

Statement on children-centred museum work during COVID-19

April 2020

Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums expresses solidarity with every organisation and individual affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it. The current situation is posing a serious threat to children-centred and hands-on museum work. Given their unique methods these hybrid organisations of early learning facilities and museums are dependent on their interaction with visitors.

These pioneers of mainstreaming pedagogy-centred and hands-on-based educational approaches in the museum-world serve society by:

- Advocating children and their empowerment
- Developing, researching, and testing innovative learning practices and contributing valuable expertise to the educational discourse
- Lowering the barriers of accessing cultural heritage for all members of society

They are also quick to react to the immediate needs of their visitors. This asset becomes evident in countless initiatives launched to help tackle the COVID-19 outbreak:

From sewing masks like Sladovna Písek and FRida & freD - Das Grazer Kindermuseum, to Wereldmuseum Rotterdam adapting their exhibitions to help educate children about the COVID-19 pandemic, Children's Museum Verona, Explora - il Museo dei Bambini di Roma and MUBA - Museo dei Bambini Milano creating a free online children's picture book about the corona virus, and offering free digital home schooling resources like Junges Museum Frankfurt, these organizations are dedicated to create a positive social impact.

We welcome the swift supporting initiatives by the European Commission and national and international museum associations for the sector. Yet, we are deeply concerned about the general absence of distinct strategies and acknowledgment for interactive and visitor-centred museum work during this pandemic.

Play-based and interactive museum settings are currently on the verge of extinction, due to the lack of genuine support measures by leaders of culture and education.

A lack of support of interactive and child-centred museum environments during these times of crisis will result in a long-term back-step for innovative cultural education and pedagogy and is an unjustified breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As the representative of children-dedicated museum organisations in 40 countries, we demand the following immediate and unbureaucratic initiatives:

1. We call to all political and cultural leaders to outrightly commit to the recognition of every child's right of cultural participation and low-threshold education by ensuring the protection of these specific types of cultural institutions.
2. We urge governments at all levels to adopt appropriate emergency measures to ensure these unique cultural institutions are not forgotten and to acknowledge their contribution to society, especially when it comes to coping with this crisis in a long-term perspective.
3. We ask you to provide a clear framework, which allows them to continue creating new and innovative ways of serving the holistic education of children in a mid-and post-pandemic world.
4. Furthermore, we request government bodies, cultural leaders, museum associations and all experts involved to recognize the specific requirements of interactive and play-based settings of cultural education and include them when developing strategies and guidelines to reopening museums.

Hands On! is dedicated to support hands-on cultural organisations world-wide through these challenging times. As international association we are currently gathering strategies and practical examples of interactive museums.

We invite governments, cultural organisations, lobbies, and sponsors to stand together and safeguard a future for all organisations offering high-quality interpretation and play-based engagement with cultural heritage.