SUMMARY REPORT

Roundtable
The Cultural Heritages of Asia and Europe:
Global Challenges and Local Initiatives
(2-3 September 2010, Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

1. The Roundtable, “The Cultural Heritages of Asia and Europe: Global Challenges and Local Initiatives” was held on 2nd and 3rd September 2010 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. It was organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in collaboration with the International Institute for Asian Studies (based in Amsterdam and Leiden, The Netherlands). The Roundtable brought together 19 experts from ASEM countries, including scholars, cultural professionals and heritage experts from relevant organisations.

2. The following issues were discussed at the Roundtable: (i) Evolving scope of the term ‘heritage’ in different contexts in Asia and Europe and for different stakeholders (including institutional and governmental organisations and civil society actors); (ii) Heritage ownership in relation to different stakeholders (including policy makers, communities, educators and other civil society actors); (iii) Institutional frameworks at various levels (international, national and local) and the role of civil society in heritage-related activities; (iv) Possibilities of reconciling market economies and heritage-related activities; (v) Maintaining the balance between preservation and modernisation in urban contexts; and, (vi) Recommendations on heritage for the 4th ASEM Culture Ministers’ Meeting (9-10 September 2010, Poznan).

3. The principle findings of the Roundtable were:

   i. There is an urgent need to recognise the plurality of the notion of ‘heritage’ both within ASEM Member States and between Asia and Europe; in the latter context, the notion of ‘shared heritage’ needs to be addressed by ASEM Member States.

   ii. There is a need to move from the notion of ‘heritage’ as an assemblage of objects and texts to a dynamic understanding of heritage as a process.

   iii. The participants proposed the use of the notion of ‘situational heritage’ (i.e. including a diversity of stakeholders together with the plurality of their values) in order to resolve important omissions in earlier notions of cultural heritage created by the distinction between the categories of ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ heritage.

   iv. Such an expanded understanding of ‘heritage’ (as outlined above) would incorporate the inherent multivocality of all representations of culture; and,
the legitimacy of alternative modes of producing knowledge and representing
the past.

v. Given that history is, by definition, unavoidably selective, there is a need to
recognise the existence of numerous groupings of social actors and
acknowledge that such groupings and their needs shift over time.

vi. There should be a more substantive response to the changing needs
articulated by local communities at various levels and to the cultural
aspirations of different generations.

vi. The most urgent priority is to allow legitimate forms of contestation and to
facilitate the articulation of various stakeholders such as NGOs, local
communities, educational institutions and local intellectuals, activists and
micro-entrepreneurs.

vii. The participants particularly emphasised the need to recognise that hitherto
underrepresented disciplines and professions have now productively entered
the ongoing debate.

viii. Regional and local languages faced with extinction require particular
attention.

4. The participants present the following recommendations for the
consideration of ASEM Member States:

ii. To recognise, explore and support the potential and actual contributions of
cultural practitioners, micro-entrepreneurs, and activists in cultural
transmission and change.

iii. To acknowledge, sustain and provision platforms and networks for the
interaction of different social actors as equals in the representation,
transmission, governance and sharing of heritage.

iv. To develop heritage-related programmes, planning and projects on the basis
of ethical principles that promote the concept of an inclusive, equitable
society.
v. To strengthen the effectiveness of cultural heritage management at different levels through participatory methods including through online technologies.

vi. To include critical perspectives on heritage at all levels (local, regional, national and transnational) in educational curricula, comprising of both institutional and non-institutional knowledge.

vii. To encourage and support research and documentation that aids the creation of shared knowledge and promotes collaboration among all interested groups in Asia and Europe.

5. Recommendations from the Roundtable will be submitted to the 4th ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting (9-10 September 2010, Poznan) and the ASEM8 Summit (4-5 October 2010, Brussels).

Amsterdam, 3 September 2010