts highlighting several debates related to the museums and civil society, this included the following:
 - 'Museums to think about territories'; reflections of collective and individual memories of the territory (case study: Colombian territory).
 - Heritage Protection Responses in Ukraine; Calls by ICOM for relevant actors to support museums and museum personnel following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022¹.
 - 'The War childhood Museum ²' - Bosnia and Herzegovina; focuses on the experience of childhood affected by war.

¹ <https://www.mkip.gov.ua/news/7599.html>

² <https://warchildhood.org/>

- 'Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum'-Cambodia; how museum deals with remembering and peace education.
 - Afterwards, there was a very hot discussion at the Roundtable regarding the revision of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums. The Roundtable offered a brief history of the Code and its central role in supporting ICOM's mission. It discussed the methodology, changes, and additions needed in the revised Code. This included key issues such as human remains, decolonization, ownership, repatriation, museums database/cataloguing, digital transformation, sustainability, etc.
 - This was followed by ICOM's Network Meetings. I attended the UMAC-NATHIST-ICME-ICR joint meeting where I presented my talk in the session of The Power of Museums: Inclusion / The Making of an Inclusive Museum (See below).
 - **Second Day:**
 - A wide range of different topics and debates related to sustainability, museums, and resilience were addressed on the second day. A very inspiring panel discussion underlined the need for museums to develop more sustainable actions towards climate change, natural disasters, and other environmental concerns. A varied group of panellists provided innovative ways to move towards a sustainable future.
 - Roundtable discussions regarding the ICOM Strategic Plan (2022-2028) were held to provide the road map of ICOM's progress towards developing strategic plans to meet the needs of the future, most importantly, how to translate the vision and objectives to applicable actions and thus support the museum sector worldwide.
 - Museums and leadership were among the key debates that were tackled during the second day. Expert panellists from different organizations highlighted challenges faced by museum leaders today, including the integration of digital technologies and business models.
 - Afterwards, I joined my ICOM Committee's meetings and attended a very informative session on Climate actions to support the sustainable development of museums. Then, I went to CIPEG Committee to attend some of my friend's lectures.
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- **Third Day:**
 - An interesting plenary session was given addressing museums and new technologies. The main theme of the session was articulated around the improvement of audience engagement through new technologies while maintaining effective resources to protect the collection and expand accessibility. The main coherent question of the session was: what might the digital museum of 2030 look like? And how might we get there equitably, ethically, and sustainably?
 - An exciting session '*Power of the Museum Definition*', followed by the 37th Ordinary ICOM General Assembly that approved the new museum definition with 92,41% (For 487, Against 23, Abstention: 17). This voting was the culmination of the 18-month participatory process that involved hundreds of museum professionals from 126 National Committees from all over the world.
 - **Fourth Day: On-Site meeting for ICOM Committees**
 - **Fifth Day: Excursion and Day trips (see below)**
 - **Sixth Day:**
 - Attending the CIPEG OFF-SITE MEETING in collaboration with the Czech Institute of Egyptology, in the Faculty of Arts, Charles University.
 - A program organized by CIPEG called 'Young CIPEG meeting' was held at - Náprstek Museum to address Egyptian Collections in the Context of World Cultures Museums.
 - **Seventh Day: back home**
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- My favourite lecture was by Hilda Flavia Nakabuye (Uganda) about Climate change. She gave a very inspiring speech about how the museum influences education on climate change. She also highlighted the necessity of expanding the role of youth to co-create new scenarios for transformative change. My least favourite was the session of the CIPEG meeting on the 3rd day as the raised topics were a little traditional with no deeper insights.
 - I had the chance to meet many people; MoTA's friends, museum professionals, academics, experts, ITP fellows, museums directors, etc. The conference was a wonderful opportunity for networking and exchanging ideas. I had several

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conversations regarding the latest trends, refined ideas, and recent technology in the field of museums.

- I had new connections and got to know new innovative projects in the museum arena. One of the interesting conversations I had was about multilingualism in ICOM and the possibility of selecting the Arabic language to be added to ICOM.
- I have gained a lot of knowledge through listening to talks held by world-class experts in the field of museums with the latest findings, engaging in high-level debates, and getting deeper insights into the key challenges faced by museums, ethical standards, innovative practices, and much more on the aforementioned themed topics.
- **Visits and Excursions**
 - As part of the conference agenda, there was a rich social program for excursions, study trips, and museum visits. We had an interesting walk to Prague towers and historical gardens, tourist attractions, and city landmarks. We had several events in museums. The opening party (in the evening) was in the National Technical Museum. It was a great party with a unique performance. We had evenings in different types of museums. One of the most interesting social events was the ceremony of Flag Relay at the National Museum of Prague, where the ICOM flag was handed over to the organizing committee of the 27th ICOM General Conference - ICOM United Arab Emirates. It should be noted here that the members of ICOM Czech made this symbolic flag by hand in the traditional cross stitch embroidery.
 - Museum Train: We had a visit to a whole different City – Brno - via a historical train that consists of coaches dating back to the 1960/70s. It was an exciting trip to Brno where each group experienced different types of museums and programs. According to my program, I was part of the Museum Train to Brno 01, which took us back in history to the dawn of humankind as we visited the Anthropology Museum to explore the earliest periods of human history. Afterwards, we visited Moravian Museum with different contexts related to the ethnic collections of the Czech Republic.

▪ **Observations Made:**

The conference hosted large numbers of participants, therefore there was a lack of seats in some sessions (I had to stand in one of the sessions due to the lack of chairs). Another thing was the overlapping sessions and meetings. It was a bit difficult as I had to be in one session and run quickly to catch the other. I had to drop some items off my agenda as most of the lectures I was planning to attend were parallel. One of the negative aspects was that the organizing committee closed the registration for many activities months before the conference. For instance, I couldn't attend the off-site meeting of my committee (ICR) as I was not registered, even though I tried several times earlier with no luck.

Aside from this, the conference was very successful and had a great impact on all the attendants in a very positive way. Prague is a very beautiful city and we enjoyed the city and the program a lot.

▪ **Lessons learned and outcomes:**

The conference provided very useful input for me in many aspects. I learned a lot of new topics and collected many ideas that will benefit me in my academic publication and in teaching my courses. I have learned about so many new topics and projects that support museums and museum personnel. Recognizing the worldwide efforts towards helping the heritage and raising awareness of the threats that are placed on heritage and museums today are vital knowledge I gained from attending the conference. Some solidarity projects of ICOM included the resilience of museums and how to adapt to the new situation, especially after the Pandemic, and this was of great significance in adding to my knowledge. Sustainability, leadership, new standards, and ethics codes; all these topics represented a wonderful resource for me.

▪ **My lecture and what I brought to the conference:**

My talk was about examining the role of museums in promoting social inclusion and combating prejudice, and how museums have affirmed their commitment to social change and future reform. Mainly, asking: What opportunities exist for museums to lead a shift in social norms and overcome prejudice in the light of Egypt's Sustainable Development Strategy? It is entitled: "Egyptian Sustainable Development Strategy and the promotion of social inclusion; Authority and opportunity for Egypt's Museums in advocating inclusive practices".



Egypt's Sustainable Development Strategy is an ambitious strategic agenda that addresses a wide range of social and environmental challenges to set Egypt on a path to a sustainable future by 2030. Museums of Egypt can contribute to the implementation of this agenda and can help Egyptian society to move toward an inclusive society.

I got very positive feedback on my lecture. I was told that it was the best talk of the whole session. I got engaged in so many debates about my findings and it was requested that I join one of the working groups of ICOM's social Museology. It is a new proposal for establishing a new committee for Social Museology.

Networking:

- One of the key benefits of attending the conference was NETWORKING. I met a lot of people on many levels and on different fronts. Firstly and since I am now living in Germany, I was so overwhelmed to meet my colleagues from MoTA as more than 20 members of the ministry were attending the conference. It was so great to meet all of them and have several discussions on the updated projects that are currently underway at the ministry and also to get updates on the files I was involved in before my traveling.
- At the level of Wurzburg university, I had the privilege of meeting so many museum professionals and museum directors that were connected to the museology department of the university (where I am working now). It was a great opportunity to meet them and discuss some of the joint projects with the university and my future excursions to their museums and institutions.
- Worldwide museum experts: the conference gave me the chance to network with some museum experts that were part of my post-Doc research, meaning I used their books in my literature review. One of them was Henry McGhnie - the author of many museum books. I was so happy to meet him in person and discuss with him some of the arguments of my manuscripts. I was also so happy to meet Regina Schulz (Hildesheim Museum) and Gabriele Pieke (The Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen Mannheim) in person.
- ICOM Members: it was so amazing to meet in person with many ICOM members. Most of my communication methods with them were through E-mails, but now I have got to know them more and meet them face to face. Furthermore, I experienced enjoyable travels with them.

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It was so important to meet new contacts and I arranged with some of them to work on future projects together. For instance, I arranged with McGhnie to have a webinar on the Museum's role in Climate change at the university and the ministry. Also meeting Gabriele and Regina was so important as I arranged some future excursions with them for me to catch up on what their museums are providing in terms of accessibility and social inclusion programs.



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▪ ITP reunions:

How wonderful to meet and reconnect with colleagues from the ITP. The conference was a great opportunity to enable me to have re-unions with ITP fellows. We had several excursions together and engaged in many discussions



▪ The Future/Legacy

Attending the conference was so significant for me as it offered me the chance to be updated with many critical issues in the field of museums today and get engaged in many debates around museum constraints and challenges including social inclusion, human rights, decolonization, sustainability, climate change, and much more timely topics. The conference enabled me to get exposed to many contemporary practices that provide useful input for my post-Doc research, considering that my case study is Egyptian Museums and how to improve their role in advocating human rights and supporting inclusiveness practices. Thus, the conference was of great significance for my investigation and served as a resource for capturing the latest theories and practices in the field and thus will add value to my proposed action plan for upgrading Egyptian Museums in a measurable way. Getting exposed to all these contemporary issues - especially the social inclusion sessions, as my research interest - has enhanced my abilities and advanced my pedagogical expertise to encourage the MoTA's museum staff and young researchers to explore overlooked, yet significant topics.

I also got involved in the planning for some possible projects and activities related to the tackled topics of the conference, such as Climate Change, and I arranged with one of my new contacts at the conference to provide a Webinar in collaboration with the university and the MoTA in parallel with the UN Climate Change Conference COP 27 that will take place in Egypt next November. Furthermore, I communicated with some of the ICOM members I met to provide some online sessions at the university within the framework of the exchange program that's carried out by DAAD, Helwan university, and the MoTA.

I already shared much of the captured knowledge in the field of Museum Technology with many colleagues at the MoTA and University to help them get updated with the latest trends in the field and also to have deeper insights into the new museum projects in the field such as the new 'Future Museum of Abu Dhabi', that opened very recently.

The conference helped me to build a strong network and connect with many colleagues in the field, thus formulating an important investment for both my personal and professional development. On an academic level, I gained a lot of information and updates on new topics with deeper insights. This enriched my academic knowledge and consolidated my role as a lecturer in Museum Studies as well as my role as supervisor of many master theses and Ph.D. dissertations. I would also like to refer to the soft skills I gained by attending the conference which is very important in my career. The conference gave me the chance to practice these skills in presentation, answering questions, and communication with others, all of that helped in sharpening my skills.

One last thing, traveling to a new city – Prague - was a big part of the conference's appeal. I have visited new places (Prague and Brno), experienced local food, and explored Czech landmarks. Not to mention dinner, excursions, parties, and many attractive social programs. It was a really FUN and Enjoyable experience! ***Thanks to the ITP!***

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Once again, **I extend my gratitude to the British Museum's ITP,** without which I would not have been able to present my paper at this conference, gaining this experience and such a great future legacy.

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