

## **ICOM THE NETHERLANDS**

### **In favour of a new museum definition**

**In the turbulent days in Kyoto the Dutch National Committee was one of the voters in favour of the new museum definition. The motivation for this standpoint we would like to explain to our French colleagues, who so graciously invited us to this meeting. We thank you for your invitation, for indeed it can be a challenge to find out what binds us, on moments when differences appear so easily. Also we like to share with you our plan of action, with which we involve our members in the discussion about the definition.**

### **1. The definition, crucial element of the identity of ICOM**

Since the beginning of ICOM, the Museum Definition helped us to define our identity and who could join our global association as a member. As the world and its museums changed, the definition was reconsidered and adapted regularly. We consider this a valuable ongoing development and a chance to analyse regularly the developments in our beautiful profession.

As years went by, national governments in several countries adapted the ICOM definition as a tool to make national museum policy and distribute financial subsidies and other support. In those countries a change in the ICOM definition could have considerable practical consequences. For the national ICOM committees in these countries the discussion within ICOM could be seen as more important, or even risky, seen from a national dimension. But we should not forget that ICOM has no jurisdiction in any country, and the use of any ICOM definition for policy and funding is a national political choice.

In the 2017 General Conference the ICOM members decided to reconsider again the Museum Definition and to observe recent developments in the museum world. You could imagine that this task would be executed by ICOM, where the museologists were gathered. But it was decided to make a Standing Committee MDPP, as there are more standing committees for special themes. In the summer of 2019 MDPP handed over its results to the executive board. From that moment on we observed that many mistakes were made in process management, communication and governance. In Kyoto we witnessed an escalation we all can regret. The Dutch national committee observed in Kyoto that the situation occurred, that the revision of the Museum Definition could be postponed for indefinite time. And so we would miss the opportunity to involve all recent developments in the museum world. This motivated us to vote in favour of the new Museum Definition, as to keep it on the agenda in the next year. A political choice.

### **2. ICOM: valuable to the museum professionals and students**

About 60% of the Dutch museum professionals and students are ICOM member. They appreciate the chances ICOM offers to broaden your horizon over your national borders and communicate with colleagues from different continents and cultures. Working with ICOM stimulates us to use a second language, to enter other worlds, to learn different working styles and habits. It is very exciting, though not always easy, to leave your own 'comfort zone'. The annual programme of ICOM The

Netherlands is aimed at stimulating its members to participate personally in international ICOM activities, boards and commissions.

### **3. impulses for a new Museum Definition**

In the last two decades we witnessed the introduction of new elements in the functioning of museums. The virtual and internet world gave new dimensions to our ways of presentation, study, communication and interaction. Inaccessible or far away collections could be visited, languages could be understood, knowledge could be shared in new ways. The iconic value of a museum as a prestigious institute was desired by young and emancipating countries, communities and action groups. Social themes like indigenous cultures, slavery, political violence, minority groups etc. were expressed through museums. Museums were even used as active social instruments of identity and emancipation. The momentum of revising the Museum Definition gives our ICOM members an important stimulus to learn about the recent developments in our profession. An opportunity to contact our dear colleagues all over the world and get acquainted to their reality. A necessity to involve the new developments in the next version of the Museum Definition. There is no need to eliminate old elements in the Definition, there is the challenge to make the Definition to a reflection of the present day museum landscape. And a rich landscape it is.

Luc Eekhout  
Chair NC ICOM The Netherlands 2015-2020