

**Welcome address****Mats Sander, Mayor of Helsingborg**

Welcome to Sweden, Skåne and Helsingborg!

We are very grateful for hosting the ICOM conference 2017. I want to thank all of you who have been involved along the way, putting your time and effort in to making this great event happen.

I was asked to say something about museums. So once upon a time we needed a new city museum. Many discussions and negotiations were held during the years to come. And the result/outcome was this house that you are in right now. Dunker's House of Culture. A versatile house of arts and culture. Not a museum. Just a small part of it is that. Some people are still missing a museum. Later this year a museum will be a guest here in the building. The name is... – The Museum of Failure.

I took a glance in your programme and noticed that it is full of interesting events. I do think that you will leave Helsingborg absolutely exhausted. I hope you will be inspired, with a big smile and of course, with a feeling of wanting to come back to Helsingborg.

I wish all of you a fruitful conference!

Thank You!

## Welcome address

**Katherine Hauptman, President ICOM Sweden**

How to learn good things from difficult issues in museums? – it is often said that museums hold the collective memory of society. This is a great responsibility and possibly more of a wild vision than a realistic task. Nevertheless, this is our aim and one of the tasks for museums in society. To understand a specific museum collection, you must understand the context of time and place of its origin and of the collection process. It is obvious that in a rear-view mirror things and people from history have been missing out. The three papers we are about to hear are different approaches to make the museum more inclusive and address topics, people, conflicts and competence that have been absent.

If we share a past, but do not share the same memories about that past, the society is in trouble. Therefore, we need to talk more thoroughly to each other. This was obvious already to the first ICOM president and the same insight has been a pillar for the international museum collaboration ever since. When ICOM was founded 1946 Chauncey J. Hamlin argued that museums have a key role in building the future, and that people, sometimes even former enemies, should unite through their common interest in history and culture. As a mission to connect more countries and museums to ICOM Hamlin sought cooperation around the world and stated that: “Through museums man may grow to understand all other men in time and place.”

After World War II many countries faced the difficult task of re-building destroyed environments and communities, as well as to regain confidence among people and governments. It is not surprising that one of the growing needs of the time also was to recapture lost histories in museums. As Hamlin noted, the curiosity about unknown matters is a strong glue when caring about people and the future of society. This is true not only for the happy histories, but also for the difficult issues of the past, and for how museums have dealt with such topics in the past.

The task of making difficult histories easier to understand for more people has stayed important, not least today when democratic rights are again challenged in several countries. Museum work, with respect and recognition of many people’s histories, art and culture, is one crucial part of building democratic societies.

During the three conference days in Helsingborg we will touch upon many aspects of objects and stories that are contested or sensitive to handle in museums. We will discuss the individual professional choices and what it means to take risks in museums. Matters of political influence, conflicts and community relations will also be in focus. So will be collecting hidden histories, the implications of dark narratives, and a wide spectrum of different ethical challenges. Hopefully there will be something to provoke your mind for everyone.

Some of the issues that will be raised will lead to follow up questions about how future museums can develop to deal with them pro-actively. For example, strategic documents are helpful to raise questions about action in difficult situations, or to analyse the risks if the museum only play it safe. New competences are needed in the future museum that interacts with different communities. And a continuing debate is necessary about the changes in professional voices of museums that become more inclusive. How does such a development affect the museum's role in society?

My wish is that we continue to dig deeper together in proud histories as well as in to the sore and dark things that needs to be examined more thoroughly. Museum professionals have strong voices by their experience from heritage work, their deep historical knowledge, and training in critical thinking. Therefore, museums have important roles in the shaping of society with space for everyone. Continue taking the lead in discussions about difficult issues, in the museums and in the public debate.

As the president of ICOM Sweden I am very proud of the opportunity to host this international conference in Helsingborg, which was jointly arranged by the ICOM Nord countries and ICOM Germany. A special welcome to Suay Aksoy, president of ICOM. We are honoured to have you opening the conference with an important keynote.

My deepest thanks to our partners in the national committees of Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland and Norway. Without your fabulous work we would miss out on many thought-provoking discussions and on new museum connections for an even stronger future collaboration.

A warm welcome to the Conference *Difficult Issues in Museums* in Helsingborg, Sweden!