The International Network of Women’s and Gender Museums

1 Introduction

The International Association of Women’s Museums (IAWM) is not only connecting women’s museums worldwide, but also looking for exchange and collaboration with affiliated associations. Since a French journalist told me about FIHRM a year ago, I was convinced that we have a lot in common. Firstly I would like to introduce IAWM.

The goals of IAWM are:

• To promote and strengthen the acceptance of Women’s and Gender Museums worldwide.
• To increase the mutual support of the Women’s museums, their exchange and network.
• Achieving international recognition of museums.
• And the last point is perhaps the most important for you: The pooled Women’s and Gender museums advocate women’s rights and a gender democratic society.

2 What we do

a) We regularly organise international congresses together with the host-museum to realize the meeting, discussion and exchange of our members. Our next one will be http://iawm.international/2016/03/19/november-2016fifth-international-conference-mexico-city-mexico/

b) We bring museums together for cooperation and organise collective projects, promote exchange and cooperation between the museums.

c) We reach out to other networks for collaboration.

3 Monitoring
We provide a constantly updated database of Women’s Museums worldwide on our webpage http://iawm.international/: physical museums, virtual museums, initiatives to found a new museum and gender institutions affiliated to IAWM. We count at the moment 77 museums all over the world. 12 of them are virtual ones. We visualize all the museums on our website on a map as well as in a list. Most of the museums are in North America, especially the United States, and in Europe. We know from 26 initiatives of museums, who want to establish a new museum, most of them in Europe. (July 2016)

4 The reason to create women’s museums

Women’s Museums are a worldwide phenomenon which developed independently and very often they did not know anything about the existence of others. The Women’s Museums in America and Europe have originated mainly from second wave feminism and from the result of the new understanding of history as a gender history. However, also the museums of the other continents are based on the roots of modern feminism: Gender inequality, the material disadvantage of women and the ideological discrimination of the females is the all uniting subject. Since 2000 we can remark, that there are a lot of museums and specially initiatives with the focus on women and therefore human rights.

5 Women’s rights are Human rights

In the following I will present a few examples of our members, which are working on the theme of human rights. I begin with the words of Merete Ipsen, who is not only the director of the Women’s Museum of Denmark, but also part of the board of ICOM:

"With Hillary Clinton’s words from Beijing: Women’s rights are human rights, and human rights are women’s rights. They definitely are an integrated purpose for all organizations working with women’s studies, in women’s organizations or in women’s movement.”

Further she explained that the Women’s Museum in Denmark has a program for refugee and immigrant women for better integration, for young schoolchildren about democracy as well as sexuality. They show exhibitions on hidden themes.

6 WM Mexico

Very active is also the women’s museum of Mexico since the foundation in 2011, as the director Patricia Galeana is not only a university teacher, but also involved

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in human rights organizations. In 2016 they have a project of the Commission of Human Rights of the Federal District in their house with orientation and information about human right's themes for women and men. Since the opening of the women’s museum of Mexico the human and specially women’s rights are a main topic and they did a lot of forums, round tables, conferences, workshops and publications on this theme – inviting and cooperating organizations from the civil society and the governmental institutions. From 2012-2014 the museum worked with girls and boys from 6-12 years on this theme, supported by the Mexican Network of Children's Rights and the Commission of Human Rights of the Federal District.

7 WM Meran (Italy)

A strong connection exists also between the museum and human rights associations in Meran, in the North of Italy. Since 2008 the museum is cooperating with the association Human Rights International (HRI). Together they provided two prizes to women, one of which was awarded to the Iranian lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh. She sent a video message, which was one of the reasons, why Nasrin is imprisoned until this day. The WM of Meran is actively working together with organizations and the local government regarding the refugees and immigrants, women and men. They organize exhibitions, workshops, lectures and do cultural mediation and education in their region.

8 WM initiative Iran

Since the first international congress of IAWM in 2008, Shirin Ebadi is the godmother of our association. She is not only convinced, that there has to be a women’s museum in every country, but also in her own. Within her activist group she found Mansoureh Shojae, who was the director of the women’s library in Teheran, before it was closed, and has the blog “feminist school”. Mansoureh was very enthusiastic to create a women’s museum in Iran, as “a peaceful strategy for voicing their demands for the equal treatment of women”. This was the reason she was arrested. Since then she is a political refugee in Europe, but goes on to plan a women’s museum in Iran, perhaps beginning with a virtual one.

9 WM initiative India

The feminist publishing house Zubaan in India made an international research and analysis and is convinced that there is a need for a women’s museum in India.
They are working at the moment at a research project on sexual violence and impunity. It will be carried out in the next three years in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka with the objectives of developing and deepening the understanding on sexual violence and impunity in South Asia. One of their other projects is the Poster Women Project Website with lots of wonderful posters created by many regional local women's and human rights' movements, which will be a part of the collection of the future museum.

10 WM Centralafrica

The museum of the Central African Republic – here a few pictures of it from the past, was destroyed in the civil war. Since then a lot of organizations of different religions and the NGO “Femme Action Plus” are collaborating to rebuild it, because they see the women’s museum as a symbol for the importance of the woman in the society.

In Mai 2015 the ex and future director of the museum, Rachel Mamba – as the voice of all the women of Central Africa – made an official declaration during a demonstration on the streets of the capital of Bangui: “Le Cri de Cœur des Femmes de Centrafrique» - The Shout of the Heart of the Women of Central Africa.

In this declaration they asked concrete steps for peace and security, democracy, gender equality and justice against the ones, which acted violent, including sexual violence. They requested help to rebuild the infrastructures, but also socio-cultural spaces like the women’s museum.

11 Gendermuseum Ucraine

According to Tatiana Isaieva, director of the Ukranian gendermuseum, in her country is a great percentage of victims of domestic and sexual violence. At the moment they are working on a project about the different women’s faces of the war and one of their artists draws about the sexual violence on occupied territories at Donbass.

Human and women’s rights are at the moment their main focus.

12 WM initiative Montenegro

Natasa Nelevic from the women’s museum initiative of Montenegro tells us similar things. There is a high rate of discrimination against women in Montenegro with a high rate of domestic violence. Dominant gender role-models are still highly patriarchal, despite the fact that women still have available some rights acquired during socialism.
Launched in 2013, the Initiative for Montenegrin Women’s Museum Founding is inseparably linked to fighting discrimination against women. The main objective of the museum is to make women’s contribution to historical and cultural development more visible and to have women in Montenegro recognized as equal political and social subjects.

13 WM Bonn Germany

The women’s museum of Bonn is working especially with exhibitions – historically and contemporary, often with art. The museum was for example until a few months ago part of the worldwide art-exhibition-tour from the World Bank Art Program of „One in three - What does it take for you to be outraged?“. The central point of this exhibition is that more than one in three women worldwide (an estimated 35 percent) will be beaten, coerced into sex or marriage, or otherwise abused in their lifetime. International artists have worked on this without showing direct brutality. Background information about gender violence all over the world and a performing art are part of it as well. The exhibition is still on tour.

14 WM Istanbul Turkey

The virtual women’s museum of Istanbul is working on the theme “Inclusion” – an ideal as well as an organizational principle for museums. “Displaying social peace” is the primary target of the exhibitions. The museum contributes to an inclusive women’s history of the city of Istanbul – a history which was lost, obscured or disowned all too quickly by the mainstream of opinion. It is a counterpart to male-dominated historical writing and creates an inspiring new cultural model. The memory of the city’s women is kept alive through virtual exhibitions that honor, inform and provide role models from women’s history. The museum is envisioned as a project to create and encourage understanding and dialogue among the generations, genders and among the different cultural and ethnic groups of the city.

15 WM Fürth (Germany)

This German museum calls itself: “Museum regional, culture of women international”. The association behind is named “Women in one world”. It is clear that the main topic of this museum is interculturality and solidarity. They have strong relations with female grass roots movements all over the world, especially with the Iranian human rights activists.
They discuss women’s and human rights in nearly every exhibition and framework program. One of their first exhibitions was the “cultures of headscarves” in 2006, in which they made a historical review of the patriarchal cultures and the counter-strategies of women, but also their esthetical and cultural perceptions to wear or not wear headscarves or other veils. The exhibition also provided an overview of current laws from different countries where headscarves are either mandatory or forbidden. This exhibition toured for several years and had been a great success.

16 WM Buenos Aires (Argentina)

The Women’s Museum in Argentina was the first in Latin America and focuses on recovering the history of women as the basis for the contemporary struggles for women’s rights. Graciela Tejero, director of the museum: “We denounce the oppression of gender in Argentina and see the museum as an instrument to claim the social liberation. We have the right not to be the object of violence, not to be the victims of femicide, not to be abused sexually, not to be domestic slaves. We have the right to decide over our own bodies, to not obey standard models of beauty and to rebel against every patriarchal mandate.”

17 WM Wiesbaden (Germany)

In 2016 the women’s museum Wiesbaden is organizing a project with the name “Bridges in a global world”. Researchers and artists are thinking about culture, ethnicity, religion, gender and economy. What is diversity and what do we all have in common? How can we build a bridge across the differences? The women’s museum Wiesbaden is carrying out a lot of exhibitions, in which they show the historical development of women’s rights, but also current discussions of human and women’s rights.

These examples are just a small part of the work our museums do. They are meant to make visible, that human rights are part of the main topics of women’s museums all over the world.

18 Webpage and the end

Our network is young, but increasing a lot. We are in negotiation with the European Parliament committee on women’s rights and gender equality (FEMM) to cooperate in their celebration of the International Women’s Day on the 8th of March.
March 2017 and we are preparing a great EU-project in 2017.

With these examples I wanted to make visible how much IAWM and FIHRM have in common. Not only, because we are a network of a specific type of museums and we can exchange also our networking experience, but also because we can find common points in the contents. So I hope for a fruitful cooperation of our networks in the future and that we are able to increase the exchange between our museums.
References


Additional resource material


Weblinks

International Association of Women’s Museums http://iawm.international/
EU project She Culture http://www.she-culture.com/en/
Women’s Museum Arhus, Denmark http://kvindemuseet.dk/
Women's Museum Bonn, Germany http://frauenmuseum.de/
Women’s Museum Fürth, Germany http://www.frauenindereinenwelt.de/
Women’s Museum Initiative India http://zubaanbooks.com/
Women’s Museum Istanbul, Turkey http://www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org
Women’s Museum Mexico City, Mexico http://www.museodelamujer.org.mx/
Women's Museum Merano, Italy http://www.museia.it/english/
Women's Museum Podgorica, Montenegro http://www.muzejzena.me/
Women’s Museum Ukraine http://gendermuseum.com/
Women’s Museum Wiesbaden, Germany http://www.frauenmuseum-wiesbaden.de/