

ICOM - DEFINITION OF MUSEUM

First Day of committees - March 10th, 2020 in Paris

Initiated by ICOM France, in collaboration with ICOM Germany, ICOFOM, and ICOM Europe, this first 'committee meeting', held on March 10, 2020 and hosted by France, aimed to report on the debates that took place within the committees. These discussions were based on the presentation of a "new definition of museums" in Kyoto last September.

Addressed to all elected Chairpersons of the ICOM committees, all elected members of the Executive Board, the President and appointed members of the MDPP2, this meeting was intended to be the beginning of cooperation between all parties, in the spirit of unity and exchange.

In their opening speeches, the members present were invited to participate in finding a consensus on the definition and vision of what a museum is. They were to engage in a debate, without controversy, on ICOM's vision for the future. This proposal served as a guideline and was respected throughout the day.

41 ICOM National and International committees and regional alliances participated in the meeting of ICOM committees held at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. 19 were present on site and 22, due to coronavirus, submitted a written or video presentation or joined the meeting via Skype.

Seventy members representing the various committees participated in the discussions. ICOM's Executive Bureau was represented by Regina Schulz, President of the advisory council, and Alberto Garlandini, Vice-President.

The work was conducted in three phases:

I – presentation of the committees on the status of the debates (post-Kyoto) in their respective areas of action (national, regional, international)

II - "defining the definition": legal and lexicographical approach by two guest researchers

III - two round-table meetings on transversal topics

The participants were welcomed by the President of the National Museum of Natural History. The objectives of the day were presented by Juliette Raoul-Duval, President of ICOM France.

The inaugural lecture was given by François Mairesse, Professor of Museology at Paris-Sorbonne.

Provisional Report

I - Presentation of the Committees. Key learnings:

. 39 committees presented a paper. In addition, 2 committees orally participated in the afternoon round-table meetings, bringing the number of participating committees up to 41.

. 31 national and international committees reported that they had continued their reflection on the definition.

. 7 national committees state that they have gathered their BOD around this subject; 30 committees have organized discussions, forums, debates and/or sent surveys or questionnaires to their members after Kyoto.

II - Scientific Presentations :

. Legal approach by Marie Cornu: *"Thinking of the museum as a legal category, what is at stake in its definition?"*

. Lexical approach by Jean Louis Schiss: *"Some linguistic remarks on the definition of 'museum'"*.

III - Round Tables :

. "Why a definition of museums by ICOM?"

. "What unites us?"

All the documents submitted are available on the ICOM France website. The round-table discussions and conclusions will be put online as soon as they are transcribed. A summary of the main lessons learned will be prepared in the very near future as a complementary document (see below, "preparation of a resolution").

Provisional Conclusions

Throughout the day, the participants made proposals and expressed desires concerning both the content and the working methods for drawing up a "new definition and vision of Museums" by ICOM. In doing so, participants explicitly demonstrated their commitment to ICOM's unity.

These proposals were synthesized and presented at the end of the day. They'll be updated if need be during the process of transcribing and editing the debates. In the meantime, the participants expressed the desire that the following recommendations already be formally addressed to the President and the Advisory Council in June 2020 in Paris (resolution). The Advisory Council will also give these recommendations to the MDPP2 for their evaluation.

1 - Participation of elected members: ~~the number of participants at the meeting on March 10th and their diversity, in terms of geographical location and type of committee they represent, is significant.~~ Their commitment to be present shows how fully involved ICOM's elected members are in this redefinition process. They reiterate that as elected representatives the work on the definition cannot progress without them. They reiterate that the President of ICOM already invited all the committees to present their proposals for a new definition, and sincerely hope that those will be taken into account. Several committees wished to elaborate their own proposals for the museum or indeed had already done so in the recent months. For example, ICOM Italy and ICOM South-East Europe have been working on their definitions since spring 2019. But it seems like their work was not circulated amongst the ICOM bodies nor taken into account by the MDPP. It is essential that all work carried out within the national and international committees be taken into consideration. There is a proposal that each committee working on a new definition of the museum send it to the President of ICOM and to the Board of Trustees, thus nourishing a reflection at the highest level of the institution and enriching the working definition of the MDPP2. It is recommended that this proposal be examined at the General Assembly in June 2019.

2 - Consultation of members and the impact on their working schedules: The working methods and schedules for the redefinition of what a museum is has to be compatible with the possibility to consult all ICOM members, via their national and/or international committees and/or alliances. The first "committee day" on March 10th showed how involved the national and international committees are in discussing and analysing the MDPP's proposal. In the nine months following Kyoto, many committees were able to express well-founded opinions and present results, others still need time. Therefore it is necessary to leave enough time to allow for the development of this work. The search for a shared vision and consensus is a priority. Proposed definitions from the committees should be considered along with the new proposal that will come from the MDPP2.

3 - **Distinction between *mission statement* and definition:** A large number of interventions emphasized the necessity to distinguish between what a definition is, in the linguistic sense of the word, and what a "mission" or "vision" statement is for a museum or for ICOM. These principles are not sufficiently defined in the current reflection, and therefore could be further elaborated at the next General Assembly.

4 - **Legal assessment:** because of its role in national statutes and laws, the ICOM's definition of a museum has strong legal impact. A legal analysis is therefore to be integrated into the reflection process for any new definition proposal.

5 - **Choice of words - terminology:** any definition must be understandable and usable by all, in a language that is as precise and as neutral as possible. The use of lexicographical expertise is extremely valuable in order to avoid inappropriate political interpretation. In particular, members expressed the desire that the professional character of the organization be affirmed unambiguously in the choice of words.

6 - **Translation:** translation is a major tool for our unity. A poorly translated text is a source of misunderstandings. Translation is not just a technical aspect, it is the key to respecting our cultural diversity. An effort must be made to produce linguistically valid documents. The possibilities of translating certain terms into languages other than the languages represented in ICOM should be evaluated.

7 - **Code of Ethics.** The Code of Ethics plays a decisive role in the common culture of ICOM members and on its influence as an organization throughout the world. The members present at the meeting expressed numerous times their desire to work simultaneously on the definition as well as on the Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics must be constantly adapted to the reality of museums, whose diversity is increasing.

The participants appreciated the message of the President of ICOM, the presence of its General Director and the President of the Advisory Council. A recommendation will be made to the Advisory Council and to the ICOM Board of Directors to formally request the MDPP2 and its President, invited but unfortunately unable to attend, to take note of the documents, debates and conclusions from the meetings which took place on March 10th, 2020.

The participants expressed the desire to hold a future "committee's day".

A request for support from SAREC is being considered.