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BY ANUPAMA SEKHAR
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Heritage education for ASEM youth



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caption="Delegates at the 4 ASEMCMMPoland2010"]



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Heritage dominated the agenda of the **Fourth ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting** in Poland in 2010 and will continue to shape the deliberations of the next Ministerial meeting, scheduled to be held in Indonesia in 2012.

Specifically, issues of heritage education and management dominated the discussions in Poznan, which hosted the Culture Ministers' Meeting (CMM) from 8-10 September 2010. Delegations from over 35 partners of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) participated in this meeting, whose overarching theme was "Heritage and the Challenges of the Present".

Ministers call for awareness of common cultural heritage among youth

The need to educate and actively involve youth in heritage-related issues was foregrounded by many participating governments at this meeting. The **Chairman's Statement** issued at the end of the three-day Ministerial deliberations in Poland further reiterated this message: "The Ministers are aware of the fact that subsequent generations will not be able to form a stable identity and future without any reference to the past and the achievements of their ancestors. To avoid losing the link with the past, the Ministers encouraged all ASEM members to foster the awareness of common cultural heritage as a part of the youth education systems in their countries."

Experts recommend critical perspectives in heritage education

Recommendations from civil society representatives to the Fourth ASEM CMM also stressed the importance of heritage education for youth. At the roundtable "**The Cultural Heritages of Asia and Europe: Global Challenges and Local Initiatives**", heritage experts from Asia and Europe called on ASEM member states "to include critical perspectives on heritage at all levels (local, regional, national and transnational) in education curricula, comprising of both institutional and non-institutional knowledge". Specific emphasis was laid on the urgent need to recognise the plurality of the notion of 'heritage' within ASEM member countries, and between Asia and Europe. In the latter context, the notion of 'shared heritage' was foregrounded as being particularly relevant.

The Roundtable was co-organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation and the

International Institute for Asian Studies in Amsterdam from 2-3 September 2010. **Recommendations** emerging from the Roundtable were presented at the Ministerial meeting for the consideration of ASEM governments.

ASEF University on cultural heritage

Responding directly to these Ministerial and civil society recommendations, ASEF is organising the **17th ASEF University** (AU17) on “Cultural Heritage: Challenges and Opportunities”. ASEF University is a two-week programme that aims to promote cross-cultural exchanges among youth from member countries of the ASEM. A total of 41 students and young professionals working in heritage and related fields and representing 31 ASEM member countries have been selected to participate in the project through an open call.

Co-organised by ASEF and **University Sains Malaysia**, AU17 will be organised in June 2011 in George Town, which has enjoyed World Heritage Site status since 2008. Outcomes of the project will be shared at the Fifth ASEM Culture Ministers’ Meeting, scheduled to be held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2012.

The programme will combine theoretical learning and hands-on experience through lectures, masterclasses and workshops with a variety of experts including Professor Amareswar Galla, Chairperson, Cross Cultural Task Force, International Council of Museums, Paris; award-winning architect Laurence Loh credited with the restoration of the Chou Tze Fatt mansion in George Town; and, Karen Chin, Head of the Education Department at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore.

Participants will also collaborate to create a photographic exhibition, “Shared Heritage: As We See It” that opens on 30 June 2011 at the University Museum at the University Sains Malaysia. This exhibition is expected to travel to Indonesia next year for the Fifth ASEM Culture Ministers’ Meeting.

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