

Welcome everybody, there are many of you present for this meeting.

Thank you to Bruno David and the MNHN (*National Museum of Natural History*) for hosting us. Thank you to Regina Schulz, Chair of the Advisory Board of ICOM, also here with us.

We are pleased to welcome you to Paris; I would like to warmly thank the partners with whom we organized this first "committee day": ICOM Europe, ICOM Germany, ICOFOM, our Italian friends... we worked together and especially Alberto, Luis, Markus, Bruno represented by Marion.

Many of you already know how the project of this first "committee's day" came about, I'll only remind you of a few steps: Kyoto and the call for a vote concerning a "new definition of museums", raising many questions on both form and content. Regarding the form: there was less than 5 weeks during the summer to consult with the members. In content: ambiguity of the language used or omitted, position of the collections and its related tasks in the background, a shift in the very nature of our professional organization to the point of including the register of human rights at large ...

This summer, with the partners I just mentioned and the support of several dozen committees, we suggested that the vote be postponed to allow more time to analyze the changes that were proposed and the evaluation of their consequences.

But because ICOM's status doesn't allow for the cancellation of an extraordinary general Assembly already decided upon, the debate was held. It was lively. In Kyoto on September 7th, a vote (more than 70 %) postponed the adoption of the text.

It was immediately announced that the "new definition" would be put back on the agenda for a next ICOM General Assembly. It was also immediately decided, by all the signatories who requested the postponement, to pursue their reflections with their respective committee members.

All those who were engaged in this discussion, all - both *for* and *against* (the definition) - have, I think, felt that it was not just a quarrel over words.

In fact, what was fascinating for us and dividing us out of passion was the vision of our professional reality.

- Vision of what museums are: their history, their role in society, the ideals they stand for, their weight in the construction of future social bonds, that is, all around the world since our organization exists in 135 countries around the globe.
- Vision of what ICOM is: ICOM does not have exclusivity over the definition of what museums are. The term 'museum' is not a protected designation. But we were surprised that the Kyoto debate resonated loudly throughout the cultural landscape, within institutions and even in the press (we prepared a press review, it speaks for itself). ICOM's definition has authority and holds weight, far

beyond ICOM and its members. We can be proud of this, but it also **obliges us**; a jurist and a linguist will speak to us shortly about the meaning and weight of a "definition" in this context.

- Vision of what a definition is: the words that we add and those that we remove, the order in which we put them, everything has a certain meaning and weight, it's not an exercise in literature, it's a framework that gets straight to the point, that orders and hierarchizes. It's this hierarchy of priorities that we'll have to work on in the next two years.

We are not debating a universal definition, but rather one that will provide a sustainable structure for the future of our organization and that will be able to bind our members together beyond their differences.

Because we can all agree that those who do not share the same definition of their profession find it difficult to unite in the same professional organization. For ICOM to persist into the future, we are obliged to get along. In Kyoto, some have seen the moment when ICOM was about to reach a breaking point due to crucial misunderstandings. This must be acknowledged and overcome together.

There is no room for controversy.

We, the organizers of the day, were said to have wanted to divide and oppose a "statutory" working group officially appointed by our president... Let's not in return make such assumptions about our colleagues from the MDPP 2 – a committee which I have agreed, under certain conditions, to be part of.

The President of the MDPP and ICOM were invited, as well as all the members from the executive board and standing committee. Some are present or represented among us. The initiative finds its place in the necessary debate that the president calls for.

It is up to us today to convince that we are gathered here to unite together. You are, we are, the presidents of committees, national or international, all elected by members ... To assemble, to inform and to facilitate a dialogue between the members is our mandate.

And it is doable: fortunately there are many things we probably all agree on, even within that definition.

For instance, I bet none of us think that museums should not be inclusive. For decades, almost everyone has put the public at the heart of their work. The *Musée de France* law of 2002 - almost 20 years ago – puts the democratization of access to the museum as a top priority, and 3 years ago the report "museum of the 21st century" called to further strengthen this aim. For this to happen we must diversify the range of what we offer and seek attractiveness. If that's what we call "Polyphonic" (the word is inappropriate and caricatural) who doesn't do it? and even, who doesn't try to excel in it?

As for *being inclusive* and *attractive*, or providing well-being, these are keywords of all culture and leisure activities: stadiums, concert halls, cultural centers, etc. How is this unique to museums ? The essence of a definition is to say what belongs to us "it its own right".

Many have been moved by the fact that the terms, which characterize the museum's occupations in their own right, are being overshadowed or even disappearing: conservation, education, scientific work.

Some surveys have been in circulation to question members on the relevance or acceptability of one word or another, or even the absence of another.

But we all know that terms, in isolation, reveal only part of their meaning. Between words, it is their connections that we hear and the logic that these connections carry. Their significance.

Therefore, a few days ago, the MDPP2 embarked on a new dialogue. It is our turn, elected representatives of the members, to nourish this dialogue. By consulting members and making proposals, not just on words but on new and forward-looking content and projects.

The proposed timetable is short. It is part of the dialogue to say whether we find it too short.

The challenge is that we leave this evening convinced that what unites us *exists* and that we belong to the same professional community.

Speaking and debating, especially between people who do not share all the same opinions, is only useful if after today we know better and more concretely the strategies we want to bring together into the future.

Museums around the world are undergoing major, sometimes even radical, transformations. Technologies, the obligation to find incomes, hosting distant audiences, the instrumentalization in cultural diplomacy, the commitment to sustainability, all this requires new skills and cooperation every day.

Museums have changed so much in the past twelve years that it is legitimate to update their "definition". But they are going to change so much in the next twelve years that the question is how to anticipate which ICOM professionals will recognize as the organization that represents them. Which ethics consolidate us? Much is expected of us. We are even expected to stand firm, so to say. Some already say that this is the occidental 'pensée unique' day.

So I would like to ask everyone, especially the moderators and spokespeople (thank you), to search ardently throughout the day, not for what is controversial but for what forms the basis and consensus. And if by tonight we haven't finished finding our base - it's very likely that we won't plus 18 months before a new vote surely won't be too much - we will each have to go back with tasks to do, methods to produce pass on the expectations of our members.

This is what we can bring to the MDPP2, whose task is difficult and which we must support.

This is the direction I want to give us for this day.

I thank, in advance, all of you who have agreed to do so and I commit to making accessible the publication of our debates to everyone.

Good day to all of you.

Juliette Raoul-Duval,
President, ICOM France