

Plea for an essential museum definition of the world association ICOM

The museum definition of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) is, along with the ICOM Code of Ethics, one of the central statements of the association. The definition identifies the core characteristics of all museums. Its worldwide validity is a high asset.

In 2016, the world association of ICOM began an investigation into whether the current version of the ICOM museum definition is suitable for the 21st century.

A proposed resolution to amend the text did not find a majority in 2019. The multi-stage process for updating the museum definition now specified by ICOM, in which the National Committee ICOM Germany is also actively involved, is to be completed in 2022.

This plea, presented here, aims to constructively contribute the following points to the discussion currently underway:

1

The ICOM museum definition must name the unchanging core tasks of the museum: collecting, preserving, researching, presenting and communicating.

2

The ICOM museum definition must include all museums worldwide - museums of every size, every genre, in every social and cultural environment. This can only be achieved if the definition focuses on the above mentioned fundamental aspects.

3

Since 2015, UNESCO has also been using ICOM's current museum definition; national laws, funding guidelines and museum accreditation labels also refer to it. A far-reaching reformulation would cause ICOM to lose its leading role worldwide.

4

Since 1974, it has been the consensus of the ICOM world association that museums are committed to the service of society. This statement has endured. Each museum must contextualise, concretise and update this statement in its own regional mission statement. The ICOM Code of Ethics provide a common basis of values.

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