

“How to develop a common vision: what units us? The place of the Code of Ethics...”

Elke Kellner, Managing Director, ICOM Austria

Dear Madame President Raul-Duval,

Dear Madame Girard,

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. I am sorry that I cannot be with you in person due to measures to fight the coronavirus but I am happy being given the opportunity to speak to you via Skype.

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. Our former president 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.

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.**
- **Key elements, like museums as permanent institutions, tangible and intangible heritage, collections, education and study/science must be included in the definition.**
- **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 to have a unifying character for museums and museum professionals.**

Since the postponement of the vote on the proposal at the General Conference in Kyoto there has been a long silence from ICOMs President and Executive Council. Only in January a message from President Aksoy has obviously been sent out, describing a new “way forward” on the museum definition. In our view this message left open a lot of questions as not even the members of the new MDPP2 were presented as well as eight ethical criteria were mentioned but not clearly defined. Again, we shall propose ideas for the museum definition, but I am not confident that our voices will be heard this time. I rather have the feeling that the intransparency of the process continues.

Therefor 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 21st century.

In many discussions during the General Conference in Kyoto - so many highly reasonable concerns have been raised from all sides. So many ICOM members and ICOM representatives from all over the world were coming together discussing their views and opinions in a spirit of mutual respect.

MANY said that they have grave concerns against the new definition.

MANY said it need some changes and adaptations on the wording.

MANY said that the funding of museums by governments is in severe danger due to the proposed wording and a BROAD MAJORITY said to - please give us more time to discuss this!

The hasty proposal of a new museum definition almost brought ICOM to the brink of separation. In my view this has been irresponsible leadership promoting confrontation instead of mutual understanding - by forcing a vote in such a short time and without time for discussions.

But still - here we are. Now all members of ICOM - representatives of ICs and NCs and all related alliances have got another chance to find a way together and find a solution together. We should be open to discuss and formulate a new mission statement for ICOM, maybe also start a process to revise the ICOM Code of Ethics. But changes like this must be thoroughly discussed and carefully formulated. I think in the ICOM family we all support important values like democracy, inclusion, climate protection and community involvement and they shall of course be part of the new definition! But ICOM as THE international museums organization has to be able to clearly define what a museum is, setting museums apart from other organizations. This is an essential task that ICOM has to fulfill. If we fail doing that, we lose our defining ability in the world museum community.

Finally I want to stress another point that is of utmost importance to me and I think also for the whole process: There is no US and THEM. All indications that there shall be a confrontation of Europe against other countries have to be strongly opposed. The museum definition has to be unifying for museums and museum professionals all over the world.

Let`s do this TOGETHER!

Thank you