

Contributions from national and international committees

ICOM Committees' day, March 10, 2020

Museums, today and tomorrow? Definitions, missions, ethics

➤ **Moderated by Marie-Laure Estignard**

A few weeks ago when considering how the committees would be involved in the new museum definition, we had no idea that we would receive so many responses, leading us to organise this morning's event. Thirty-eight committees (26 national and 12 international) sent us contributions. Half of these committees are represented in this room today and will speak directly; the other half have sent their contributions in text or PowerPoint format, which have been summarised by Florence Le Corre and Laure Ménétrier. Nevertheless, presenting these 38 contributions in more or less the same way may take some time. The format is the same because we asked committees to present themselves by number of members for national committees or in terms of their missions for international committees. Each committee was then asked to share how it has worked on the new museum definition internally, and finally, to identify the main points raised in terms of agreement and changes to the definition.

All contributions are very useful and comprehensive, and make it possible to hear from everyone. The responses are really interesting, but there are so many that we are obliged to limit presentations to 7 minutes per committee, and we will, unfortunately, be unable to take any questions during the contributions. There will be an opportunity to discuss these questions during the roundtable sessions this afternoon.

We will be inviting each national and international committee to speak directly or asking Florence or Laure to represent them. For your information, we received the final contribution less than 10 minutes ago and three others during the night! Please be patient with us.

➤ **ICOM Switzerland – Helen Bieri Thomson, member of ICOM Switzerland**

ICOM Switzerland has 1,700 members for around 1,100 museums. Our members represent all museum sectors, from museum custodians to directors, communications managers, curators, caterers and more. We are a bilingual national committee with 40% French speakers and 60% German speakers. Our three main objectives are to encourage international contacts, strengthen ethical practice in museum work and above all, provide high-quality training, for which we have an extensive programme. Our annual conference is held in August. Last year, we were caught off guard by the new museum definition and were not really able to respond at the time.

Following the Kyoto General Assembly last September, we talked to our members and decided to survey our 200 or so members who attended the event, using the same survey as

ICOM Germany. We have also planned our annual conference in August 2020 around the sole theme of the new museum definition.

In response to the question, “To what extent does the wording of the current ICOM museum definition correspond with the definition of a museum?”, 86% of respondents were satisfied or relatively satisfied with the current definition, compared to 10% of respondents who believed that the wording did not correspond well or at all to how they considered museums should be defined today. If we compare this to the definition proposed in Kyoto, the results are inversed, with 9% of respondents saying that the definition corresponds well and 22% who considered that it corresponds quite well, representing a total of around 30% of respondents who were relatively satisfied with the Kyoto definition. However, 59% of respondents were not convinced by the wording presented in Kyoto.

The survey also ranked the aspects considered the most important in the new definition. The top items corresponded to the current 2007 definition, with 80% prioritising “museums hold artefacts and specimens in trust”. The aspects with which our members agreed the least include the idea that the purpose of museums is to contribute to “global equality”, “social justice” and “planetary wellbeing”.

In summary, after analysing the results of this survey as a committee, we believe that the museum definition should be normative and limited to defining museum admission conditions. It should represent the smallest common denominator for all museums in the world. We do not consider this denominator to be restrictive, but instead a means of giving institutions greater freedom and as much room for manoeuvre as possible. We believe that ICOM should represent the values of museums but not impose a strategy upon them. We therefore consider this new definition too limiting and exclusive. It would *de facto* exclude a certain number of museums and would no doubt mean the end of ICOM.

In Switzerland, the articles of association of many museums specify that the institution must remain politically neutral, which runs counter to this new definition as it requires political engagement. Should ICOM decide to transform the proposals underpinning the new definition into a sort of “mission statement”, we would question the necessity of such a procedure. We believe that it is each museum’s responsibility to define its own mission. This is true of the example of the Gothenburg Museum of World Culture, cited by François Mairesse. However, we do believe that the role of ICOM is to promote discussion and conversation around the themes mentioned in the new definition. The aim would be to raise awareness, and to encourage and support museums to engage in these various fields, such as ecology, social issues and politics. To finish, we would like to reiterate the fact that we reject the proposal presented in Kyoto, and that we are very happy to see discussions now taking place on new and proper foundations.

➤ **CECA – Marie-Clarté O’Neill, President**

CECA is the Committee for Education and Cultural Action. It is a very large committee with around 2,000 members. The geographical distribution of our members is relatively standard for an international committee, with 69% European members and the remainder spread across the other continents. As President of the committee, I intend to balance this spread

across continents. Members of CECA come from two different professions, with cultural mediation professionals and an increasing proportion of academics, researchers, training professionals and more. Due to the sheer size of the committee, we have decided to decentralise our organisation with six elected regional coordinators and forty-five national correspondents chosen by the coordinators who relay information to members of the network.

Firstly, let me explain how CECA has been working on the proposed definition. We were involved from the outset in the discussion group comprising various committees. After Kyoto, we launched a survey of our members, primarily focused on issues concerning society and the public. Some countries organised discussion groups through day-long events, while others decided to collect opinions more periodically, in each case via the national correspondents.

The results of the survey are as follows. In *ICOM Education* no. 29, we published a trilingual article summarising the opinions collected through this survey, taking into account geographical location. The summary on the functions of a definition and how that should affect the wording shows that members of CECA believe that a definition should be short and precise. It should use functionally specific terminology as it needs to be included in both national and international legislation. It is also used for the allocation of funding and the regulation of public policy. Language must be simple, as the definition has international value and must be able to be translated without over-interpretation or mistranslation. Finally, the definition should differ from a declaration of intent or statement of values.

This summary includes other vital points, firstly concerning the necessary stability of an institution. The very high number and intensity of missions assigned to museums could not be managed by a flighty or temporary institution with no geographical, social or political identification. Work therefore needs to be done to structure and strengthen these institutions.

Secondly, it is worth asking what museums have to offer or the nature of what they have to show. Professionals in contact with the public are well aware of the specific role of museums in providing evidence. Firstly, through the presence of original objects. It is important not to underestimate the importance of bringing people into contact with original objects, compared to using digital tools. Secondly, through the informed interpretation of intangible heritage. Our role is to one of consolidation. This impacts the types of professional expertise required. The survey clearly shows that those responsible for cultural mediation, interpretation and education are very concerned at not having to provide purely social expertise, which they do not consider themselves qualified for. This would be to the detriment of their role of providing evidence.

The absence of the term 'education' in the definition led to many reactions. The third vital point in this summary is to consider education as a central function of a museum. We know that the term education is controversial and subject to debate. It can be interpreted in different languages as education, mediation or interpretation. At CECA, we have adopted the

etymological definition of the term education, which comes from the Latin “*ducere*”, meaning “to lead”, and from “*e*”, meaning “outside”, and therefore to grow, to go beyond oneself or “to branch out”. Essentially, education becomes an objective and not a means, as cultural mediation or interpretation are.

In some regions, the educational role is clearly expressed as central and a crucial way of supporting school education. We received responses on this point from Africa, Austria, China, the USA and more, although everyone agreed that school education and museum education use different methods.

Another vital point in this summary is to consider educators as historical and contemporary prophets of a museum’s social responsibility. Educators are very comfortable with some of the terms used in or which underpin the new definition. Terms such as interactivity, critical freedom, universal accessibility, wellbeing, inclusion and co-construction are in everyday use by educators. However, educators are in constant contact with the community and see all too clearly the potentially negative consequences of planetary ambitions. They are neither realistic on the ground nor considerate of local specifics. The terms cited above do not have the same meaning in every country, and may not exist everywhere in this form.

Our survey very clearly shows that museums are far from being outdated institutions; on the contrary, they are fundamentally contemporary institutions. On the one hand, the number of museum visitors shows an upward trend, which is a sign that modern society approves of museum institutions. On the other hand, museums are identified as places of critical dialogue for reinterpreting the past, giving meaning to the present and creatively building the future. Educators believe that this is a sign of considerable modernity and that there is no need to change a museum’s missions in order to stay within this dynamic. This active approach is common to all the countries we surveyed across all continents (Singapore, Zambia, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Austria, France, etc.).

➤ **ICOM Slovakia - Text by Jasna Gaburova, President, presented by Florence Le Corre**

Prior to the presentations of the committee contributions by Florence Le Corre and Laure Ménétrier. The absent committees have sent their contributions to our reflections. It would take too long to read each text. Committee texts are presented in a summary format, emphasising the most important terms in a factual manner, without any interpretation. Please note that the texts demonstrate the need to include the terms “acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit”. In addition, all committees talk of “tangible and intangible heritage” or “collections”, whereas few mention “artefacts and specimens”.

The ICOM Slovakia committee has 240 members. Before Kyoto, the new definition had not been fully approved by its members. When put to the vote, some were for and others against. Following the Kyoto General Assembly, members received a questionnaire for sharing their opinion on the issue. The results show that museums relating to national minorities were in favour of the new definition. Nevertheless, most members propose

reworking the definition. In addition to the terms “acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit” that it would like to see in the definition, ICOM Slovakia has a positive view of the notions of democracy, political independence, critical analysis of the past, rights and equal access to heritage for all. However, the committee rejects the terms democratising, inclusive and polyphonic, social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing. Moreover, it specifies that museums are not competent for playing a political role, especially on issues such as conflict, human dignity and social justice. Furthermore, museums must be distinguished from cultural centres.

➤ **ICOM Luxembourg – Guy Thewes, Vice-President**

ICOM Luxembourg became a national committee in 2017. It has, at this date, 129 individual members and 21 institutional members in a country with a population of 625,000 and around 70 museums. The main activities of ICOM Luxembourg consist of the four annual meetings of its executive board and its annual general assembly. Action towards its members focuses on professional development of the sector, in particular, the organisation of conferences featuring international experts, and training days. The main event is International Museum Day (Luxembourg Museum Days), which is a great success with the general public, drawing in 18,000 visitors in 2019 (i.e. 2% - 3% of the population). ICOM Luxembourg have just signed an agreement with the Ministry of Culture in order to increase financial resources and means for action.

Information on the new definition only arrived in early August 2019 through ICOM Europe, when our members discovered the reactions of ICOM France and ICOM Germany. After attending the Kyoto Annual Meeting in September 2019, discussions were held by the executive board, representing around a dozen museums.

ICOM Luxembourg considers that the current 2007 definition perfectly corresponds to the needs of our museums and reflects their identity. This definition distinguishes museums from other cultural venues (cultural centres, performance venues, private galleries, etc.) and affirms our unique contribution to society. It emphasises the need to acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit both tangible and intangible heritage to future generations for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. The committee believes that these functions are still fundamental to a museum. Other museum ambitions, such as accessibility, a participatory approach, social inclusion, and democratic or environmental engagement, have their place in each museum’s mission statement or statement of objectives rather than in the general definition.

In this new definition, many unclear terms would leave the door open for diverging political and ideological interpretations. The notions of democratising, equal rights, human dignity, social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing are values rather than objective criteria within a definition. If ICOM adopts the new definition, logically it would need to use value judgments to exclude museums operating under notoriously authoritarian regimes, which would not meet the standards for transparency, polyphony and democratic inclusion. ICOM Luxembourg therefore proposes that the text developed by the Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials (MDPP) should remain a vision rather than a

definition. It could be adopted as an ICOM charter of intent, expressing our shared values and societal commitments, alongside the existing definition.

➤ **GLASS – Anne-Laure Carré, member of GLASS, on behalf of Teresa Medici, President**

I am speaking on behalf of the President of ICOM-GLASS, Teresa Medici, and am using the presentation given by our international committee at the Toyoma Glass Art Museum last September.

ICOM-GLASS is an international committee founded in 1946, with 144 individual members from 32 countries, and 22 institutional members. It also has 359 non-voting members, 43% of whom are registered with ICOM-CC and 21% with ICDAD. Like other international committees, the highest number of voting members come from France, Germany and the United States. The committee organises at least one annual meeting, and the next one will be held in October 2020 in Coburg, Germany. It also organises joint meetings, especially with ICDAD and ICFA, and with other representative organisations in this field, such as the International Association for the History of Glass (AIHV). The committee publishes the *Reviews on Glass* journal in English and French, in electronic and paper format, as well as an annual newsletter.

ICOM-GLASS received no spontaneous feedback from its members regarding the new definition. We forwarded to our members the ICOFOM questionnaire sent to all international committees in November 2019 and only received four responses before the January 2020 deadline. It would therefore appear that ICOM-GLASS is not the right forum for this discussion and that our members are engaging via their national committees. The ICOM-GLASS executive board has therefore not defined an official position, but I would like to share the main points of the contributions we received. All highlighted the very political nature of the new definition and were concerned at the potential removal of a primarily “professional” definition, which is widely used by national legislations and enjoyed a consensus.

On behalf of ICOM-GLASS, we would like discussion to continue through the national committees.

➤ **ICFA – Sophie Harent, Secretary**

The new definition was discussed with the ICFA executive board rather than with committee members. The definition was only mentioned in passing at the first meeting of the recently renewed board of directors in Amsterdam in late January 2020, and was not on the agenda. It didn't really seem to be an issue. Nevertheless, discussions revealed clear hostility from members of the executive board towards the major part of the new definition. Firstly, they consider the terms used inadequate, especially “polyphonic”, “inclusive”, “social justice”, etc. They believe that this definition is exclusive, too political and too ideological, unlike the message it seeks to convey. Greater neutrality is called for, as well as greater simplicity in the definition. The fundamental question raised by many within the executive board is why it is useful or necessary to change the museum definition currently in force. Members feel that

there was a consensus and therefore wonder why there is a desire to change it completely. In addition, members of the executive board do not consider it essential to promote and highlight the term “collection” in the future, which can seem as restrictive. On the contrary, the term “artefact” seems to be appropriate to encompass all types of collections. This proves that there are potentially quite significant differences within the ICFA executive board, especially depending on the languages of different members. The “cultural centre” aspect proposed in the definition is vigorously rejected. However, the participatory nature and consideration of all members of the public are considered important aspects that are perhaps not sufficiently clear in the 2007 definition. It is mainly on this point that the ICFA Committee considers it useful to develop it further.

➤ **ICOM Georgia – Text by Inga Karaia, President, presented by Florence Le Corre**

ICOM Georgia was founded in 2007 and has 517 individual, institutional and student members. After the Kyoto General Assembly, the committee sent an online questionnaire to its members, whose responses were discussed by the executive board.

The results of this questionnaire and discussion show that 46% consider the new definition appropriate and 48% inappropriate. It is considered too complex, when a definition should be short and structured. Many terms are superfluous and redundant, such as “equal rights” and “equal access”. In this presentation, we would like to emphasise that legal language is not the same in all countries, but that this legal notion is nevertheless considered important. According to the Georgia committee, the following terms should be included in the new definition: “education”, “institution”, “democracy”, “inclusivity”, “dialogue about the past and future”, “accessibility”, “participatory” and “transparency”. It also proposes replacing “conflict” by “challenge”, and removing “acknowledging”.

➤ **MPR – Matthias Henkel, President**

Of course we need a new reading of the definition. We also have to draw the distinction between a definition, a mission and a vision. That is why we do not have one problem but three challenges.

ICOM-MPR was founded in the late 1970s. It has about 600 members and almost 70% of them are from Europe. We fundamentally believe that the role of communication about the future is very important for museums in the future and that museums should be more topical than political.

➤ **ICOM Belgium – Sergio Servellon, Vice-President**

We hereby submit our feedback for the “Committees Journey”, convened by ICOM France and ICOM Germany, with the support of ICOFOM and ICOM Europe, regarding adaptation of a new museum definition.

Although Belgium is a small country, its ICOM national committee has 1500 members from two organisations: one Flemish and one Walloon. We decided to split the discussion into two sessions, one methodological and one conceptual. This choice can be explained by what we have already heard today, or what could be called the 'Gothenburg paradigm shift'. I think it is a strategic error to discuss the core of the core, when we have not yet resolved what this core is.

First, we had a methodological session. This first session was needed to determine the kind of input to be gathered and how it should be processed. On 15 January 2020, we organised an ICOM Belgium Convention and five points came out of this. Our first recommendation is a very simple question: Who is this definition for? Is it the general public, our governments, the museum community itself or the members of ICOM? This needs to be mandated by consensus. We need to focus on the goal of this definition. Secondly, we need to measure the impact of any new definition on different regions and institutions. It is clear that we all face legal implications with this definition, which is why we are asking ICOM to carry out an impact study for any definitions that would come out of this. The third point is that we need transparency on the "contribution from national committees and international committees" to the new MDPP2 committee. We want to know what this means methodologically. For Belgium, MDPP2 has no free mandate. We need transparency on how the information collected is summarised. We have to specify the methodology followed. Additionally, we want to know what the original five propositions were and how they came about. Finally, we need to know what process will be implemented from now on.

Conceptual sessions are planned. On 5 June, Bruno Brulon Soares has been invited by the Université de Liège together with ICOM Bruxelles-Wallonie. On 15-16 June 2020, Flemish, Brussels and Walloon associations will follow the ICOFOM survey. There will be additional sessions in order to provide ICOM Belgium's feedback.

➤ **ICOM Israel – Text by Nava Kessler, President, presented by Florence Le Corre**

ICOM Israel has 1,600 members, who met in roundtable sessions to discuss the new definition. A definition committee was then created and a survey distributed to members. These discussions on the museum definition attracted significant interest in the Israeli press. Discussions and the creation of a committee on this issue have concluded that a large majority of members consider the current definition good, but that the new definition is imprecise. ICOM Israel believes that it is important to include the idea of a museum as a permanent venue, in addition to the terms "education", "social mission" and "professional management of collections".

➤ **ICOM Netherlands – Arja van Veldhuizen, board member**

ICOM Netherlands is a large and growing committee in a relatively small country, and has 5300 members. Our policy on the board is to organise activities with members and

cooperate with other parties in the Dutch museum field. We focus on encouraging members to look beyond borders and use ICOM to become inspired by international perspectives. In Kyoto, ICOM Netherlands initiated the launch of ICOM Family, a platform for connecting with colleagues worldwide.

First, after Kyoto, we noticed that there are a range of different opinions on the museum definition in the Netherlands. We decided with the ICOM NL-board to have a Museum Definition Working Group, and we published a fact sheet in November and an update in February. We want to increase discussions among Dutch museum professionals – ICOM and non-ICOM members. We are doing this using a ‘grassroots’ approach, involving our more than 5000 members. We will finally collect their different views and opinions. We partner as much as we can with other organisations in the Dutch museum landscape and ask them to put the discussion on their agenda. By doing so we are reaching out to a wide range of museum colleagues.

We attended the Heritage Arena ‘Game Changers’ on 29 January 2020 at the Reinwardt Academy to explain the issues around the new definition. We held a work session for ICOM Netherlands members on the museum definition on 6 February 2020 at Museum Catharijneconvent, in Utrecht. These discussions will continue during other events. There will be the Museum Knowledge Day of the Dutch Museum Association, titled ‘Is the museum a clubhouse with a collection?’ at Museum het Valkhof in Nijmegen, on 23 March 2020. The ICOM Netherlands General Assembly will be held on 25 May 2020 in Breda. There will be an invitation to members to give voting advice (via an online tool) prior to the ICOM Netherlands General Assembly 2021.

During the successful work session on 6 February, an introduction was given explaining the prestigious nature of the ICOM definition, and the way in which the ICOM committee works. Then, two statements were presented by two colleagues with very different opinions on the question. During this session, we gathered the opinion of members by asking them six different questions.

Our observations so far are that we have as many opinions as members. These opinions seem to depend a lot on the type of museum and the role of the member in their museum. It seems to be a difference between more object-focused museums and museums where stories and narratives told with objects are most important. There may also be a generational issue. The question of who the definition is for seems to define part of the opinions: is it for policymakers, museum professionals or the general public? This discussion triggers reaction among our members: suddenly ICOM seems to matter for them.

Our message for this meeting is that ICOM Netherlands only has 5 votes out of more than 800 in June 2021. Consequently, our opinion has a modest impact on the result. So we think that we have to use the delay in the vote to take advantage of the unique opportunity to explore our own profession. At the 6 February session, we told our members to be open-minded, to postpone judgement, to explore arguments used for and against and to explore the different sub-themes, seen from different perspectives. So, you are not going to hear the opinion of ICOM Netherlands yet. We diverged first. We will converge again before June 2021.

➤ **ICOM Germany – Markus Walz, member**

ICOM Germany is a national committee of 6 500 members. Most of them are individuals. Institutions prefer the museum associations organised in our 16 federal States.

After Kyoto in October 2019, there was rapid reaction from a very important monthly journal on national and international contemporary politics. The author said that the MDPP proposal represents a liberal and neo-liberal discourse and presents social diversity as the new norm for ICOM. Between October and December, we had our first experience with online activism, with an open letter demanding more dialogue. This open letter had 294 supporters, including 75 German members of ICOM. In parallel, we received an invitation to a roundtable discussion at the Jewish Museum Berlin, on 30 January 2020. Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, member of the Executive board of ICOM was in favour of the “new position”, and I was in favour of the “old position”.

In February, two national conservative daily newspapers published commentaries. One was asking whether critical museology was ready to be musealised itself. The other said that Museums have to change, and so does their definition.

In December, we carried out our first survey of members, which reported in February. It was a questionnaire on opinions of the current definition and the MDPP proposal. We received 302 valid questionnaires, representing 4.6% of all our members. We asked our members which terms used in both definitions they considered the most important. The result is almost all the terms in the 2007 definition are considered “an important part of the definition” according to more than 80% of respondents. On the contrary, just a few words of the MDPP proposal are considered an important part of the definition, for less than 66.6% of respondents, such as “for society” and “equal access to heritage”. Finally the terms “global equality and planetary wellbeing” are those least considered important in this generally unpopular proposal.

It is interesting to note the difference between what is considered important for a proposed mission statement or proposed definition. For a mission statement, the words of the MDPP proposal are more frequently considered important, for less than 66.6% of respondents. Which makes us think that, even if the proposal becomes a mission statement, there is still work to do on it.

With regard to overall acceptance of the definition, ICOM Germany had roughly the same result as ICOM Switzerland. The current definition is considered very suitable or quite suitable for more than 80% of respondents. The MDPP Proposal is considered suitable for less than 50%.

My message is that our members are interested in a contemporary vision, some like the spirit of the new wording, but they are satisfied with the current museum definition.

➤ **ICOFOM – Marion Bertin, Secretary**

ICOFOM is the international committee dedicated to the theoretical approach to museums and museology, focused on developing a research field incorporating the numerous disciplines that structure museum practice. Since its creation in 1977, ICOFOM has actively participated in the museum definition as a historical, social and cultural process, and in in-depth deliberation on the topic. Other themes underpin ICOFOM's work, including museology and technology, the social and political role of museology, and museology as theory and practice, etc.

ICOFOM is another very large international committee in ICOM, featuring around 2,000 members, with large international representation. The same is true for the ICOFOM board, elected for the 2019-2022 period, whose President is Bruno Brulon Soares (Brazil) and Vice-President is Anna Leshchenko (Russia). The executive board comprises two elected members who are also members of ICOM France: Marion Bertin (Secretary) and Daniel Schmitt (Treasurer). The outgoing president is François Mairesse.

ICOFOM is split into two sub-committees: ICOFOM LAM (for South America) and ICOFOM ASPAC (for Asia-Pacific region).

Pivotal work forming the backbone of ICOFOM and ties between members includes the project led by André Desvallées from 1993, entitled "Terminology of Museology", which, at the request of ICOM, led to ICOFOM's involvement in discussions on our current museum definition from 2003 to 2007. Noteworthy publications include *The Declaration of Calgary* in 2005, and *What is a museum?* in 2007, led by François Mairesse and André Desvallées, which present theoretical perspectives from ICOFOM members on the museum definition. In 2009, an edition of the *ICOFOM Study Series*, published by Nelly Decarolis and François Mairesse, looked at the topic of "Museology: back to basics", in which ICOFOM authors discussed key museological concepts. This led to the publication of *Key Concepts of Museology* in 2010, led by François Mairesse and André Desvallées, which was translated into multiple languages. A major by-product of this work, the *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de Muséologie*, was led by the same authors and published in 2011. ICOFOM therefore has a longstanding and fruitful involvement in reflection on the museum definition.

Under the leadership of ICOM, since 2016, ICOFOM has actively participated in plans for a new museum definition by organising international conferences on the theme "Defining the Museum of the 21st Century" in eleven countries. This has led to numerous publications on the topic, presenting a panorama of international museums and bringing together stakeholders from these eleven countries, in particular from Europe, Latin America and North America. These publications are all available online on our website.

Following the Kyoto General Assembly in 2019, ICOFOM administered a questionnaire to consult its members and the members of other national and international committees in order to gather their opinions on the new definition proposed by the ICOM executive board in July 2019.

ICOFOM would like to bring its journal *ICOFOM Study Series* in line with the highest standards of academic production, while maintaining its high publication rate and organising more conferences. Moreover, ICOFOM is considering an inclusive policy to promote the diversity of contexts and approaches at a global level. ICOFOM, ICOFOM LAM and ICOFOM ASPAC will therefore be organising meetings across all continents. Finally, ICOFOM is considering creating museology discussion forums in regions where there is no access to university-level education specialized on museology, in order to pursue our global vision of current museums world.

➤ **ICOM Bangladesh – Text by Hussain Jahangir, President, presented by Florence Le Corre**

In 2018, ICOM Bangladesh organised a workshop on the museum definition, and then another in February 2020 on the same subject. The committee proposes a new definition that includes the following aspects: a museum is a space, the notions of “non-profit”, “work with and for communities”, “sustainable development”, “enjoyment”, and “environmental improvement” are considered important. However, the committee here uses the terms artefacts and specimens, rather than tangible and intangible heritage, or collections.

➤ **ICOM Croatia – Darko Babić, President**

ICOM Croatia was established in 1992 and counts 123 individual members and 36 institutional members, which might sound low, but if you compare it with the size of the country and its population, it is respectable. It is one of the biggest ICOM communities in South-East Europe. ICOM Croatia members include a wide range of museums and people working in art museums, natural history or ethnography museums, art galleries and museology and museum studies professors. ICOM Croatia represents the nationwide museum sector very well, and is by far the strongest and most influential museum association in Croatia.

From the beginning, ICOM Croatia encouraged its members to contribute to the MDPP initiative, including participation in a workshop organised in 2018. Discussions from these workshops have been integrated into the general contribution of ICOM South-East Europe, which was submitted to MDPP in June 2018. While ICOM Croatia members still applaud the ICOM initiative to update the existing definition of museums for the 21st century, they consider that the transparency and participatory approach have been significantly jeopardised by the lack of communication from the MDPP in the months before ICOM Kyoto 2019. The process for developing a new definition is still unclear, and we regret the lack of transparency and that we do not have a clear idea of how this has happened.

Moreover, Croatian public institutions and owners of museums, including cities, counties, the Ministry of Culture, etc. have already asked us about this new definition, and it may

adversely affect ICOM's influence. In recent years, ICOM Croatia has succeeded in getting the current definition included in the new Croatian Museum Act. The new ICOM museum definition, as proposed in Kyoto 2019, might not be possible to include the same way in Croatian museum legislation.

From the perspective of ICOM Croatia, the proposal is not a definition because a definition is supposed to distinguish something from everything else, making it unique. Secondly, members are concerned that the Kyoto definition could encourage heritage institutions or other cultural centres that do not comply with the current definition to declare themselves museums and request funds, consequently reducing funds for current museums. Thirdly, incorporating the Kyoto museum definition proposal into any legal document (especially the National Museum Act) would be practically impossible.

To conclude, ICOM Croatia's members are in favour of developing a 21st century museum definition. In order to respect the museum tradition and the position of museum professionals, it is important to have a transparent definition-making process and not the vision of museums of a closed circle, as happened in Kyoto.

➤ **INTERCOM – Emilie Girard, Secretary**

INTERCOM is the International Committee for Museum Management, focused on studying the theories, challenges and practices associated with management and leadership in a museum context. The committee has around 700 members from all countries around the world and all professional categories. This year, INTERCOM is jointly organising a conference with ICME and ICOM Azerbaijan, at the National Carpet Museum in Baku from 14 to 16 October 2020.

The question of the museum definition was not raised with the executive board until we received the invitation from ICOM France. This gave us the opportunity to launch consultation with INTERCOM members, asking them to share their thoughts, reactions and suggestions. To date, we have not finished analysing members' feedback.

Nevertheless, INTERCOM would like to highlight the fact that the legal impact of changing the definition may vary according to each country and that it is therefore important to be aware of this point. We do not want to become prisoners in a debate of for and against. It seems important for discussion of the definition to be broad enough to reflect all streams within ICOM in order to maintain the precious unity of our organisation and its role among museum professionals. We therefore need to continue to build dialogue between ICOM members about the definition. INTERCOM is determined to play a very active role in discussions.

➤ **ICR – Text by Irina Zmuc, President, presented by Florence Le Corre**

ICR is the International Committee for Regional Museums. This committee believes that it is very useful to update the current definition, which must be easy to understand for everyone, including the general public and politicians. The definition must apply to all types of museum. The new definition must allow for variable readings, and it is important to know who is using the definition and how it will be used. The definition must be relevant for all communities, must meet the needs and interests of these various communities, and must also be taken into account in various State and committee legislations. The terms that seem important for ICR are “inclusivity”, “responsibility”, “responsiveness to change”, “access for all people” and the “digital aspect”.

➤ **ICOM Ireland – Dr Hugh Maguire, Chair**

You will be aware of the English-language colloquialism, ‘A camel is a horse designed by a committee’. This is one of the conflicting ideas the definition debate is representing ICOM. It is an unnecessarily confrontational issue for ICOM as an institution. It is confronting ICOM and its extensive membership. One so-called ‘lofty’ reason for the United Kingdom and the tortuous Brexit debate and one of its reasons for a departure from the European Union was the growing sense among the British population that Brussels and membership of the European Union was not relevant to day-to-day existence. There is a parallel with this debate. There is an element in an equally rancorous debate which is highlighting or implying that ICOM itself is represented by Paris-based liberal intellectuals discussing a definition which is of no day-to-day relevance for the operational reality of numerous small museums on the ground. . It is as if in wishing to embrace and be inclusive the actual debate is becoming exclusive and removed.

Ireland is small and ICOM Ireland’s membership is very small as well. We have something like 50 to 60 members. The Irish Museums Association is significantly bigger but not huge by international standards. Of those 60 members, as I think was mentioned by my Dutch colleague, it is safe to say that most members in Ireland are members for travelling abroad and getting free entry to museums abroad, most Irish museums are free. We have to accept the fact, tasteless as it is, that membership of ICOM internationally is very much determined by the free entry provided by the ICOM card. . A professional membership for a not very professional reason.

We have created for ourselves an overly complex definition and yet, as we all know in this room, museums have existed certainly in Western culture since the Renaissance. If as a profession and a discipline, not to say organisation, following five hundred years into existence, we cannot define ourselves, it is very hard for the government officials which issue funding to take us seriously. If ICOM members cannot define the organisation in the duration of a short taxi ride between this museum and the nearby Gare d’Austerlitz, that cannot be a definition.

ICOM is not the only organisation in the world facing changes: universities are facing changes, governments are facing changes, the published media, general press and newspapers are facing changes, libraries, even more than us, are facing changes. We talk about the digital world. Most museums still have tangible objects and we have museums of tangible objects. Libraries by their very nature are more challenged by the digital world than we are. I am certain that if someone leaves this building and tells their taxi driver that they work in a library, he or she would have an idea of what they're speaking about. If we as ICOM embrace a definition that is so everything and so all-over the place, all encompassing, no taxi driver is going to pay us any attention and may well consider that we are 'half-baked'.

I agree, as does the Irish National Committee, with what my colleagues said earlier that this proposed so-called definition is more of a mission statement. It is a strategic plan. It is not a definition. No-one in Ireland, no one on our committee, no one with whom we have consulted would disagree with the inspiration and the sentiments behind the definition with which we are presented with. We all believe in democracy, we all believe in accommodating spaces, we all believe in inclusivity and we agree wholeheartedly with all the aspirations presented to us. But we cannot agree, however, that it is a definition.

The 'definition' is all too encompassing and tries to tackle too many issues. One almost anticipates references to the promotion of veganism. The definition is trying to tackle so many issues, political, cultural and social and otherwise, that it has ceased to be of any practical use. I would concur with my colleagues from Luxembourg and say that the political nature of this definition is presented in such a way that rather than engaging people it actually alienates. There are elements in the definition, notably 'democratisation' with which you and I agree. How could we not! But is it not naïve to use such terminology in a definition which will be employed in countries and regimes which may not encourage democracy. How can a government office, or the civil servant, be seen to support an organisation that is pushing democracy if its own political system is itself possibly anti-democratic? So, I would urge reflection, I would urge that we retain some core principles notably that museums are "non-profit". In my country, this is hugely important because certain officials, and boards, think that museums should be like the popular Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, which is the most visited attraction in the city. Profit making and part of a bigger corporate enterprise, there are many that perceive museums should be part of a comparable visitor attraction package, generating incomes and profits. The same expectations are not placed on libraries or public parks.

So, in summary, and in this short presentation, we have to keep "non-profit" in there somewhere and we have to distinguish clearly between what should be a succinct definition and what has become a strategic plan and a mission statement.

- **ICOM Ecuador – Text by Juan Carlos Fernandez Catalan, President, read by Teresa Reyes i Bellmunt (President of ICOM Spain)**

Let me begin by sharing warm greetings from ICOM Ecuador. On the basis of previous conversations, I would like to submit our participation in discussions of the new museum definition proposed by ICOM International.

First let's remind ourselves of this proposal based on work by the MDPP:

"Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing."

As we all know, the decision to adopt a new definition has been postponed until the ICOM annual meeting in June 2020 in Paris.

Our proposal is to incorporate the notions of equality, environment, social responsibility, and humanitarian and social objectives into this definition. We also believe that it must include stakeholders, i.e. the museologists, museum managers or other individuals who are responsible for interaction between objects and visitors, in order to highlight the fact that museums have a pre-eminent educational role. They succeed in their mission by reaching the people who visit them and feed off the knowledge of collections.

Other aspects could also be included in the definition, such as:

- conservation of permanent collections of objects with special tangible or intangible value or interest,
- the notion of public service: communication, passing on memory and building one's own identity, taking ownership of content (museums as a mirror). This involves paying special attention to language and discourse around an object or space, and giving the public an opportunity to speak,
- informal and alternative education,
- study, research,
- experimentation, willingness to work with artists and the public (who create museum spaces),
- intellectual pleasure, reflection (transgression, generating debate), contemplation, inspiration, escaping reality and everyday life,
- promoting museums as a social space for interacting with others,
- museums opening their doors, stepping outside of their confined space, opening up to the public (abandoning the notion of "white cube").

I hope that we have been able to make a modest contribution to this important ongoing work. Goodbye and I wish you a very successful day.

➤ **ICOM Spain – Teresa Reyes i Bellmunt, President**

ICOM Spain currently has 1289 members, of which 1006 are individuals (78%), and 283 institutions (22%). ICOM Spain did not set up working groups, but spontaneous comments

were offered by members, particularly in internal meetings or workshops, and on social media.

We would like to underline that for most members, the proposed definition is a declaration of principles rather than a definition as such. A definition needs to be more concrete and concise. If further clarifications are considered necessary, these should be included in an annexe or explanatory development. A definition should seek to do no more than adequately describe what is defined. There is a certain vagueness here in the definition of what a museum should be. The proposal, as it is written, could define almost any type of cultural or civic venue, from a library to a theatre or exhibition hall of a cultural centre. Not all institutions that explain and interpret heritage are or should be considered museums. The search for political correctness may be detrimental to its universality, compromising its normative power and legal utility. Aspects that have facilitated the inclusion, with variations, of the ICOM definition in the heritage and museum legislation of many countries.

We think that museums need to be designed by and for society. The new definition should include society and enable better interaction with it. The definition should focus on the relationship between the museum and its immediate context. It is essential for any museum, regardless of its size and location, to take root in its community. Relevant concepts that need not to be lost have disappeared, such as “education”, “enjoyment”, “open to the public” and “permanent institution”.

Finally, we suggest the need to work in a broader and more representative way, in order to reach a consensus on a museum definition that satisfies the majority of the groups involved. All this before putting it to a vote. The latest roadmap provides little time for the committees to consult their members. We propose extending the period for collecting and managing the survey. Perhaps it would be appropriate, in addition to everything proposed in the roadmap, to add an international congress with the participation and representation of all the committees, to finish agreeing on concepts and setting the definition. This could be done once the MDPP2 has compiled and summarised the committee contributions. We are aware that this would probably delay the vote on the new proposal scheduled for July 2021, although we believe that the extra year for its implementation could be used to finish closing the new definition so that it could be voted on at the next Extraordinary General Conference scheduled a year later. It is very important to reach a consensus together.

➤ **DEM HIST – Text by Remko Jansonius, Secretary, presented by Florence Le Corre**

DEM HIST is the International Committee for Historic House Museums. It sent a questionnaire comprising four questions to its members in February-March 2020. First, what are the strengths of the current definition? Second, which aspects could be improved in the current definition? Third, which three keywords define a museum? Finally, each member was asked to give their own museum definition. The committee is awaiting responses which will then be sent on to feed into the discussion.

➤ **ICOM Austria – Text by Bettina Leidl, President, presented by Laure Ménétrier**

ICOM Austria is one of the largest national committees with over 2,500 members. The main actions carried out within ICOM Austria intend to protect cultural heritage, tackle the trafficking of cultural goods and promote sustainable development measures to fight climate change.

Following discussions within the committee on the issue of the new museum definition, ICOM Austria regrets the absence of the following keywords: “permanent institution”, “collections”, “study”, “education”, “tangible and intangible heritage”. The committee also regrets that the proposed new definition is like a mission statement. It supports the emphasis on the social role of museums, and especially its importance for climate protection. Finally, ICOM Austria would like the new definition to be approved by a very large majority of ICOM members, and for it to be developed in a transparent and constructive manner as part of a shared process.

➤ **CIMCIM – Frank Bär, President**

CIMCIM is ICOM’s International Committee of Museums and Collections of Instruments and Music. It has about 250 members representing around 120 collections on all continents and was founded in Paris in 1960.

There was little spontaneous feedback on the new museum definition text from CIMCIM members, and what there was was not positive. The subject was put on the agenda in the President’s end-of-year message in 2019. Due to restricted resources, no dedicated meetings have taken place so far. Instead, the board has decided on a structured survey.

The starting point is the impression that the new museum definition, as based on the UNESCO sustainability principles of 2015, contains a lot of well-intentioned elements that describe current situations on one hand, and on the other hand situations to be strived after in the future. It sounds like a mixture of a definition and a mission statement. Accepting the entire text as a definition is a way of checking whether your institution is a museum or not – and this is where the potentially serious danger for ICOM as an organisation lies.

So, we tried first, from a methodological standpoint, to tentatively accept all notions in the text as well-intended and legitimate. Secondly, we tried to distinguish between elements for a definition and elements for a mission statement. To this end, we ran an online survey from 12 to 25 February this year. Like other committees before us, we split the text into distinct notions. Participants were asked to tell us whether a particular notion is a definition or a mission statement, or neither, or, finally, if the notion is not sufficiently clear. For around 200 surveys sent to our members via the e-mail addresses in the IRIS database, we received 40 responses, which is a participation rate of 20%. This is generally the kind of participation level for CIMCIM surveys.

Here, you see the different notions according to a calculation of hypothetical majorities, divided into outright majorities, where a notion gets more than 50% and relative majorities where a notion gets the most votes of the four choices.

Using this, we can compose a hypothetical definition text and a hypothetical mission statement text. For the sake of time, I will do this in the more encompassing versions of a relative majority. I have to stress that what I am going to show you is not an official or

unofficial CIMCIM proposal for a new museum definition text. It is a proposal to feed into general discussions.

“Museums are spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. They hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society and safeguard diverse memories for future generations. Museums are not for profit. They collect, preserve, research, interpret and exhibit understandings of the world.”

This is very reminiscent of the current museum definition, but some things have been added and changed. Remember: a museum definition says what a museum is and what it is not.

If we apply the same procedure to a possible mission statement text, we get this:

“Museums are democratising and inclusive spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities.”

Remember: a museum mission statement is much more about what museums should strive after, than about what they currently are. It is not the same thing as a definition.

Here, I have to admit that in composing the survey, I missed out the notion of “enhancing understandings of the world”. Apologies for this.

Two elements didn’t make it into these hypothetical texts. The notion of “polyphonic spaces” was the only one that got a simple majority vote for being unclear. I was not really surprised to learn this, as “polyphony” and “polyphonic” have quite well-defined and almost sacred meanings for musicologists and musicians, and obviously for them, applying this term to museums is not obvious.

Finally, the statement that museums are “... aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing” is, in my opinion, already formulated as a mission, not a definition. So, here the question was: “Do you think that museums are able to contribute to these goals?” A great majority said “yes”, few said “no”, and a good number of participants wrote thoughts about it.

I have not yet had time to review and structure these comments. The same is true of the 28 in part very detailed free comments on the new museum definition text, and we don’t have the time to do this here and now. They will serve as a resource for further thinking. A more comprehensive report will be published in the CIMCIM Bulletin in autumn this year.

Let me finish with a thought about a possible procedure agreed as a recommendation by CIMCIM’s board. First, we have to acknowledge all the work that has been done by MDPP and all those who initially contributed to advancing the new definition draft. Secondly, we have to analyse which portions of the text are apt for a definition and which portions would be better situated in a mission statement. Thirdly, we have to continue the discussion on this basis, coming diligently to a (new) definition proper, and talk within ICOM about its further goals and mission.

➤ **ICOM Latvia – Text by Juris Ciganovs, President, presented by Florence Le Corre**

ICOM Latvia organised its General Assembly in January 2020, which included discussion of the new museum definition. The committee believes that the definition should distinguish museums from other cultural institutions. Moreover, ICOM Latvia thinks that all additional aspects proposed in the new definition to supplement the current definition are values, which should therefore appear in the Code of Ethics. According to ICOM Latvia, the following terms should be kept in the definition: “the museum is a permanent institution”, “sustainable development”, “non-profit”, “in the service of society”, “socially-oriented missions”, “museum open to the public and accessible to all” and “education and enjoyment”.

➤ **ICOM Turkey – Text by Meliha Yaylali, member of ICOM Turkey, read by Burçak Madran, member of ICOM Turkey**

The Turkey national committee was founded in 1956 in a declaration of the Turkish Council of Ministers based on the UNESCO convention. The official code of ICOM Turkey came into force in 1970. ICOM Turkey is overseen by the government and the Ministry of Culture. In 2020, ICOM Turkey has 290 active members.

Our country contributed to ICOM’s “revision of the museum description” with a workshop organised by ICOM Turkey, in Avanos, Nevşehir, on 20 April 2018. The workshop was organised to evaluate contemporary museology in Turkey from its start to the present day, and also to prepare a comprehensive report on the “museum definition” to be presented to ICOM. The 50 workshop participants were members of ICOM Turkey, representatives of private museums, professionals and executives of the museums administrated by the General Direction of Cultural Heritage and Museums, the representatives of museum studies departments of universities and museum-related NGO’s. The report of this workshop was published in Turkish and in English and sent to ICOM.

Recently, ICOM Turkey organised a second meeting on the new alternative museum definition announced by ICOM in Ankara, last February. At this last meeting, a group of 25 participants from the ICOM Turkey executive board, representatives of state and private museums, of universities and NGOs evaluated the new museum definition and prepared a primary report to be sent to ICOM. The new museum definition proposed by the ICOM Executive Board was examined at this meeting on 6 February. The keywords, concepts and functions needed in a museum definition were evaluated. Questions such as “What is a museum?”, “What is its function?”, “For whom does it exist?” were discussed. For now, Turkey has contributed to the revision of the new museum definition with these two meetings. Based on the last meeting, ICOM Turkey’s opinions can be summarised as follows: The new definition text is too long. The new definition is not clear, some expressions such as “polyphonic”, “critical dialogue”, and “conflicts” are confusing. Moreover, these are political expressions. The new definition does not define a museum. It does not emphasise the relationship between a museum and the tangible and intangible heritage which distinguishes it from other cultural institutions. The new museum definition does not include fundamental terms and concepts such as: “education”, “training”, “intangible heritage”, “restoration and

conservation”, which need to be included in a museum definition. ICOM Turkey has defined a series of keywords which we propose to be included in a new museum definition.

In conclusion, we consider that the new museum definition should be accepted by the entire international community, with the agreement of the majority of member countries. It should be free of political expressions and take into account the various sensibilities of different countries. The new definition should include fundamental concepts that emphasise the distinctive features of museums in relation to other cultural institutions. The work launched by ICOM for the new museum definition should also be carried out in a transparent, participatory and democratic way and should be open to the knowledge, approval and contribution of all member states. Countries taking part in the new definition process must absolutely be informed about the process and developments.

➤ **ICMAH – Burçak Madran, President**

ICMAH, the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Archaeology and History, was created in 1948 by Georges-Henri Rivière and is one of the oldest and probably most inclusive committees in the museum world. ICMAH currently has 1,670 individual members and 111 institutional members from 94 countries.

ICMAH played no official role in the MDPP process, but since the announcement of the new museum definition, we have received spontaneous feedback from our members, particularly during the Kyoto conference. We recently sent out an online survey to collect more precise feedback from our members in order to produce an analysis to return to ICOM, but we have not yet received all responses.

ICMAH’s approach to the new museum definition is twofold. We’ll start with the development method. First it was noted that the process was fully transparent with proposals communicated online. However, the time between announcing the new definition on the basis of these recommendations and the period required for approval was too short. Second, we strongly believe that a participatory methodology should have identified the most used terms and concepts from the 269 proposed definitions. A summary could have been produced online showing the frequencies and percentages. It would have been preferable for this sort of analysis to be clearly demonstrated by the MDPP in order to substantiate the choice of terms and leave no doubts about the new definition. In light of the quick yet efficient work of ICOM France, ICOM Europe and various national and international committees in Kyoto, it would appear that the frequency of the terms subject to discussion and debate was far from justifying their use in the new museum definition.

Next, with regard to the terms and concepts, we believe that the world needs greater humanitarian and environmental reflection to save our future. But do these terms openly define museums? These are vital mandates not just for museums but for all institutions, NGOs, governments, groups and charities, working in the service of societies in their own way. We would like to emphasise that our main field of interest and mission is to define what a museum is. Now we are facing another concern, namely whether or not to accept some of the concepts proposed, which directly or indirectly have very political meanings that could cause problems in certain regions of the world. This kind of museum definition could

probably not be applied to a number of countries. I come from Turkey where we have discussed “polyphony” at length. Five years ago, I opened a very “polyphonic” museum with Turks, Armenians, Kurds and Greeks in the same place. Three months later, the museum was closed. It is therefore very difficult to talk about “polyphony” in some world regions and under some circumstances. These political terms should be excluded, both for reasons of legislation and of our authority as museum professionals.

Finally, a museum definition should be shorter and more focused. It should speak to everyone, including the authorities responsible for museums. It should be non-political, meaningful and help promote museum functions and professions. Finally, this new definition should include terms from the current definition and new museological terms, preferably leaving all these other missions to a new ICOM Code of Ethics.

➤ **CIDOC – Text by Monika Hagerdorn-Saupe, President, presented by Florence Le Corre**

CIDOC is the ICOM International Committee for Documentation. Its executive board met in Geneva in February 2020 to discuss the new museum definition.

For CIDOC, the new definition contains some very positive aspects, but overall, it primarily defines the missions of museums rather than what museums are. The committee requests that the objectives of the new definition be specified and that the fact that the terms selected will have legal value in some countries be taken into account. Work on the definition should therefore consider this legal aspect. The definition must be short and enable museums to be distinguished from other cultural venues.

➤ **ICOM France – Juliette Raoul-Duval, President**

ICOM France has 5,500 members, including 400 institutions. It is one of ICOM’s largest national committees, and contributes €550,000 to the international organisation’s annual budget. Members come from all museum professions and the number of members is regularly increasing. New membership applications are assessed by an *ad hoc* commission that makes its decision on the basis of professional criteria. We have a strict interpretation of what it means to be a museum professional.

ICOM France has an executive board that meets 5 times a year, comprising 30 members. Fourteen of them are members by right, representing museum institutions and other museum professional associations. Sixteen members are elected by all members. ICOM France’s members are closely involved in the committee’s activity via the website and social media pages, and the organisation of many public debates on current issues (changes to the profession, museum professions, restitutions, risks, etc.).

Let me now present the position of the French national committee regarding the “new museum definition”. The national committee signed the invitation to postpone the Kyoto vote on the museum definition. It believes that the new definition requires time for reflection and that a consensus should be reached regarding a common vision for the future

of museums. The main aspects debated in France are firstly the language, which is very vague, the removal of fundamental aspects from the definition (“permanent institution”, “collections”, “enjoyment”, “education”), the rushed process, the lack of reference to the Code of Ethics, politicising aspects of the definition, and the underlying changes to membership criteria. However, there are some points on which we are in agreement and which open up room for consensus. We agree with the idea that museums have and will have an important social role to play, and we obviously share the idea of museums being inclusive. However, there are inescapable divergences, including the removal of professional language, the separation and ranking of collections and members of the public, the trivialisation of museum missions, political assumptions, especially in the MDPP1 report, and the undercutting of the universalist approach.

We believe that the definition which could be voted on has not found a consensus and that any definition should arise from a consensus among all members. The definition to be put to a vote in September did not take into account the summary of member feedback from Emilie Girard’s analysis of regulatory uses of the definition to be considered in the 269 definition proposals. The French national committee believes that the ICOM museum definition is a tool that must be used by all member countries and that this regulatory usage should be preserved. The ICOM definition is a world reference, positioning ICOM as a major global organisation built upon its Code of Ethics. The ICOM museum definition cannot be separated from its Code of Ethics.

I would like to say something about the engagement of not only professionals, but also cultural stakeholders and the French press with regard to this new museum definition. During the Kyoto General Assembly, the French delegation received many messages of support from museum professionals, cultural stakeholders and the national press, including museum institutions, well-known cultural figures, museum professional associations, the national press and social media.

Since Kyoto, the main professional associations have continued their reflection. In September, the *Association Française des Conservateurs* (AGCCPF – French Curators Association) started considering the “redefinition of museums”, drawing on its “*Livre blanc*” (white paper) to establish a “French” definition that includes the concept of inalienability to which France is committed. This initiative was presented alongside others at a press conference at the SITEM international museums trade show on 29 January, and appeared in an article in Edition 539 of 14-27 February of the *Journal des Arts*. National and specialised newspapers and radio have been significantly involved in the debate, with 16 articles and radio programmes identified by ICOM France. Other professionals have organised or taken part in a number of public meetings, including FEMS, AGCCPF and FFCR. ICOM France has continued extensive dialogue with its partners and members, at its General Assembly in Paris in October, during its three executive board meetings (September, October and January), on its website and by forming an *ad hoc* working group responsible for preparing the “Committees Days” on 10 March. ICOM France expressed its positions and opened them up for debate throughout the second half of 2019, with 6 letters sent to the President of ICOM International between June 2019 and January 2020, and discussions with a number of interested cultural stakeholders, with whom we sent 13 positions. ICOM France will continue discussion between professionals with a national debate on 29 April 2020.

In conclusion, France has an ambitious museum policy and believes that museums have a responsibility for sharing the memory of arts, sciences and societies. This conception is underpinned by professional rigour, which ensures high-quality scientific discourse. ICOM is a forum for sharing these skills. It is the largest global network of museum professionals and we would like it to reinforce this professional approach.

➤ **ICOM Portugal – Text by José Alberto Ribeiro, President, presented by Florence Le Corre**

In November 2019, ICOM Portugal organised a meeting of 150 people, working together to think about the museum definition, in addition to working groups for follow-up. The conclusion is that it is important to differentiate the definition from a list of missions and a vision. The proposed definition is considered too long, and should focus on the essence of museums. Moreover, the museum definition should be considered on the basis of the current definition and should contain the following terms: “permanent institution”, “tangible and intangible heritage”, “education”, “inclusivity”, “accessibility”, “participatory”, “study, enjoyment and reflection”.

➤ **ICOM Greece – Text by Teti Hadjinicolaou, President, presented by Florence Le Corre**

In December 2019, ICOM Greece published an article on the museum definition in the national committee’s bulletin, and launched discussion during its General Assembly in 2020. Responses to discussions were sent via the questionnaire drawn up by ICOFOM. ICOM Greece is also drafting a questionnaire and responses are expected by the end of March. Using the responses to this questionnaire, a roundtable session and workshop will be held in April 2020. An article was published on this subject by the ICOM Greece committee in *Museum International* (vol. 71, No. 181-182, page 64).

Discussions concluded that while it is necessary to change the definition, the foundations of the 2007 definition should be retained. A museum is not a cultural centre; the definition must be short; the legal value of the terms used must be taken into account; the proposed declaration of the role and missions of 21st century museums should be drawn up on the basis of UNESCO recommendations. Finally, the term “education” should be included in the definition and it is important to remember that the definition applies to all types of heritage and therefore museum.

➤ **ICOM Azerbaijan – Text by Rema Zeynalova, Secretary, presented by Florence Le Corre**

ICOM Azerbaijan sent a questionnaire to museums in the country and an extraordinary executive board meeting was held to discuss responses. The conclusions are that the current

definition should be retained with a few additions, and that two points should not be forgotten: inclusivity and safeguarding the memory of various communities for the future.

➤ **AVICOM – Text by Michael Faber, President, read by Florence Le Corre**

AVICOM is the International Committee for Audiovisual, New Technologies and Social Media. AVICOM proposes that the new definition should build on the UNESCO declarations and contain the following terms: “permanent institution”, “managed by professionals”, “inclusivity”, “sustainable development”, “non-profit”, “accessible for all”, and “a museum must work with the past for the future”.

➤ **ICOM Poland – Text by Jolanta Gumula, member of ICOM Poland, presented by Florence Le Corre**

ICOM Poland organised a conference with Polish museum directors during which it created a ten-member committee to discuss the museum definition. A publication by the *National Institute Museum and Public Collections* containing the reactions of some professionals is also under development. Members sent spontaneous reactions, many praising the idea of reviewing the definition but regretting the lack of debate, participation and information on work to overhaul the definition, even before the vote. They find the new definition unclear and ambiguous, open to debate, too long and not easy enough to understand. It lists missions; it is not a definition. Members also regretted that the role of collections is not mentioned: ‘What is a museum without a collection?’, asks the Polish committee. Finally, it is important to remember that a museum is an institution and that the notions of critical dialogue and democracy need to be taken into account in this discussion.

➤ **COSTUME – Corinne Thepaut-Cabaset, President**

The International Committee for Museums and Collections of Costume was created in 1962 and currently has over 400 members, two thirds of which are European. The number of members is constantly increasing, reflecting the creation of new fashion and costume departments in museums and the diverse professions associated with these objects.

COSTUME was unable to discuss the potential new museum definition in Kyoto in September, as the letter informing us of this debate arrived during the summer, preventing us from adding this discussion to our agenda or even from collecting enough opinions, as we lacked information on this project. We can say that most members present in Kyoto were surprised by this news and expressed concern. Above all, they were not sufficiently informed to take a stance either for or against, within such a short timeframe.

In order to be able to follow discussions in a constructive manner and take part, the COSTUME committee emailed its members the questionnaire developed by ICOFOM in late 2019, asking individuals to send their responses directly to ICOFOM. We have therefore yet

to receive any feedback on this questionnaire. However, we do intend to develop our own questionnaire, prior to which we will be sending links to the current museum definition, either by email as a reference document and/or by publishing them online on the ICOM COSTUME mini-website.

In conclusion, this important subject will be discussed during our General Assembly in late June/early July 2020 at the Palace of Versailles. This will give us the opportunity to collect initial thoughts, reactions and feelings from members of the international COSTUME committee during the annual meeting, which we will then share with the ICOM community.

➤ **ICOM Ukraine – Text by Kateryna Chuyeva, President, presented by Florence Le Corre**

ICOM Ukraine organised discussions in 2019 and the recently elected executive board will continue reflection on plans for a new definition. It highlights that a museum must be a permanent non-profit institution open to the public. This committee believes that the basic data in the current definition of collections should be retained. It is important to include the concept of heritage protection and close attention must be paid to the legal aspects of the definition.

This is an extract from what this committee says about the very high value of the legal aspects of the museum definition:

“Taking into account the experience of totalitarian and post-totalitarian past of our country, we feel bound to warn that purely formal compliance with functional criteria does not prevent museums from being transformed into a propaganda instrument for totalitarian and anti-human regimes. This is why it is important to provide a definition not only with a basic core, but also with a lawyer, in addition to the functional signs, that would express the essential landmarks and values for which a museum should serve in a free and democratic society.”

➤ **ICOM Burkina Faso – Text by Jean-Paul Koudougou, member of ICOM Burkina Faso, read by Laure Ménétrier**

The definition is very long and general, which results in a vague understanding of the specifics of a museum. Indeed, many recommendations in the MDPP report clearly state that all aspects cannot be taken into account but that the definition should be concise enough to identify the specifics of a museum, and open enough to take into account other aspects associated with objects and the values promoted by the museum institution.

The status of museums as fully-fledged institutions is not clearly and explicitly mentioned. The absence of concepts such as tangible and intangible cultural heritage and “enjoyment” is regrettable.

The new definition takes into account new paradigms of cooperation and democracy, and major changes and challenges facing museums that need to be incorporated into their missions.

However, in the light of continued sensitivity regarding issues associated with decolonisation, the restitution of cultural property, illegal trafficking and identity politics, the new definition appears to open the door to legitimising potentially “fraudulent” acquisitions whose ownership could be justified by the duty to “safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people” and “work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.”

There is no urgent need to change the definition if the new one does not truly express what is expected of an institution and fails to obtain unanimous support, as is currently the case. The 2007 definition only needs amendments, such as taking into account some concepts such as cultural democracy, equal rights, improving understandings of the world and respect for the diversity of cultural expressions.

➤ **ICOM Estonia – Text by Agnes Aljas, President, presented by Laure Ménétrier**

ICOM Estonia has 250 members. There is a lack of consensus between members of the board who hold contradictory positions. Some believe that the new definition is too political and lacks neutrality, but there is no consensus on this point. Nevertheless, ICOM Estonia approves the idea of changing the current definition to take into account the changes and challenges facing our society. ICOM Estonia would like to highlight the difficulty of defining what a museum is due to the plurality of museums in the world. It believes that the definition should be a tool to help museums find their place and support them in their operation. The definition must also help us take a position on phenomena such as financial pressure, and to make ourselves available to societies and their development in order to promote universal access to culture.

➤ **ICMEMO – Max Polonovski, board member**

ICMEMO is the International Committee for Memorial Museums, primarily in remembrance of crimes committed by States, meaning that the neutrality aspect is very important to us.

Discussion of the proposed new museum definition in Kyoto was extremely heated, and could even be considered violent. We witnessed a very large majority opposed to this new definition, with a small minority nevertheless very much in favour. This was a debate that stirred passions, linked to the very principles of the mandate of our committee, where political neutrality is essential to allow the survival of our institutions in the countries involved. The President of ICOM Czech Republic, who is a member of our committee, recently resigned for political reasons. Dariusz Stola from the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, POLIN Museum, in Warsaw was recently ‘divested of his position’ by the Polish government. Peter Schäfer, Director of the Jewish Museum Berlin, has also been sent on his way. All these people are in sensitive positions, and it is therefore essential for us to remain

totally neutral. We need to pay attention to these aspects with this type of definition that has ideological and political resonance.

Overall, within ICMEMO, we had the same reactions as our colleagues. We were open to a “new wording” - a new way of presenting things in order to bring them up to date, but even more attached to retain our unique quality.

➤ **ICOM Italy – Daniele Jalla, board member**

ICOM Italy has 2,600 members, compared to 80 in 2001. The unique feature of our committee is its organisation into regional sections to increase debate, and its thematic committees. Since 2014, following a long battle by ICOM, the current ICOM museum definition has been included in the State law on museums and the ICOM Code of Ethics has been taken into account in creating the national museum system. It is important to understand that this definition is a fundamental aspect, and I do not see how it is possible to build a national museum system based on a definition that starts with polyphonic spaces. We are a country of music and poetry, but I’m not sure that applies to museums.

ICOM Italy discussed the museum definition well before the Kyoto General Assembly. A working group was formed and organised several regional meetings and a national conference in May 2019 in Milan, where François Mairesse introduced us to the topic. We discussed the current 2007 definition, from which three words emerged. First, the term “accessibility”, which already appears in the 1960 UNESCO recommendation on museums. Second, “participation”. This is nothing new as we have been discussing this theme since the 1970s, and it has given rise to forms of museums such as ecomuseums, which are institutions and institutes like other museums. Third, the only term that generated debate and is worth highlighting is “sustainable development”. However, museums were created as an instrument of progress and development, meaning that it is essential to take this notion into account.

We opposed the new definition proposed in Kyoto for several reasons. Firstly, there is the issue of the surprising and anti-democratic method. A definition should not be pulled out of a hat, ignoring ICOM’s seventy year history. Changes to the definition, debates in ICOFOM, discussions of the nature of the definition, etc. constitute a historic memory, which was missing from this decision. This may lose us time. Next, we considered the form of the text to be chaotic and situationist. There is both too little and too much. It is incredible to see an ICOM General Assembly tear itself apart with a 70% majority in favour of postponing the vote on the new definition, which had never happened before. What is the state of the ICOM presidency to have created such a situation? Never before had we witnessed this great a division on an issue so fundamental to ICOM. There is therefore a problem of methodology. Finally, let us not forget the connection between the definition and two other aspects. First, the UNESCO recommendation. We are not independent of it and cannot just invent something else when UNESCO has a recommendation on museums written in 1960 and then in 2015, which we need to take into account. ICOM contributed to this recommendation. How did the executive board approve the new definition without recalling

this recommendation in 2015? This appears to be a memory lapse. Second, the relationship between the definition and the Code of Ethics, the structure of the code and the structure of the definition, since the two form a single whole.

In conclusion, we suggest starting discussion with the current definition and fully accepting its structure, i.e. the four aspects that make up the definition: museum identity, target audience, functions and purposes. These are the four aspects that define a museum institution in line with the Aristotelian system which Van Mensch has reminded us to use in our discussions since 1993. This is a normative text for ICOM, but thanks to the general global opinion of ICOM, the text actually has the value of moral law for all States. We must therefore accept our immense responsibility to not draw up manifestos. What we have here is neither a vision nor a mission, but a manifesto. Some museum organisations do work with manifestos, such as the Museum Association in the United Kingdom. They are public summaries of strategic reflection that provide food for thought.

I propose defining a method, since the information that has emerged this morning has created a general consensus of opinion. However, there are different approaches: some discussed terminology, others the form and others the length. If we use the definition as a starting point, we must decide whether or not we like the structure. To come back to what one of our colleagues said earlier, she would like to answer her children's question, "What's a museum?", using the ICOM definition. This question is reminiscent of that asked by Marc Bloch's son, "What is history?". However, the ICOM definition is not suitable for children. If anything has changed in museums, it is the centrality of people, whether in terms of participation or accessibility. Museums are no longer centred on collections but people.

If we start with more moderate objectives and if we like the structure, we will need to answer the following questions: what is a museum? What is a museum's target audience? What are the functions a museum must achieve? What are its purposes? We can discuss these four parts and reach a reasonable conclusion.