

PREFACE

Museums are permanent institutions which collect, preserve, study and present the vast tangible and intangible evidence of people, their activities and the natural surrounding of the earth that they inhabit. The earliest museums developed out of art collections and assortments of interesting artefacts which were put on display for the curious. Over time, museums improved standards and established conduct for accurately assessing their showings, thus augmenting their scholastic role and cementing their importance which continues today. More recently, growing social demands stemming from an increased collective concern regarding the state of heritage preservation and its transmission have placed increasing responsibility on museums.

Museums safeguarding capabilities have become increasingly important attributes and are commonly recognized as an important catalyst in the ever more difficult task of heritage preservation. In recognition of the dilemma at hand, many museums across the globe have risen to the occasion and have engaged in unprecedented levels of new, active outreach initiatives aimed at improving their educative role and raising awareness of, and appreciation for, cultural diversity.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has long supported museums and their development as sources of knowledge about cultural heritage. In 2005, with the aim of documenting good practices by museums in the East Asia region, UNESCO commissioned a series of case studies in five countries: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea under the broad theme of museum outreach and public engagement.

This publication contains a collection of case studies which introduce the different roles that museums are playing in public participation and educational outreach activities. While the initiatives vary greatly in strategy and manifestation, all similarly reflect the growing need to actively educate and engage the public.

I trust this publication will be of value to museum curators, managers and staff, and provide them with useful examples and inspiration for educational outreach programmes in their respective museums and countries as well as for educational institutions and the general public.



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