

**Preparation for the reopening of the museums:
Consultation of the institutional members of ICOM France and the European national
ICOMs
8-12 February 2021**

In preparation for a consultation with the Ministry of Culture scheduled for 12 February in conjunction with other professional associations, ICOM France carried out a "flash" consultation of its institutional members and its international ICOM colleagues. ICOM France would like to thank the many institutions that responded. Below is a brief analysis of the responses received. We are continuing to make use of these responses, which will be the subject of a forthcoming summary.

Panel:

The consultation focused on the institutional members (not individual members) of ICOM France and its counterpart presidents of national ICOMs in Europe. The NEMO survey and the recommendations of the NGO ICOM International were also taken into consideration.

The French responses concern about 97 museums, the vast majority of which are in the regions. In the major cities, the responses came from museums in Paris and Marseille.

The responses from international counterparts concern 26 European countries and in addition Israel.

Method:

This was not a closed questionnaire but an invitation to institutional members to give their point of view mainly on three questions prior to the forthcoming reopenings: the reception of schoolchildren, the timetables and the methods of pre-booking or, more generally, of controlling the flow of visitors.

The institutions consulted were invited to express themselves freely on any issue they felt was important in this period. The respondents expressed great satisfaction at being consulted and made many spontaneous remarks and recommendations. As a result, the interpretation of their answers is as much qualitative as quantitative and will require more detailed exploitation.

The international counterparts were invited to describe the situation in their own country: the health situation in their country, the opening or closing of museums, any protocols in force, the state of the dialogue between museums and their governments, and prospects.

First lessons:

The following information can be drawn from the responses of the museums in the France:

- **The museums concerned are ready and prepared to reopen.** They have very strict sanitary protocols in place and are in a position to reactivate them, or even, if requested, to reinforce them. The 10 m2 gauge is well accepted, barrier and hygiene distances and gestures are in place and fully accepted. The announced deadlines for receiving the public again are short, most of them between two and five days, sometimes a week, which is necessary above all for the mobilisation and organisation of the teams.
- **Almost all respondents consider the reception of schoolchildren a priority.** Since the beginning of the pandemic, many have put in place "outside the walls" facilities, which are still in place. Most institutions are prepared to envisage differentiated schedules to be able to welcome schoolchildren (and play a role in the "learning winter"): for example, mornings reserved for schools and afternoons for individuals, or alternating schoolchildren during the week and families and individuals at weekends. Many people associate schoolchildren with the 'public who are unable to attend'. The concern is rather to regain its audience: the obstacles seem to be more the responsibility of teachers and rectorships, or transport conditions.
- **Opening hours:** all of them have already included curfew in their forecasts. If they need to change the hours, they are prepared to do so, it is a matter for collective bargaining. No ideal schedule emerges from the responses; some may only open half days or certain days of the week. There is far from

unanimous agreement on the idea that reducing opening hours reduces visitor flows: on the contrary, some think that increasing the amplitude will allow the flow of visitors to be spread out.

- **online reservation/ticketing facilities**, etc.: this question gives rise to many comments. The museums that replied, in the regions or even in rural areas, consider that the problem of visitor flows to be contained does not concern them. With sometimes less than 30 visitors on a normal winter's day, they consider themselves to be below the limits and able to control distances on the spot.

There were many comments on this aspect: some pointed out that 80% of the museums are in the regions, and logically these were the ones that responded the most. They feel that the concerns or arguments expressed in the public debates on the reopening of museums overwhelmingly concern museums in large cities, which are likely to draw crowds and generate confusion, which is not the case for them. They are sensitive to the attention given to them by this survey. Several suggest that priority should be given to reopening regional museums, whose main concern is to regain their audiences.

Among our European partners, the situations are contrasted; out of the 26 responses collected, 14 come from countries whose museums are closed, 12 from countries whose museums are open.

What is interesting is that the questions are largely the same from one country to another: the place of schoolchildren, gauges and protocols, awareness of the eminent role of museums in rebuilding social links. From this point of view, museums throughout the world form a very homogenous and close-knit community, ready to help each other, as demonstrated by the responsiveness to our questioning. The answers are detailed, explicit, and require a period of time to be finely analysed. Many have sent the protocols prescribed by their authorities and these deserve to be compared in more detail. This comparison will be made in the coming days.

One striking point in the country returns is the great importance given to the situation of personnel (employees, workers, depending on the language), sometimes at least as detailed as that given to the public.

Another point is the role given to museum managers in the decision to reopen them. ICOM's recommendation puts it this way: "it is recommended that museums which are not in a position to respond to these measures should extend their closures".

As regards the other ICOM recommendations, the following can be noted (in somewhat loose form):

- Consider extended openings
- Consider opening hours reserved for certain groups, (e.g. + 65 years old)
- Suspend installations that involve visitor interaction,
- Reserving lifts for people with reduced mobility
- ...

In conclusion:

The ICOM members consulted expressed their readiness to reopen, their willingness to implement any measure that would allow it, their awareness of their role in relation to schoolchildren and their concern about the obstacles to their return, and their desire to have their specific local characteristics taken into account. An in-depth analysis of their replies will undoubtedly bring to light some very precise proposals.