

# The British Museum

## International Training Programme Conference support grant 2025 Final Report

### The 27th General Conference of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) – ICOM Dubai 2025.



*Supported by the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust*

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**Conference 11<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

## ***Introduction***

My name is **Dr. Nagwa Bakr**, and I am the **Director of the Training Department at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC) in Cairo**. My academic background is rooted in **Egyptology**, and I hold a **master's degree in Cultural Anthropology**, a **master's degree in museum studies**, and a **PhD in Museums and Heritage Studies**, with a particular focus on **women's heritage in museums**.

I have worked in the museum field for more than **two decades**, particularly in areas related to community engagement. Throughout my career, I have held various positions across my areas of specialization. For the past two years, I have been serving as the Director of the Training Department at NMEC, where I lead capacity-building initiatives for staff through diverse training programs in collaboration with multiple institutions. I also design and coordinate training opportunities for university students to link their academic fields with the museum environment, in addition to organizing a series of public lectures that connect audiences with the museum through relevant local and global events.

I attended the **27th ICOM General Conference** held in Dubai in November 2025—one of the most significant global gatherings for museum professionals. The conference addressed a wide spectrum of museum-related topics and brought together specialists from around the world. Attending this conference was particularly important for me, as it was my first experience participating in an ICOM General Conference. It provided a valuable opportunity to observe global professional practices, engage in high-level discussions, build an international professional network, and exchange knowledge with colleagues worldwide. Additionally, I had the honour of **presenting a research paper and a lecture within one of the conference committees**, which significantly enriched my professional experience.

I wanted to attend the conference to gain first-hand exposure to global museum practices and engage in high-level professional discussions that would enhance my work at NMEC. It was also an important opportunity to expand my international network and present my research within a leading global forum for museum professionals.

I applied for funding from the ITP because my institution does not provide financial support for attending international conferences or professional travel, which makes external grants essential for my professional development. Without such funding opportunities, it would be very difficult for me to participate in global events that are important for expanding my expertise and representing my institution internationally.

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ICOM Dubai 2025 also supported my participation by covering the conference registration fees. Although I had applied for their full grant, I was fortunate to receive the ITP grant, which had already enabled me to book my flights and accommodation. After being awarded both, I requested that ICOM Dubai contribute specifically to the registration costs, and they kindly agreed—allowing me to attend the conference without having to cover any extra expenses.



**National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC)**

<https://nmec.gov.eg/ar/>

<https://dubai2025.icom.museum/ar/>

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## *Conference experience*

Dubai hosted the ICOM General Conference **for the first time in 2025**, making it the **first Arab city** and the **first city in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia (MEASA) region** to host this prestigious international museum event. The main conference sessions were held at the **Dubai World Trade Centre**, a highly professional and well-equipped venue that provided an excellent environment for learning, networking, and focused discussions. The conference opened with a vibrant **morning plenary session**, which set an inspiring tone for the week. The speeches highlighted the importance of global cooperation, cultural resilience, and the evolving role of museums in rapidly changing societies. The atmosphere was energetic and welcoming, bringing together professionals from every region of the world in a spirit of shared purpose. For me, it was a motivating start that captured the significance of being part of such a global museum community.

The international conference, which stood as the largest global gathering of museum professionals, brought together more than 4,500 participants, including museum experts, cultural leaders, and thinkers from around the world. Its aim was to exchange visions, knowledge, and ideas on **the future of museums in rapidly changing societies**, while addressing the challenges and opportunities facing the sector. The discussions explored museum policies and examined how institutions can respond to accelerating demographic, technological, and environmental shifts. Participants also considered innovative solutions that could strengthen the role of museums, enhance their community responsibilities, and support the preservation of cultural heritage and shared values, reflecting the diversity and richness of global identities. The conference program featured over ten keynote speeches delivered by leading cultural figures and specialists, alongside contributions from more than 400 speakers who shared their expertise and perspectives. The scientific programme included more than 100 panel discussions and dialogue sessions that highlighted the key challenges and opportunities shaping the museum field today.



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The conference opening ceremony took place **in the evening at Expo 2020**, and it was a beautifully organized event that offered a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with friends and meet new colleagues from the museum world. We enjoyed a captivating performance that showcased the history and heritage of the United Arab Emirates, accompanied by exceptional hospitality. Even the journey to the venue was a memorable part of the experience: three metro trains were reserved exclusively for conference participants, and volunteer organizers guided us to our designated train sections. As I looked around at the passengers I found myself reflecting on the moment—realizing how remarkable it was that we had all gathered there, from so many parts of the world, united by the same purpose.

During the ICOM General Conference 2025 in Dubai, I attended a rich selection of lectures, sessions, and workshops—particularly within the CAMOC programme focusing on **urban heritage, community memory, and the role of city museums in rapidly changing urban environments**. My own session, *“Where the City Speaks: People, Memory, and the Intangible Heritage of Al-Muizz Street, Cairo,”* was part of the panel *Urban Heritage: Contested Landscapes and City Memory*, which featured diverse case studies from China, Syria, Turkey, and Qatar.

My presentation explored how Al-Muizz Street, Cairo, serves as a living space where community memory, daily practices, and intangible heritage shape the identity of the historic city. I discussed the different layers of memory embedded in the street—from traditional crafts and social interactions to religious practices and local narratives—and how these elements contribute to a deeper understanding of Cairo’s urban heritage.

The presentation highlighted the importance of documenting community voices and integrating them into museum and heritage work. I also shared the methods I used to collect oral histories and emotional narratives from residents, artisans, and visitors, demonstrating how such stories can enrich interpretation within museums and heritage sites. The session emphasized the need for inclusive approaches that reflect the lived experiences of communities, not only the physical monuments. My talk was well received, generating questions and discussions about community engagement, intangible heritage documentation, and the challenges of preserving living urban environments in rapidly changing cities.



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During my panel session, I also had the opportunity to connect with **Fatma Sezin Doğruer** from Turkey, who—like me—is an alumna of (ITP). She presented immediately after me, delivering her insightful paper **“Reframing Urban Memory: Emotional Mapping of Istanbul’s Changing Historical Neighbourhoods.”** It was a valuable moment to meet another museum professional who shares the same training background, and it reinforced the sense of community within the ITP network. Additionally, my colleague **Aprille Tijam**, also from the ITP 2019, attended my session, which made the experience even more meaningful and supportive.



I also participated in the workshop **“Your City Next! Researching and Curating Cycling Histories”**, which provided practical insights into community-oriented research and participatory interpretation methods. In addition, I attended the joint session on **Art and Creativity in Arab Cities**, which examined how museums contribute to artistic narratives and civic life across the region. The CAMOC IC Day was especially enriching, offering sessions on intergenerational dialogue in museums, rethinking urban memory, and community engagement.

**My favourite sessions** were the ones exploring **urban memory, community voices, and inclusive heritage practices**, as they strongly aligned with my own research and professional focus on community engagement and intangible heritage. I found the diversity of regional perspectives—especially from MEASA countries—particularly inspiring.

**The least favourite sessions** were those that were more general and less connected to practical museum challenges, as they offered limited application to my current work.

However, even these provided useful context on broader trends within the museum sector.



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Also, I attended the CIPEG Annual Meeting held as part of the 27th ICOM General Conference in Dubai, under the main theme “**The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities.**”

The sessions explored three key topics shaping museum practice today: **intangible heritage**, **youth engagement**, and the impact of **new technologies** on interpretation and accessibility. Throughout the conference, a diverse group of museum professionals presented case studies and innovative approaches related to Egyptian, Sudanese, and wider ancient cultures. The programme included rich discussions on safeguarding intangible heritage, digital storytelling, AR/VR applications, and ethical museum practices.



I benefited from hearing how different institutions are rethinking their roles, especially in relation to community voices and the challenges of the modern cultural landscape.

Moreover, I attended a dedicated session on **ICOM Africa**, which offered an eye-opening overview of the challenges faced by African museums today. The discussions highlighted issues such as limited funding, the impact of political instability, gaps in professional training, and the urgent need for stronger infrastructure to preserve collections. What stood out most was the powerful conversation about **the visibility of African voices within ICOM** and the importance of ensuring that African museum professionals are not only represented but actively shaping global museum discussions. Listening to their perspectives enriched my understanding of the diversity of museum experiences across the continent and reinforced the importance of building equitable international collaborations and support networks.

Throughout the conference, I had the opportunity to meet a wide network of museum professionals from different countries and programmes. I reconnected with several colleagues from the **ITP**, including, **Marine Mkrтчyan, Hayk Mkrтчyan** and Astghik Marabyan who are also from the ITP alumni. Aprille and Marine also offered me thoughtful gifts, reflecting the warmth and collegial spirit among ITP graduates. Also, many Egyptian ITP alumni attended the conference.



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My first feelings upon meeting my fellow ITP alumni were a mixture of **happiness, pride, and longing**. I was eager to catch up and hear about their experiences, even though time was too short to have longer conversations. I felt especially joyful to reconnect with **Aprille** and **Mariné**, and their thoughtful gifts made the meeting even more memorable and heartwarming. It was a truly special moment that reminded me of the strong bonds and shared memories we have through the ITP program.



I was also pleased to reconnect with many colleagues from the **Museums Lab** programme. Despite the very tight schedule and limited time, we made sure to exchange updates, maintain communication, and reaffirm our professional connections.



One of the important encounters was meeting **Christian Greco**, Director of the Turin Museum, who has recently become Chair of the ICOM Committee (CIPEG). It was a valuable opportunity to congratulate him and discuss ongoing developments within the committee.

Another meaningful moment was meeting **Rashad Bukhash**, CEO of the Architectural Heritage Department at Dubai Municipality. He had supported me during my PhD research years ago by helping me access information about the **first Women's Museum in the Arab world**, located in Dubai. Meeting him and visiting his collection booth allowed me to express my gratitude in person.



I also connected with many members of **ICOM Arab** and had engaging conversations about regional museum practices and challenges. Additionally, **ICOM Qatar** generously hosted the ICOM Egypt delegation for a gala dinner, where they warmly welcomed participants and shared thoughtful heritage-inspired gifts, including a book on museums in Qatar. Their hospitality added a memorable cultural dimension to the conference experience.



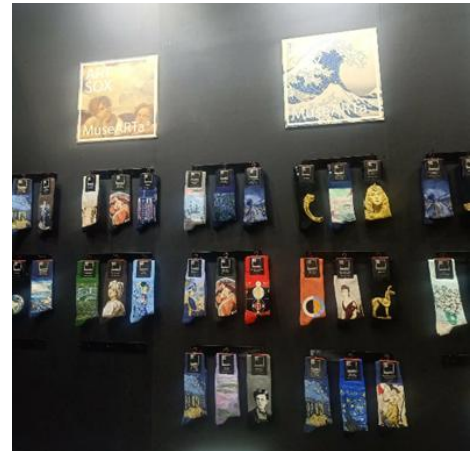
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During the conference, we enjoyed a series of traditional Emirati performances, including music, singing, and folk dances that beautifully reflected the spirit and heritage of the UAE. These performances added a vibrant cultural dimension to the event, creating an atmosphere filled with warmth, authenticity, and a deep sense of place. It was inspiring to see how the traditional arts continue to thrive and how they were shared with participants from all over the world.

The ICOM Dubai 2025 General Conference featured a vibrant accompanying exhibition that brought together museums, cultural institutions, technology companies, heritage organizations, and academic partners from around the world. The exhibition provided a dynamic platform for showcasing innovative museum practices, new technologies, conservation tools, digital solutions, and educational programmes. Many booths highlighted cutting-edge approaches such as immersive experiences, AR/VR applications, digitization initiatives, and community-driven projects, reflecting the conference theme of *“The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities.”*

One of the displays I particularly enjoyed was the **Emirati Coffee Museum Exhibition**, which presented the cultural journey of coffee in the region and its role in Emirati hospitality. The booth showcased traditional tools, brewing techniques, and the social rituals connected to Arabic coffee, offering a warm and engaging representation of intangible heritage.

Another standout feature was the **MuseARTa booth**, which showcased a creative collection of art-inspired socks. The display was vibrant and fun, transforming famous artworks into wearable pieces. It added a playful and unexpected artistic element to the exhibition, and I really enjoyed how it blended fashion with culture in such an accessible way. The booth attracted a lot of attention and brought a light, modern twist to the overall exhibition experience.

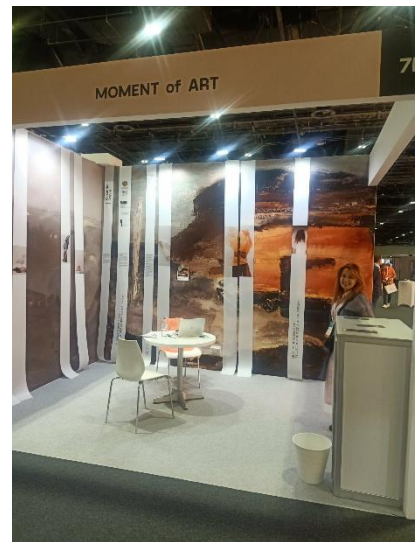


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I was also impressed by the presence of Emirati perfumery art at the exhibition: a standout for me was the work of *Asim Al Qassim*, the founder of *Anfas* — widely recognized as the UAE’s first certified perfumer. His display captured the sensory heritage of the region, reflecting the warmth, culture, and hospitality of the Emirates through carefully crafted fragrances inspired by Arabian tradition. For me, this was a powerful reminder that museums and heritage events are not only about visual history — they also have the potential to engage smell, memory, and emotion.

The perfume exhibit added a deeply personal and cultural dimension to the conference, underlining how heritage can be experienced in multiple sensory ways beyond objects or texts.

I was particularly impressed by the **nature-inspired fashion pieces** showcased as part of the exhibition, where designs beautifully translated elements of the natural world into contemporary garments, blending artistic creativity with cultural storytelling. This section was especially meaningful for me because it was presented by my friend **Mariné Mkrtychyan**, ITP fellow and Director at the Museum of Russian Art, A. Abrahamyan Collection. One of the most striking contributions from her museum was the special project “**Moment of Art,**” developed in collaboration with a fashion label. The initiative reimagined classic artworks from the museum’s collection as modern, wearable pieces—creating a compelling dialogue between fine art, design, and contemporary culture. This innovative display demonstrated how museum collections can inspire cross-disciplinary creativity, offering fresh ways to connect heritage with present-day audiences and making the exhibition both visually captivating and conceptually rich.



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## Day Trips:

As part of the conference programme, I participated in two major site visits:

**Abu Dhabi:** We visited with the **CIPEG Committee, New York University Abu Dhabi**, where we presented our institution, and shared our experiences in community engagement and heritage management.

We also discussed the new committee elections and the role of museums in supporting Sudanese heritage after the recent conflict. These discussions provided valuable insights into regional museum challenges and collaborative approaches.

Then, we visited **Louvre Abu Dhabi**, where we experienced an exceptional curatorial approach that integrates diverse world cultures across multiple thematic exhibitions. The museum offered a remarkable example of how museums can represent global heritage in innovative ways.



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**Sharjah:** We explored the Sharjah Museum of Natural History and the Botanical Museum, where we were introduced to the region's diverse natural environments, from its geological formations to its rich biodiversity. The botanical section showcased the unique plant species of the Arabian Peninsula and highlighted the vital role of conservation and environmental awareness. The interpretation and display methods were well-crafted, making the experience both educational and engaging.

We also visited the **Islamic Botanical Garden**, which offered a fascinating perspective on the relationship between nature, culture, and Islamic heritage. The garden presents plants mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah, connecting botanical knowledge with historical and cultural narratives. It emphasized the importance of biodiversity, sustainability, and environmental education within museum and cultural contexts.

Together, these visits provided practical inspiration for exhibition planning, interpretive design, and new approaches to audience engagement.

I observed how museums in the UAE balance **global narratives and local identities**, create immersive visitor experiences, and integrate educational and cultural programming with exhibitions. I also noted the emphasis on **interdisciplinary collaboration** and the use of **innovative curatorial methods** to engage diverse audiences.

Key lessons included the importance of **community engagement, inclusive storytelling, and inter-institutional collaboration** in enhancing the impact of museums. The visits inspired ideas for future exhibitions, public programs, and conservation projects at NMEC, particularly in how to combine heritage with education and cultural dialogue.

I contributed my expertise in **Egyptology, cultural anthropology, and museum training**, sharing NMEC's approaches to community-cantered heritage, capacity-building, and public engagement.

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While I did not have a formal facilitation role, I actively participated in committee discussions, helped share knowledge about NMEC practices, and contributed to collaborative conversations during field visits and workshops.



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During the conference, it was announced that a new President of ICOM had been elected, along with the new members of its Executive Board. The previous President was Emma Nardi. The newly elected President is Antonio Rodríguez. It was also officially announced that Rotterdam (Netherlands) will host the next conference — ICOM 2028 General Conference — and the ICOM flag was ceremonially handed over to representatives of Rotterdam during the closing ceremony.

There was notable media coverage of the ICOM Dubai 2025 General Conference across local, regional, and international platforms. Major UAE newspapers and online outlets, including *The National*, *Gulf News*, and *Khaleej Times*, reported on the significance of hosting the conference in Dubai and highlighted key sessions and discussions. Television channels such as Dubai TV and Abu Dhabi TV also featured segments from the opening ceremony and daily activities. In addition, ICOM's official social media platforms provided continuous updates, sharing photographs, interviews, and summaries of panel sessions and events.

Several participating museums, universities, and ICOM committees amplified this coverage by posting about their contributions and presentations. Altogether, the wide media presence helped emphasize the importance of the conference and showcased the vibrant exchange of ideas shaping the future of museums globally.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4S2EmbvysY>

<https://www.instagram.com/dubaimediainc/>

<https://www.lord.ca/news/news/icom-general-conference-2025>

<https://www.afp.com/en/infos/icom-dubai-2025-concludes-historic-success>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@yousufsaleh4/video/7570367888972958984>

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=9770555663068966>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-3vSnkv12U>



## ***The future***

Attending the ICOM Dubai 2025 General Conference was a transformative experience both personally and professionally. Personally, it was inspiring not only to engage with global colleagues, expand my professional network, and witness diverse perspectives on museum practices from around the world, but also to visit the city of Dubai, quickly get to know its culture, and explore its museums and heritage. This opportunity gave me a unique insight into how the UAE preserves and presents its rich history while embracing modernity. Professionally, it reinforced my understanding of current trends in museology, digital innovation, community engagement, and heritage preservation. The exposure to international standards and practices has strengthened my vision for the development of museum work in Egypt, particularly in connecting museums more closely with their communities.

The conference gave me many practical ideas that I plan to implement at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization. For example, I am considering developing more community-centered exhibitions, integrating digital storytelling tools, and enhancing participatory programs that engage young audiences. I also gained insights on designing inclusive training programs for staff and creating platforms to capture and share local intangible heritage. The experience will influence the way I approach project planning, encourage cross-disciplinary collaborations, and prioritize audience engagement and innovation in museum programming.

New ideas and maintaining contact with delegates, I am motivated to explore collaborations with international museums and ITP alumni, particularly in areas of urban heritage, intangible cultural heritage, and youth engagement. I plan to maintain regular contact with delegates such as Aprille, Mariné, and others, sharing updates, exchanging ideas, and potentially collaborating on joint initiatives or research projects

The conference itself has created a legacy through the exchange of knowledge, the building of networks, and inspiration for future museum practices. ICOM Dubai 2025 will likely result in publications summarizing session findings, case studies, and best practices, which will serve as valuable resources for professionals globally. Additionally, the event has laid the groundwork for future collaborations, partnerships, and possibly subsequent conferences, particularly for the regions of the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. For me personally, the conference will continue to influence my work and strategic planning, shaping the development of training programs, exhibitions, and community engagement projects for years to come.

### ***Acknowledgements***

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the sponsors and conference facilitators for their invaluable support and commitment to advancing museum practices worldwide. Special thanks to the **Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust** for their generous funding, which made my participation in this initiative possible. I also sincerely acknowledge the support of the **International Training Programme (ITP)** and the **ICOM Dubai Grant Committee**, whose collaboration has been instrumental in enabling my attendance and engagement. Your contributions have greatly enriched my professional experience and provided me with the opportunity to create meaningful projects, deepen my knowledge, and connect with inspiring colleagues from around the world.