

SECOND ROUNDTABLE
HOW TO DEVELOP A SHARED VISION: WHAT UNITES US?
ROLE OF THE CODE OF ETHICS...

Participants: Alberto Garlandini, *Vice-President of ICOM International*; Burçak Madran (*ICMAH*); Chedlia Annabi (*ICOM Tunisia*); Koré Escobar Zamora (*ICOM Spain*); Alexandre Chevalier (*ICOM Belgium*); Elke Kellner (*ICOM Austria*)

Moderator and rapporteur: Emilie Girard, *Scientific and Collections Director at the MuCem.*

Alberto Garlandini, Vice-President of ICOM International (via video) – The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has forced me to stay in Milan but has not deterred me from speaking to you to introduce this very important roundtable. The theme that has been chosen is of course related to the debate surrounding the museum definition, but the issue is much broader. This is because a professional association and community of any kind have no future if they are unable to promote their history, their memory and shared ethical values. Its members need to be able to dialogue, share ideas and experiences, and develop new projects and objectives accepted by everyone. The world is changing at an accelerated rate, along with museums and their work. I can say from experience that the members of ICOM have a common vision, values and references. I have had the chance to work on several continents and meet colleagues from around the world in highly diverse countries with different social, political, cultural, religious, administrative and economic contexts. I have been happy to see that while museum professionals may speak different dialects, they share the *lingua franca* of museology in all its variants and approaches, that they experience the same problems, share the same hopes and values, and share a sense of belonging to the same professional community.

This shared vision of the specific functions of museums, and the specific roles, responsibilities and skills of those who work in them is ICOM's greatest asset and what unites it and has made it a professional community. This common denominator needs to be promoted and strengthened, and the debate surrounding the definition of museum needs to help unite professionals so that they can face the challenges of our times.

The two documents that best express the collective identity, shared vision and unity of ICOM are its statutes and the code of ethics for museums. The statutes define the mission, objectives and rules governing the how ICOM is run. The code of ethics expresses an international vision for managing museums and heritage according to specific ethical principles and practices. ICOM members are, of course, required to adhere to the code of ethics and all museum professionals across the world are held to it. However, because it has become a legal standard in a growing number of countries since the adoption of the UNESCO 2015 Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society, this code is also now a shared international reference.

It is no coincidence that the two documents that form the identity of the organisation contain both a definition of museum and a definition of what museum professionals are. In theory, because these definitions are interdependent, both should have been updated at the

same time. However, it has been done separately. The statutes were revised in 2017. The adoption of a new museum definition has been postponed until 2022 and there are currently no plans to revise the code of ethics.

In this context, several questions will be put before the participants of the roundtable: How do we ensure that ICOM's shared vision is sustained during the difficult yet necessary process of updating the documents that form the basis of its identity? How can we ensure that the committees participate in the revision process? How can we update these documents without calling into question our history and shared values? Should ICOM revise its code of ethics and if so, how should we go about doing it? Will it be beneficial to amend the museum definition without revising the code of ethics at the same time? What other documents should supplement the statutes and code of ethics to strengthen the shared identity of ICOM members? Should we create regional documents that detail the shared vision while taking into account local diversities?

Emilie Girard, *Scientific and Collections Director at the MuCem* – In short, can the museum definition be amended without amending the code of ethics, which in some ways exegeses it? Can we update the definition while preserving unity within ICOM? Are there any documents missing that could be added to the founding documents?

Chedlia Annabi, *ICOM Tunisia (via Skype)* – I looked at things through a reverse approach. How do we develop a shared vision for amending the definition while following the code of ethics? What has been done was done quite hastily. First of all, why was the decision made to change the definition? "Museology and epistemological" problems have been evoked but there is no record of them in any documents and the ICOM's core members did not report any real urgent reasons for changing it. There has been no preliminary study justifying this decision, the argument put forward in the articles published by the members of the MDPP reflect only their personal opinions and cannot be considered as decisive arguments for a revision of the definition of the museum. Our goal is not to do things quickly. But it is to strengthen the leadership and aura of ICOM and for the definition to be accepted by a significant majority of the members.

The "methodology" applied in the consultation of members was not established in a democratic manner. Unfortunately, it was said after Kyoto that consultations were in fact limited to members of the national and international committee boards. Finally, the application of the criteria for the final selection of the definition was in fact limited to the evaluation and assessment of one group and not a broad consultation.

The development of a common vision must consider several parameters. Firstly, the general vision and missions of ICOM, its statutes and code of ethics must be respected. However, the code of ethics sets out and details the ethics and principles that form the essence of the museum and its objectives, including respect for human rights, communities and minorities. Before we start re-writing the definition, let's give the code of ethics a good read, because all these notions are right there! Is the goal of the new proposed definition, which was not adopted, to expand on principles that are stated perfectly in the code of ethics at the risk of creating confusion? Furthermore, ICOM adheres to all UNESCO conventions related to cultural and natural heritage, detailed in Article 7.2 of the code of ethics, and which are

based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I therefore have to ask, is there not confusion in some discussions on the museum definition, between vision, objectives and missions? The notion of institution is also detailed in the code of ethics.

Therefore, if a new approach and new definition are really necessary, several requirements need to be met. The first is to use detailed arguments to explain the types of concrete problems that the current museum definition raise and their impact on museographical work, along with the shortcomings and deficiencies that make revision necessary. This process needs to involve men and women in the field rather than theoreticians.

The second requirement is to establish a democratic bottom-up and widely disseminated inquiry process, in constant consultation with members, with the opportunity for the MDPP to add commentary, all published on a digital platform accessible to all members, until the end of the process.

The third requirement is to avoid unilateral or limited decisions to a restricted group. The MDPP manages the discussions, refines members' interventions and answers their questions.

In conclusion, we can certainly envisage rethinking the current definition, improving it in order to integrate new paradigms imposed by museographic work. Contrary to what some seem to think, the idea is not to "create", but to carry out deep and serious discussion in a calm climate, and to weigh the pros and cons, since the definition will put ICOM on the line as the global reference on museums and it must live up to its reputation and confirm its leadership role.

Was putting so much energy into re-writing a definition for six years a real priority given the various problems which museums are facing, some of which even threaten their existence? What is our capacity to project ourselves and define today what the museum will be like in more than 70 years? Nor is it a question of issuing a new definition without preparing and foreseeing the ethical, social, moral, legal and political repercussions of this decision on the organization, on the member countries and on our institutional partners.

Above all, we have to be aware of the responsibility of such an important decision that will have a vital impact on the organization. 40,000 members are watching us and will judge the work accomplished, which is why each step must be analysed at length, reflected upon and, preferably, consensual.

Elke Kellner, ICOM Austria (via Skype) – The issue that has brought us together has already provoked reactions from ICOM Austria, as you probably know. Our former president wrote to the ICOM Executive Board to express our concerns and also did so in Kyoto. Fortunately, other national and international committees did the same and thanks to ICOM France's initiative, we were able to postpone the decision. We would like to thank Juliette Raoul-Duval for giving us the opportunity to continue the discussion here.

ICOM Austria is in favour of a new museum definition including values such as the importance of the role of museums in society, inclusion, environmental protection and social engagement. A large majority of ICOM members probably share this perspective. Other key elements, such as the fact that museums are permanent institutions, and notions such as tangible and intangible heritage, collections, education and research must also be included. For us, any new definition must affirm that museums are different from other institutions

and organisations. That is one of ICOM's key functions as an international organisation for all museums and it is important that a large majority of members agree on the subject.

Since the postponement of the vote in Kyoto, President Suay Aksoi and the ICOM Executive Board have remained silent. In January, there was a message from the president on the website, about a new chance to move forward, but left a number of questions unanswered, giving eight somewhat vague ethical criteria. In fact, we were not even told the names of the new members of the Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials (MDPP). We will certainly make new recommendations but transparency is sometimes lacking.

I therefore really appreciate ICOM France's initiative to prepare upcoming discussions at the June meeting. I believe that we will be able to present a museum definition that will carry ICOM into the 21st century. During the discussions that took place at the general conference, many completely reasonable proposals were made and discussed in a climate of mutual respect, which makes us hopeful for the future. Many members said that they were very concerned with the proposed new definition. Others considered that the wording really needed to be amended. Many also thought that the proposal significantly jeopardised government funding for museums and a large majority asked for time to discuss it. This hasty proposal of a new definition almost led ICOM to the brink of collapse. In my view, pushing to organise a confrontation rather than promote mutual understanding, all to put the definition to vote without leaving enough time for discussion, is irresponsible governance. The members of ICOM and its national and international committees now have another opportunity to find a solution together.

We need to create a new mission statement for ICOM in an open manner and perhaps begin a revision of the code of ethics. However, it will require in-depth discussion and careful wording. Once again, we certainly all support values such as democracy, inclusion, environmental protection and social engagement, and they will of course be included in a new definition. However, as an international organisation of museums, ICOM must be able to clearly define what a museum is and how it differs from other institutions. It must take on this task, otherwise it will lose its function as a defining body in the museum world.

To conclude, I would like to insist on the fact that there is no "them" and "us". In particular, we need to firmly shut down any idea of a confrontation between Europe and other countries. A museum definition must be a unifying force for institutions and their professionals. So let's write it together.

Koré Escobar Zamora, ICOM Spain – On behalf of ICOM Spain, I'll present a few thoughts based on Alberto Garlandini's introduction, which raises fundamental issues about our mission. He reminded us that ICOM sets professional and ethical standards for museum activities, issues recommendations in this regard, and encourages training, knowledge and public awareness.

However, where are we now in the implementation of these missions? In a constantly changing, pluralistic and ever smaller world, we must now, more than ever, take into account the basic principles, not that they are fixed, but because they are the basis of a consensus forged by recognition of these "universal" ideas that unify and define us, and are the roots of our organisation.

These ideas are in reality in the successive chapter headings of the ICOM code of ethics. Museums preserve, interpret and promote the natural and cultural inheritance of humanity;

museums that maintain collections hold them in trust for the benefit of society and its development; museums hold primary evidence for establishing and furthering knowledge; museums provide opportunities for the appreciation, understanding and management of the natural and cultural heritage; museums hold resources that provide opportunities for other public services and benefits; museums work in close collaboration with the communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve.

Furthermore, the code presents “a minimum standard for museums”, which calls less for modification than development, a revision that would not cross the red lines established when the organisation was founded. For us, debate, analysis and dialogue are necessary to continue fulfilling our mission in today’s society. However the debate cannot be based on passing intellectual currents or political correctness. It must be based on the minimum universal foundation that makes the museum what it is and what distinguishes it from other institutions according to ICOM’s own terms, that is, its permanence, the conservation of collections of cultural value exhibited to fulfil certain functions, which distinguish them from other institutions also dedicated to cultural heritage.

If we really feel that we are no longer able to defend these basic principles, if a majority of us think that it no longer makes sense to talk about museums, that it is better to dilute or obscure the term by associating it with all kinds of other enterprises with a social or civic purpose, perhaps we should sincerely ask ourselves questions and amend our founding documents, our mission and our definition. In that case, we would no doubt no longer be ICOM, but something else. In the Spanish committee’s view, it would be total change. We are in favour of discussion but hold to the fundamental principles that define the museum as a specific institution.

Burçak Madran, ICMAH – To start, I have to wonder why none of the members of the new MDPP2 committee are present today.

Juliette Raoul-Duval – They were all invited.

Burçak Madran – I know that you invited everyone and frankly, in their place I would have been really curious to see what this meeting is all about! Also, why are there no members of the national or international committees which, in Kyoto, were in favour of the new museum definition? The questions raised by Alberto Garlandini are a very good starting point, but if we cannot dialogue with members of different opinions, we’ll never come to anything. I could easily discuss my stance and that of ICMAH, but I already know that we agree among ourselves, whereas in Kyoto, other groups had differing opinions, which allowed for more enriching discussion.

That being the case, how should we update our documents and what work method should be adopted? That’s what we are trying to do here. For three years, no-one sent any documents to follow the working process and then suddenly a new definition was proposed. The reaction was that we could not vote under such conditions, that it was undemocratic and that we weren’t informed. The committees began to launch surveys and ask their members questions...you would think that the proposal of definition was a setup to get a reaction! We began defining a method to enable members to express their opinions so that a decision could be made together. There’s nothing more to be done. Once the national and international committees have finished conducting their surveys and have communicated their reports to everyone, not just ICOM’s central authorities, the MDPP will become a simple secretariat that gathers this information and extrapolates the opinion of our

members. It will be a real democratic exercise. The majority will win and those with another perspective will wait their turn. We have done what needs to be done so let's wait to reap the benefits of it.

Alexandre Chevallier, ICOM Belgium – In Belgium, we felt that it was quite extraordinary that for two years, there were internet surveys, workshops and meetings without knowing what the responses were and on what authority they were given since everything was thrown into a hat and a result magically emerged in late July 2019. It is unacceptable that professionals had no proper method for developing a discussion process. To reinstate collective discussion, probably the first thing that needs to be done is to restore transparency so as to know who is doing what and how. I found out today that Juliette Raoul-Duval, Marie-Clarté O'Neill and Luc Eekhout are members of the MDPP2, but who else is? Why so much secrecy? What methodology are they going to recommend? First, the current definition needs to be analysed. Does it need to be changed? Perhaps the answer is no or that it just needs a few additions. Not to do so creates suspicions and lets people think that there are dirty secrets or an attempted coup. It may well not be the case, but without more transparency, it leaves a shadow of doubt. The first step is to communicate from now on. Unfortunately, things seem to be off to a poor start for MDPP2, the secretariat and the presidency.

The second question is, what needs to be updated? The code of ethics as well? We have a basis, the definition of museum as the place where we work. It needs to be given a purpose and a work method needs to be defined. On that note, the code of ethics is already more advanced than the definition itself and, in some way, the definition is catching up with the code of ethics when it comes to the way people work at museums. It's true that the method is changing, but, the ICOFOM survey shows that the respondents uphold and approve the fundamental pillars. However, perhaps the wording needs to evolve to reflect changes in use, but not the primary function of what makes a museum. So let's start by asking ourselves about the definition, and then the code of ethics. Additions and precisions are certainly needed for certain categories, such as activist museums. How far should professionals be able to go without overstepping their neutrality or objectivity, given that most are tempted to define their own subjectivity in this way?

Alberto Garlandini asks if new documents should be added, such as a mission statement, or a new vision. This mission is defined in Article 2 of the statutes. Perhaps it could be supplemented. The vision is defined in Article 3. Should documents with a regional scope be added to create distinctive regional identities? I would tend to say "no", in order to focus on what unites us. Nevertheless, there is already a separate code for natural history museums, whose professionals are subject to specific international conventions that do not apply to art or ethnographic museums. However for the past fifteen years or so, the latter have been confronted with requests for restitution or co-management by the communities from whom the objects which they conserve originated. Therefore, perhaps a specific professional code of ethics should be defined for ethnographic museums subject to these requests, who seem to be at the origin of the proposed new definition.

Daniele Jalla – ICOM, is an organisation with a presidential structure and is not truly democratic, and has not been for a long time. The alarming division seen in Kyoto suggested that this organisational structure had come to an end.

Juliette Raoul-Duval – That is why we're here today.

Daniele Jalla – Exactly... to use national committees to exert a counterweight, which can be fully incorporated into ICOM's rules. In 1974, ICOM, changed from a club into an international organisation. This shift requires another way of running the organisation, where communication is not necessarily carried out through a top-down approach. Nothing stands in the way of meetings like today and we need to take advantage of this opportunity in order to create a stable informal network capable of communicating information horizontally, acting as a counterweight in an objectively dictatorial organisation.

Alberto Garlandini (*via Skype*) – Times are tough for museums. I'm not alluding to the pandemic, but to the difficulties they are facing around the world and the changes they're having to deal with. In this context, the aim of our discussions needs to be to decide what makes museums and museum professionals relevant in today's world, and we can be relevant if we are able to remain united to face these challenges head on. Therefore, while debating the museum definition and code of ethics, we need to leave our ideological differences aside to focus on what unites us and what is specific to museums, rather than what divides them. Mutual understanding is the only way of achieving effective outcomes. To define our common denominator, we need to be open to the opinions of others, which so far, has not been the case. It will help us with the museum definition and with ethical and management aspects.

Arja van Veldhuizen – The proposed new definition has been well received by Dutch museum professionals, as well as roundly criticised. I think that the majority of our national committee's seventy members who were in Kyoto were in favour of the proposed definition, but it is difficult to know for sure because many of them did not express their opinion. I admire the energy of our colleagues who support the proposed new definition. They are mainly the new generation, and whether we agree or disagree with them on the substance, we need their energy and that needs to find its way into this discussion, but I'm not sure how.

Regine Schulz, Chairperson of the ICOM Advisory Council – In my view, the problem wasn't the proposed new definition, which contained interesting ideas, but the fact that the text was brought to the executive board and presented to the extraordinary general assembly without the possibility of making amendments. That is what caused so much frustration and anger on both sides. Many of us were dumbstruck and chocked by the process. Opposing opinions were expressed on the text. Many were for and others were against it. Fine! It needed to be discussed within the national and international committees but that was not possible. The ICOM Executive Board made the mistake of not realising that no room was left for amendments. In the end, what started as a lively discussion, which is great, finished in a highly aggressive debate, which is unfortunate.

This approach is not constructive. We now need to consider things through another perspective than what has been done over the past two decades, but we also have to take into account the potential impacts of a definition being revised in this way. Some of our Iranian colleagues were very shocked, and told me, "If this is the new museum definition adopted by ICOM, we will leave the organisation." We need to think about who we are and what the museum definition means for our identity. Of course we need to keep up with the

times and not stay stuck in the past, but we also have to keep in mind that the national committees represent countries that are extremely diverse in all respects. In this context, just how far can we push the idea of a proposed political definition? I'm happy that the decision was made to postpone the vote. We have until 2021 to reach a definition that suits the majority of members, and if it isn't enough time, we'll postpone it again. That's what's important. It is urgent that all the members and their highly diverging opinions be heard.

We should not focus our reflections only on ourselves but favour an approach that builds us into a real community that protects our colleagues in Yemen or Sudan, for instance, who are not in as comfortable a situation as we are in France or Germany, together with those who cannot travel due to a lack of funding because their museums are considered outdated and of no interest. We need to show the world that our museums are relevant, not outdated. The discussion that has begun can be useful to this collective effort and help us move forward, provided that it is loyal and we accept that other ideas besides our own can be expressed.

Alexandre Chevalier – I ask that the members of MDPP2 who are present to make public the methodology that will be used. Currently the national committees are asked to submit their proposals and comments before August, after which a small committee will have the same power as a national committee of 4,000 members? I don't think I'm the only one who thinks that there is a serious problem in that. The first step is to let people know who sits on the MDPP2 committee, and the method, and only then will be able to begin work.

François Mairesse – When Jette Sandahl, Chair of the MDPP, made her first speech in 2016, the methodology seemed clear and precise. Then everything played out in a few minutes over the last few weeks, after the proposed definition appeared almost out of thin air. Also, it's not just because a methodology is defined that it will always work. The presentations made this morning showed the fundamental difference between a definition and a discussion on values or a mission. The BBC's mission is defined as follows: "To act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain". It doesn't even mention that it's an audio-visual enterprise! They're two things that are completely unrelated. Although some principles are old, they still stand strong and are important references that are not in absolute need of change. It's not because you want to redefine the concept of a meal that you have to redefine what a table is. We must not muddle the debate. For the past three, if not six years, we have been conflating two entirely different discussions. The result is the problems we are now experiencing.

Emilie Girard – I would like to thank all our speakers present or who participated in the discussion via technical means.