

# ICOM Austria

Bettina LEIDL, President

Dear Madame President,

Dear ICOM Colleagues,

Thank you so much for the invitation to present ICOM Austria's views on the development of a new ICOM museum definition. As many of you probably are very well aware, ICOM Austria has been very active and expressive communicating our position ever since the proposal of the new definition. My predecessor Dr. Danielle Spera voiced our concerns in letters to the Executive and also during the General Conference in Kyoto. Gladly many other National and International Committees shared our concerns and with the help of the initiative of ICOM France, we succeeded in postponing the issue. Now again, I want to thank ICOM France and President Juliette Raoul-Duval for bringing us all together to discuss our next steps.

First, let me introduce our committee: ICOM Austria is one of the biggest committees within ICOM with about 2.500 members now. Due to a professionalization in member service and many activities we are growing quite fast. During the past few years we initiated a series of seminars in Austria and also participated and organized many conferences with international partners, like ICOM Czech Republic, Germany, Russia, Poland, Slovakia or Switzerland. We are planning corporations with ICOM Europe and ICOM Italy in the near future. So international cooperation and exchange is a central focus of ICOM Austria. Another key area of our activities is the protection of cultural heritage and the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural objects. We are raising awareness to this topic with our "ICOM Palmyra Talks". During the coming years we will also focus on "Green museums" and promoting sustainability and measures against climate change.

Secondly, coming back to our discussion of a new museum definition, we got a lot of feedback from our members. In the short time before the general conference when the new proposal was issued we got many emails from board members, regular members and members from International Committees like ICOM CECA that voiced gave concerns. The main points on the definition were:

- The wording of the proposed definition seemed to be very complicated
- Many key functions of the museum were absent, like permanent institution, research, collection, objects and education as well as well used UNESCO terms like "tangible and intangible heritage".
- The wording seemed inappropriate to be used as a definition of museums and felt more like a mission statement.
- This caused great concern as in Austria the ICOM museum definition is the basis of our "Seal of quality for museums" that ensures up to date museum work according to ICOM principles and the code of ethics. It is also widely used as reference for government funding of museums in Austria. Therefore in our view the museum definition must have defining character separating museum from other institutions or NGOs.

Concerning the process that paved the way for the proposed museum definition, we criticized that

- The contributions that were sent to the MDPP were not reflected in the proposed museum definition by the Executive Committee.
- The process of the creation of the proposal was not transparent.
- The proposal was sent out just about two weeks before the general conference.
- At the General Conference there were no fora of discussion planned – NCs and ICs had to urge for that.
- Many ICOM members NCs and ICs said that they have grave concerns against the new definition, many said it needs some changes and adaptations on the wording, many demanded more time to discuss this.

Representing ICOM Austria I want to today stress that

- ICOM Austria supports the notion to include values like the important role of museums in society, inclusion, climate protection and community involvement in a new museum definition. I think there is broad support for this in the ICOM family.
- The new museum definition in our view MUST define museums and set them apart from other institutions or organisations. This is an essential task for ICOM as THE international museums organisation and
- the definition must be supported by a broad majority within ICOM.

Reacting to the newest information concerning the “way forward” on the museum definition by president Aksoy, I have the feeling that the intransparency of the process continues, as not even the members of the new MDPP2 were presented.

As mentioned in the brief, the new museum definition shall contain eight ethical criteria (that were not explicitly mentioned) as well as legislative aspects. Again, we shall propose ideas for the museum definition, but I am not confident that our voices will be heard this time.

Therefore I very much appreciate the initiative of ICOM France to come together and discuss the steps to be taken in preparation of the upcoming discussion at the Annual Meetings in June. I am very confident, that together we can support an ICOM museum definition that will be able to lead us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thank you